

# ANGLO SAXONICA

# ANGLO

REVISTA **ANGLO SAXONICA** SER. III **N. 7** 2014



University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies  
Centro de Estudos Anglisticos da Universidade de Lisboa

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SER. III N.7 2014

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**FUNDAÇÃO PARA A CIÊNCIA E A TECNOLOGIA**

*Special issue on* **CHANGING TIMES: PERFORMANCES  
AND IDENTITIES ON SCREEN**

*Guest Editors* LUCY FISCHER, CECILIA BEECHER MARTINS *and* JOSÉ DUARTE

*Número especial sobre* **TEMPOS DE MUDANÇA: DESEMPENHOS  
E IDENTIDADES NO GRANDE ECRÃ**

*Editores convidados* LUCY FISCHER, CECILIA BEECHER MARTINS *e* JOSÉ DUARTE



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**CINEMA STUDIES**  
**Changing Times: Performances and Identities**  
**on Screen**



## Acknowledgements

The following essays arise from a selection of papers that were presented at the International Conference on cinema *Changing Times: Performances and Identities on Screen* held at the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon from 7<sup>th</sup> to 9<sup>th</sup> November 2012. It was organized by Cecilia Beecher Martins, Suzana Ramos and José Duarte, researchers at the University of Lisbon Centre for English Studies (ULICES). While the Conference was organized by the American Studies Research Group, because the role cinema has played in forming and transmitting concepts of American culture is indisputable, it also arose out of a desire to offer an interdisciplinary space of discussion for researchers of other Research Groups of ULICES also devoted to Cinema Studies, as well as teachers, students, independent scholars and professionals associated with the cinema industry. The universal appeal of cinema today offers increasing opportunities for reflection on the influences of the seventh art on society. Cinema is not merely an element of a vast entertainment industry, but an art form capable of shaping generations, and presenting alternative ways of seeing and being in the world. In addition, the influences it has exerted on historic, artistic and cultural expressions, on many occasions, resulting from perspectives offered by the *cinéma d'auteur*, must be considered.

Our aspiration was fulfilled by the multiple proposals received from all over Europe, the US, Mexico, Japan, Australia and the Middle East from academics doing their research either in cinema studies, American studies or as professionals working in the cinema industry, and so the debate naturally extended beyond the Conference.

We would also very much like to thank the Guest Editor of this volume, Lucy Fischer, Distinguished Professor of English and Film Studies at the University of Pittsburgh, for her editorial and peer review work.

She was generous with her time and her contribution led to an overall improvement of this issue.

Also, we are indebted to Profs Teresa Alves and Teresa Cid, the Directors of the American Studies Research Group and Conference Directors for their advice and guiding throughout the process, which were both invaluable.

We would also like to thank Lídia Jorge, João Mário Grilo and Fernando Guerreiro for graciously accepting to be interviewed, and we are indebted to Suzana Ramos, Hermínia Sol, Edgardo Medeiros da Silva, Ana Luísa Vieira and Rui Vitorino Azevedo for carrying out the interviews and their translations.

Finally, the conference and this volume would not have been possible without the support of many institutions, including the Faculty of Letters University of Lisbon, the American Embassy, Fundação Luso-Americana/ Luso-American Foundation (FLAD) and the Irish Association. We would like to thank our sponsors for their support and generosity.

*Cecília Beecher Martins and José Duarte*

# Introduction

*Lucy Fischer*  
University of Pittsburgh





## Introduction

The theme of this issue of *Anglo Saxonica* is a very broad one: *Changing Times: Performances and Identities on Screen*. The notion of “changing times” of course emphasizes how temporality is forever in flux, a movement and progression that transforms all identities in its wake — be they performed by individuals, nations, or media forms. That this topic should be investigated through the lens of a time-based art like cinema seems especially appropriate. The subject also is particularly relevant in an age when the nature of film itself is being questioned. Articles regularly assert “the end of cinema” but in general they mean only the demise of celluloid, not of the “movies” which continue to engage audiences whether on computer screen, cell phone, or television — whether projected digitally in a theater, downloaded from YouTube, or streamed to some device. For as Lev Manovich has noted “despite frequent pronouncements that cinema is dead, it is actually on its own way to becoming a general purpose cultural interface, a set of techniques and tools which can be used to interact with any cultural data.”<sup>1</sup> Under the rubric of New Media, cinema studies now attempts to reshape its own identity — linking the trajectory of traditional film history to cutting edge formats and methodologies. Some of the essays in this volume directly address this technological shift, be it the relative status of “elite” film versus “subaltern” video, or the role of the cinematographer in this Brave New World.

Other articles tackle the issue of time itself, as refracted onscreen. As André Bazin famously noted, cinema is a means of “mummifying” the

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<sup>1</sup> Lev Manovich. “Cinema as a Cultural Interface.” [Available at <http://manovich.net/TEXT/cinema-cultural.html>]

past by capturing lived bodies at a particular moment — preserving their image in the face of death.<sup>2</sup> But, through the popular genre of historical spectacle, movies have also favored looking back at history by dramatizing the past (with varying degrees of accuracy), as is evident in articles about Woody Allen’s fantasy return to Paris of the 1920s, Robert Zemeckis’s insertion of Forrest Gump into the contemporary American timeline, Ken Hughes controversial vision of Cromwell, or Steven Spielberg’s recreation of Lincoln’s presidency. Sometimes, however, cinema accesses the past in order to reclaim it — as is clear in essays about works that “rehabilitate” South African society or “redeem” the American South. But cinema has also frequently invented its own versions of history; thus, certain essays examine mythical screen heroes, particularly those of the medieval era (for example, Robin Hood or the chivalric knight). Beyond this, scholarship has frequently investigated film as an artifact of the time in which it was produced, as does an essay on the film *Maria Papolia*, a propagandistic work that channels the ideology of the Portuguese Estado Novo.

One of the major areas of modern society that has been subjected to theories of performance has been that of gender — as in the work of Judith Butler, Mary Ann Doane, or Steven Cohan — which see masculinity and femininity as types of masquerade.<sup>3</sup> This topic is confronted in a piece that deals with cinematic revisions of the Cinderella fairy tale — known in its original version for denigrating women. Also referencing questions of gender, another essay examines the “deadly female landscape” in both film and poetry. In a somewhat similar vein, recent cultural criticism has argued for the inclusion of the *Other* (in its varied racial, sexual, national, and bodily forms) into mainstream society — ending years of exclusion. This subject is highlighted in an essay on the work of Tim Burton, whose characters (starting with Edward Scissorhands) have existed at the margins.

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<sup>2</sup> André Bazin. “The Ontology of the Photographic Image. *What is Cinema?* Vol. 1 (Trans. Hugh Gray). Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967.

<sup>3</sup> Judith Butler. *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. New York: Routledge, 1990; Mary Ann Doane. “Film and the Masquerade: Theorizing the Female Spectator.” *Screen* (1982) 23 (3-4): 74-88; Steven Cohan. *Masked Men: Masculinity and the Movies in the Fifties* (1997).

One aspect of film studies that has not changed much over time is the interest scholars take in screen works adapted from literary originals. The novel and short story have been important sources for the cinema since the days of silent film (as in a 1910 version of *The Wizard of Oz*) and they remain so today (as in the recent Harry Potter cycle). Several articles in the volume consider adaptation from new critical perspectives, as applied to films based on works by Jane Austen, James Joyce, and John Fowles. In a similar move, particular literary genres have migrated to film — including the Gothic which is considered in a piece that discusses the dark films of David Lynch.

One way in which cinema has been seen to surpass literature is in its ability to visualize the world (despite the novel's frequent claim to “paint with words”). For this reason, landscape (and its shifting parameters) has been central to film imagery, be it the deserts and plains of the Western, or the gritty urban locales of film noir. Two essays address this subject — one by focusing on visions of the city of Cardiff in an on-line video series by James Robson and Teilo Trimble, and another on depictions of Las Vegas in a Francis Ford Coppola film.

Finally, from its earliest days, critics and practitioners have seen possibilities for representing the spiritual onscreen especially since, with its projection of light and shadows, cinema was seen to be an ethereal medium. This is evident in early film history with the production of numerous silent versions of biblical stories or the life of Christ. But, of course, strategies for imagining the immaterial have altered radically with time (especially with advances in special effects and CGI), as we learn in an essay that analyzes films by Terrence Malick and Xavier Beauvois.

Beyond articles on the topic of *Changing Times: Performances and Identities on Screen*, the volume contains several interviews with important Portuguese cultural figures whose careers reflect the theme. Lídia Jorge is an award-winning novelist and playwright of the “Post-Revolution Generation.” Her novel *A Costa dos Murmúrios* (*The Murmuring Coast*) was adapted for the screen in 2004 by Margarida Cardoso. Fernando Guerreiro is a film studies professor and has written several books on the subject. João Mário Grilo is a film director whose most recent works are the documentary *A Vossa Casa* (2012) and the dramatic film *Dois Mulheres* (2009).



**REPRESENTATIONS OF HEROISM:  
MEDIEVAL AND POST-MEDIEVAL HEROES**



# ‘Captain Hood’ or the ‘Forest Hawk’: Robin Hood (dis)played by Errol Flynn (1938)

*Miguel Alarcão*

New University of Lisbon/CETAPS





# ‘Captain Hood’ or ‘The Forest Hawk’: Robin Hood (dis)played by Errol Flynn (1938)<sup>1</sup>

À Prof<sup>a</sup> Doutora Maria Teresa Alves,  
capitã de Abril

My original research on this topic, leading up to a doctoral degree,<sup>2</sup> focused on the literary and cultural (re)presentations of the English outlaw before his establishment as primarily a popular hero for children and youngsters, a phenomenon which started to take shape in the early Victorian age (1837-1851). In this article, I will seek to explore some untrodden filmic ground and look at Michael Curtiz’s and William Keighley’s *The Adventures of Robin Hood*, thus providing some hints into (post-)modern and contemporary (re)configurations of the legend(s).

Although Robin may have been a well-known character amongst a juvenile reading and/or listening public long before the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century,<sup>3</sup> as documented, for instance, by a prefatory remark dated “March, 1820” and included in the 1820 and 1823 editions of Joseph Ritson’s anthology

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<sup>1</sup> I would like to thank Mrs. Ana Rita Almeida (ILNOVA), whose assistance has proved invaluable in transcribing the chosen dialogues. As to our title, it obviously plays upon those of two other films featuring Errol Flynn (1909-1959), *Captain Blood* (1935) and *The Sea Hawk* (1940).

<sup>2</sup> See Alarcão, 2001. The original PhD dissertation was presented and discussed in 1996.

<sup>3</sup> “As with many other aspects of culture (...) the Robin Hood myth before recent times did not have separate categories for children and adults. While there can be no doubt that children long enjoyed the outlaw story, it was not part of a separated infantile library.” (Knight, *Study* 201)

of traditional and broadside ballads,<sup>4</sup> narrative fiction, itself resorting to characters and events patent in the ballads, was beginning to close the gap, largely thanks to Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1819), notwithstanding poetical and theatrical contributions (Knight, *Study* 172-201). The mere existence of a wider number of younger readers, propped up by Foster's Elementary Education Act (1870) and the emergence and consolidation of juvenile popular fiction, through novels and tales often published in magazines and penny serials, prompts me to sketch some possible reasons behind the Victorian editorial, educational and ideological investments in the medieval outlaw.

From a strictly literary point of view, I would suggest that the general pattern and basic structure of Robin's feats and achievements — involving treachery, trickery and deceit, quarrels and fights, imprisonments, escapes and rescues, and a romantic (and safely sexless) love affair with Maid Marian, herself absent from the cycle until the contribution provided by the May Games and the Morris Dances of the Tudor period (Alarcão 179-184) — meant that authors could always insert new characters and adventures into a tradition henceforth conveyed to youngsters as well.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, Robin might easily be depicted as someone who embodied some of arguably the 'best' or 'noblest' features of a largely self-constructed Victorian ethos, if not, broadly speaking, of Englishness/Britishness itself. After all, here was a brave man, loyal to crown and country; a freedom-loving patriot, pious, compassionate, caring deeply for the poor, the needy

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<sup>4</sup> "It being (...) the aim of the present Editor to produce a book which could with propriety be put into the hands of young persons, he has retained only a portion of Mr. Ritson's notes. The rest have been omitted as either irrelevant or inadmissible in a work designed for this class of readers." (Ritson, ed., n.p.)

<sup>5</sup> Dobson and Taylor (58) argue that "(...) many of the features of the traditional Robin Hood saga which have made it irresponsive to sophisticated literary treatment — its loose and episodic structure, its lack of pronounced characterization, the absence of any strong sexual connotations — are exactly those guaranteed to ensure its appeal to the young." Another historian, J. C. Holt (10), has put it even more succinctly: "The sheriff hunts the outlaws; Robin turns the tables; the outlaws win. In such simple adventures lies the legend's continuing juvenile appeal." (see also Alarcão 428-429; 433-437)

and the oppressed; protective of women and ever courteous towards them; an adventurous, independent, self-sufficient and self-confident individual, with a good sense of humour, encodable and decodable as a true, typical and timeless English hero, hence a convincing role model for young Victorian, Edwardian and Georgian subjects alike. Less commendable traits like Robin's resort to violence and his resistance to, or defiance of, authority (although admittedly an unlawful or wrongful one), best typified in the hero's legendary disrespect for the sheriff of Nottingham or the harsh forest laws, could be softened or played down as needs must. In spite, then, of long-standing doubts regarding Robin's existence, original identity and lifetime, social condition, haunts, etc., all these factors would ensure the appropriation of the medieval outlaw by the heritage culture of the mid and late Victorian Establishment, his migration from Sherwood to Hollywood and his survival into "the century of the cinema".

At this stage, it should be noted that, just as the curtains of Victoria's long reign were drawing to a close, cinema was indeed beginning to emerge, both as an art and as an industry. According to Stephen Knight (219), the first movie dedicated to the hero was *Robin Hood and His Merry Men* (1909), followed by five others (including Douglas Fairbanks's, 1922) before *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938, starring a chuckling and very athletic Errol Flynn), often considered to embody the hero's traditional image and the appeal of (and to) the seductive timelessness of "Merrie Olde Englonde". In Knight's words (151),

Less aggressive than the social bandit, more active than the displaced lord, more leaderly than the rural esquire, Robin Hood of Hollywood strides, smiles, leaps on and off his horse, brandishes his bow, speaks with large gestures and noble sentiments, and always, unlike both the social bandit and the distressed gentleman, dominates the scene entirely. Addressing his men from on high, swinging through the air to menace the Normans, taunting his enemies from a battlement, standing with arrow ominously poised, he is a theatrical figure, but one that the magic of cinema can make, in one swift cut, both potent at a distance and intimately exciting in close-up.

As most viewers will remember, the plot is set in Nottingham and its vicinity, especially Sherwood Forest, during King Richard's absence, mentioned right at the outset of the film in two parchment scrolls:

In the year of Our Lord 1191 when Richard, the Lion-Heart, set forth to drive the infidels from the Holy Land, he gave the Regency of his Kingdom to his trusted friend, Longchamps, instead of to his treacherous brother, Prince John. Bitterly resentful, John hoped for some disaster to befall Richard so that he, with the help of the Norman barons, might seize the throne for himself. And then on a luckless day for the Saxons... (0:54-1:26; all timings are approximate)

Richard's decision to join the 3<sup>rd</sup> crusade (1188-1192)<sup>6</sup> and ensuing captivity by Duke Leopold of Austria open the door for John's machinations, treachery and despotism,<sup>7</sup> endorsed and sustained by the Norman nobility and the high clergy, represented, respectively, by Sir Guy of Gisbourne (Basil Rathbone)<sup>8</sup> and the Bishop of the Black Canons (Montagu Love). This 'ethnic' or 'racial' opposition between Normans and Saxons clearly betrays the influence of the "Norman Yoke" thesis, discussed, among others, by Christopher Hill (1986) and grafted onto the cycle by Scott's *Ivanhoe*, undoubtedly the major single source behind *The Adventures of Robin Hood*. However, as declared in the script itself, several ballads are also woven into the film (for example, Robin's encounters with Little John,<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> A decision regretted by the king himself ("I ought never to have left England", 1:14:17) and later reproached by Robin Hood ("His task was defending his people instead of deserting them to fight in foreign lands", 1:23:39).

<sup>7</sup> Let us recall the ousting of William Longchamps, Richard's Justiciar, and John's self-proclamation as Regent of England; the fiscal exactions (or extortions...) on the Saxon people, allegedly to pay for the king's ransom; the arbitrary imprisonments, the looting and burning of houses and villages, etc.

<sup>8</sup> A name taken from one of the earliest ballads, *Robin Hood and Guy of Gisborne* (no. 118) in Child, ed., III, 89-94.

<sup>9</sup> See *Robin Hood and Little John* (no. 125) in *ibidem* 133-136.

the curtal friar<sup>10</sup> and the king incognito,<sup>11</sup> the archery tournament for the golden arrow,<sup>12</sup> etc.), but such a debt had already been acknowledged by the laird of Abbotsford as well.<sup>13</sup>

Throughout the movie, then, images of Norman cruelty, inhumanity and despotic power contrast sharply with an equally strong message of freedom, solidarity and equality attached to Robin and his merry (yeo)men. Indeed, one cannot fail to compare the two communities — the Norman one, quartered at Nottingham castle, and the Saxon one, based at Sherwood Forest — and the way people live, behave and interact with each other. Thus, it might be interesting to offset the formality of the Norman banquet (9:07-14:01), held behind closed doors and heavily-guarded walls, and the Saxon supper in the open forest, crowned by a Carnival-like exchange of clothes between the outlaws and the Norman nobles, soldiers and officials. In the course of this episode (38:10-46:30), Lady Marian Fitzwalter (Olivia De Havilland), King Richard's ward and herself a Norman,<sup>14</sup> will be led by Robin on a ramble across the forest, where she will be shown the miserable living conditions of the suffering Saxon peasants and, partly touched by the sight, partly carried away by the yeoman's gallantry and cheerful disposition (to say nothing of green tights...), will start to change sides.

Needless to say, these are just some of the scenes that might be mentioned here. Granted that every selection is perforce a subjective one,

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<sup>10</sup> See *Robin Hood and the Curtal Friar* (no. 123) in *ibidem* 120-128.

<sup>11</sup> See *The King's Disguise, and Friendship with Robin Hood* (no. 151) in *ibidem* 220-222 and *A Gest of Robin Hood*, fit VII, in *ibidem* 73-76.

<sup>12</sup> See *Robin Hood and the Golden Arrow* (no. 152) in *ibidem*, 223-225 and *A Gest...*, fit V, in *ibidem*, 70-71.

<sup>13</sup> See "Author's Introduction to *Ivanhoe*" in Scott 534-545 *passim*.

<sup>14</sup> The character's identity probably comes from Michael Drayton's poem *Matilda, the Faire and Chaste Daughter of Lord R. Fitzwater* (1594) and especially from Anthony Munday's plays, *The Downfall of Robert Earl of Huntington* and *The Death of Robert Earl of Huntington*, both acted in 1598 and published in 1601 (Alarcão 229-258 *passim*).

I would also suggest Marian's speech, when accused by Sir Guy and "tried" before the "court" presided by Prince John (Claude Rains),<sup>15</sup> or the vision of the forest trees, teeming with camouflaged outlaws ready to attack the Norman party (32:01-36:22) and "(...) swinging down Tarzan-style from the overarching trees." (Hark 12), a powerful reminder that "an image is worth a thousand words".

I will now seek to show how literary and legendary material, sanctioned by time and tradition, may be intermedially reworked and — metaphorically — 'reworded' or 'translated' into images. Just two general points before briefly commenting upon the chosen scenes:

In spite of rightfully entitled "His Highness", Prince John's actual 'smallness' is consistently hinted at and made more ridiculous by his dwarfish height and squeaky voice; the "High" Sheriff of Nottinghamshire (Melville Cooper), a fat, pompous and irresolute character, does not fare much better... Indeed, Sir Guy of Gisbourne, Lady Marian's prospective groom, masterfully played by Basil Rathbone, is a far more menacing and sinister character than both added together...

Considering the date of production (1938), also the year of the (in)famous Munich agreement between Neville Chamberlain (1869-1940),

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<sup>15</sup> " — Not only has she consorted with this Saxon rebel found guilty of outlawry, theft, murder, abduction and high treason but she has betrayed her own Norman people. Are you not ashamed, my Lady Marian?

— Yes, I am. Bitterly. But it's a shame that I'm a Norman after seeing the things my fellow countrymen have done to England. At first I wouldn't believe. Because I was a Norman, I wouldn't let myself believe that the horrors you inflicted on the Saxons weren't just. I know now why you tried so hard to kill this outlaw whom you despised. It's because he was the one man in England who protected the helpless against a lot of beasts drunk on human blood! And now you intend to murder your own brother!

— You'll be sorry you interfered.

— Sorry? I'd do it again if you kill me for it.

— A prophetic speech, my lady, for that is exactly what is going to happen to you.

— You wouldn't dare. I'm the royal ward of King Richard and no one but the king himself has the right to condemn me to death.

— You are quite right, my dear. And it shall be a king who will order your execution for high treason exactly 48 hours from now. Take her away." (01:18:46 – 01:20:08)

the British Prime Minister, and Adolf Hitler (1883-1945), the Austrian-born German *Führer*, it might be stimulating to explore the analogies between 12<sup>th</sup> century Normans and 20<sup>th</sup> century Nazis, illustrated, for instance, by the shape of the helmets and the way the Normans march, together in rows, with their lances and standards vertically lined up.<sup>16</sup> If accepted, this would allow us to read into Sherwood, Robin Hood and his outlaw community, Britain, British leadership and the British people, always in the forefront of the fight for freedom, thereby endowing the medieval hero with a refreshingly modern ring and relevance on the eve of the Second World War.<sup>17</sup>

After some hesitation, I have selected three sequences to discuss, starting with John's first appearance and plotting with Sir Guy.<sup>18</sup> May I draw your attention to how John's accidental spillage of the goblet, the

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<sup>16</sup> "Whether feasting, presiding over an archery contest, or supervising an execution, they sit in horizontal rows. Heralds with symmetrically aligned trumpets announce the commencement of these official functions. Rows of banners on straight poles surround the nobles' seats. Their soldiers march in strictly drilled ranks and, while on guard duty, carry long spears which they place perpendicular to the floor. In short, the Normans are controlled by an inflexible protocol, visually expressed through geometrical symmetry, which is all the more deadly because it masks sadism and greed." (Hark 7-9)

<sup>17</sup> "(...) the finished product possesses an undeniable cinematic consistency which conveys its themes through matching visual images to political philosophy. This philosophy may not seem profound, but the film does utilize its epic genre to articulate the common social concerns of the late thirties (...)" (*Ibidem* 16-17).

<sup>18</sup> — How are the dear Saxons taking the news, Sir Guy?  
 — They're even more worried than Longchamps, Your Highness.  
 — They'll be more than worried when I get to squeeze the fat out of their hides.  
 — You intend to act on your plans?  
 — What better moment than this, Sir Guy? Whoever would have thought my dear brother would be so considerate as to get himself captured and leave all England to my 'tender' care?  
 — He may disapprove when he returns, Your Highness.  
 — *If* he returns. And I'll see to it that he doesn't. We must drink to this moment, Sir Guy. Golden days are ahead. I'll assign tax districts to you tomorrow.  
 — Tomorrow, Your Highness." (1:45-2:35)

dribbling of the red wine on the floor and the menacing way in which he twists his dagger can be read as ominous signs, both of the overthrow of the rightful political order and of the fiscal bleeding about to be perpetrated upon the defenseless Saxon peasants.

Speaking of drink (and food), Robin will later break into the Norman banquet at Nottingham Castle, carrying a dead deer across his shoulders and boldly dropping it opposite Prince John,<sup>19</sup> an act which will lead to the hero's outlawry and forfeiture of his title, lands, goods and chattels. Let us, however, move on to the hero's speech, stating his code of honour and vowing a relentless guerrilla-like resistance to John's usurpation and Norman oppression until Richard returns.<sup>20</sup>

Finally, a few words on John's aborted coronation ceremony (01:27:05-01:30:39 and 01:34:43 till the end), whose dialogues, unlike the preceding ones, are far too long to be transcribed here. Having revealed his identity, Good King Richard (Ian Hunter) banishes Bad Prince John from court and country, thereby setting things right, restoring legality, bringing about ethnic reconciliation and social harmony between Saxons

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<sup>19</sup> This episode includes Robin's celebrated sentence "You know, we Saxons aren't going to put up with these oppressions much longer".

<sup>20</sup> "— I called you here as freeborn Englishmen, loyal to our king. While he reigned over us, we lived in peace. But since Prince John has seized the regency, Guy of Gisbourne and the rest of his traitors have murdered and pillaged. You've all suffered from their cruelty. The ear loppings, the beatings, the blindings with hot irons, the burning of our farms and homes, the mistreatment of our women. It's time to put an end to this!

— Robin's right.

— Aye!

— Now, this forest is wide. It can shelter and clothe and feed a band of good, determined men, good swordsmen, good archers, good fighters! Men, if you're willing to fight for our people, I want you. Are you with me?

— Aye! Aye!

— Then kneel and swear this oath. That you, the freemen of this forest, swear to despoil the rich only to give to the poor. To shelter the old and the helpless, to protect all women, rich or poor, Norman or Saxon. Swear to fight for a free England. To protect her loyally until the return of our king and sovereign, Richard the Lion-Heart. And swear to fight to the death against our oppressors!

— We do! We do solemnly swear!" (23:12-24:20)



and Normans and, in the closing scenes, granting his royal boons to Robin as a reward for his unshakable loyalty, which the king himself had witnessed during his ride to the greenwood (01:21:50-01:25:40). As the times were a-changing, Sir Robin of Locksley's new title as Earl of Sherwood and Nottingham somehow bridges the gap between town and forest, "Norman" Nottingham and "Saxon" Sherwood, a spatial dichotomy which echoes and stages the social and political ones behind the historical, ideological and mythical tenets of the Norman Yoke.

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**ABSTRACT**

My first approaches, from the mid-80s to the mid-90s, to the Robin Hood cultural universe spanned from c.1377 (Date of the earliest known literary allusion to the outlaw, in *Piers Plowman*, B-Text) to 1837, when Victoria became queen (1837-1901). As a consequence, all (post-)Victorian configurations of the legend(s) were deliberately set aside. In order to make up for (and partly bridge) this temporal gap, this essay briefly surveys some trends and features of the following hundred years, focusing upon *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1938), with Errol Flynn (1909-1959) cast in the role of the medieval hero.

**KEYWORDS**

Cinema; Medieval Hero; Robin Hood; Errol Flynn; Michael Curtiz

**RESUMO**

As minhas primeiras abordagens, entre meados das décadas de 80 e 90, ao universo cultural robiniano estenderam-se entre c.1377 (Data da mais antiga alusão literária conhecida ao fora-da-lei, em *Piers Plowman*, Versão B) até 1837, quando Vitória subiu ao trono (1837-1901). Por esse motivo, todas as configurações (pós-)vitorianas da(s) lenda(s) foram deliberadamente deixadas de lado. Tendo em vista superar (e suprir parcialmente) esse hiato temporal, este ensaio aflora alguns traços e tendências dos cem anos seguintes, centrando-se em *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (dir. Michael Curtiz, 1938), com Errol Flynn (1909-1959) no papel do herói medieval.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Cinema; Herói Medieval; Michael Curtiz; Robin Hood; Errol Flynn

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# Performing British Identity: Arthur on Screen

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# Performing British Identity: Arthur On Screen

## Introduction

Arthur is undoubtedly one of the major heroes of British culture. Throughout the medieval period, he became a central character in art and literature and, from the Middle Ages onwards, he has lured writers, painters, composers, and all sorts of artists, more than any other medieval figure.<sup>1</sup> It is no wonder then that screenwriters and film directors also felt attracted to this compelling hero and decided to celebrate his deeds in motion pictures.

In this article we intend to reflect about representations of Arthur on screen. Impossible as it would be to speak about all the countless films that have depicted the Arthurian legends we decided to concentrate on two — *Excalibur* (John Boorman, 1981) and *King Arthur* (Antoine Fucqua, 2004) for several reasons:

- 1) While *Excalibur* centres on Arthur as a mythical hero emerging from Celtic myth, *King Arthur*, on the other hand, portrays a historical Arthur.
- 2) While *Excalibur* offers the perspective of an English director, *King Arthur* gives us the view of an American.
- 3) Besides the geographic distance between both directors, it would also be significant for us to single out the two films and analyse them separately in chronological terms. *Excalibur* was released in 1981, *King Arthur* appeared in 2004. There is, therefore, a time lapse of twenty-three years between them.

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<sup>1</sup> John Aberth estimates that 262 films, cartoons and TV shows have been made about the Arthurian legends, the first being a silent version of Richard Wagner's *Parsifal*, directed by Edwin S. Porter for the Edison Film Company, in 1904. (Aberth 1)

- 4) The two films are, therefore, very different in their approach to the figure of Arthur, conveying two paradoxical views about how Arthur is envisaged nowadays in modern cinema.

### Contextualizing the Figure of Arthur

Arthur is mentioned for the first time in *Historia Brittonum*, a Latin chronicle written in 829-30. In this text, Arthur is described not as a king, but as a military leader (*dux bellorum*). Pseudo-Nennius was writing in the context of the British (Welsh) conflicts against the Mercian kingdom governed by Saxon rulers. Arthur appears then as a British hero capable of expelling the Saxons out of British territory, much in the same way as the Welsh king of the time — Merfyn — to whom the chronicle is dedicated.

*Historia Brittonum*, though, connects this warrior of enormous courage and prestige to several marvellous episodes (*mirabilia*).<sup>2</sup> It is clear that *Historia Brittonum* sets the pattern for Arthurian tradition and literature in several important aspects, among which we would like to stress two:

- 1) We understand that, from the beginning, the figure of Arthur is surrounded by both historical and legendary aspects so inextricable that it is impossible to prove if he, in fact, existed or not.
- 2) The figure of Arthur was used from the very beginning to convey political and ideological ideas related to a specific time and place.

Arthur's fame soon began to grow and this military hero of supernatural strength acquired the status of a king. In 1136, in *Historia Regum Britanniae*, Geoffrey of Monmouth turns him into an Emperor and gives him a genealogy within another political context: that of the new Norman conquerors whom he wants to praise by giving them a hero that would rival and supersede the symbol of French monarchy — Charlemagne. With

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<sup>2</sup> Arthur allegedly defeated 960 Saxons with a single blow in the Battle of Badon Hill; he owns a dog the size of a horse, named Cafall; both Arthur and Cafall were known for persecuting a magical pig called Troynt; Cafall left the print of its hoof in a marvellous stone that cannot be moved from the place where it stands, and, finally, Arthur supposedly killed his only son, Amr, whose grave never shows the same length each time it is measured.



Geoffrey of Monmouth, the legend of King Arthur, as we know it today, is born. Through it, its author legitimizes the government of Norman monarchs who actually commissioned the book. Arthur becomes a model for a strong and powerful monarchy at an unstable time that coincides with the chaotic reign of King Stephen in England (1135-1154).

French romances gradually added new elements and episodes to a legend that gave origin to countless texts throughout the 12<sup>th</sup> and 13<sup>th</sup> centuries, mainly the *Vulgate* and *Post-Vulgate* cycle of romances. These were sponsored by religious orders, particularly, the Cistercians, in a new medieval scenario no longer dominated only by the king as before, but also by the nobility that, by the 12th century, had expanded its power due to the feudal organization of society.

The French Arthurian romances substantiate this state of affairs in medieval Europe: on the one hand, the growing power of the nobility and of its knights over the king and, on the other, the spiritual control of the Church and the monastic orders over the social groups. Arthur, although king of an ideal court, becomes a *roi fainéant*, no longer participating in the adventures which are now performed by The Knights of the Round Table.

The Christianization of the Arthurian legend came to its climax in Sir Thomas Malory's *Le Morte d'Arthur*. Although Malory rewrites the whole legend drawing mainly from French sources, as well as from the Middle English Arthurian romances, he is placing Arthur within an English context again with an ideological concern. As the title of the book and the narrative indicate, Malory focuses on Arthur's death, which is also the death of a golden age: Arthur is gone, his main knights are dead, the Round Table collapsed and all these losses give the idea that a time of crisis is coming.

*Le Morte d'Arthur* was written in the aftermath of the Hundred Years War fought against the French, and contains a patriotic tone. At the same time, however, it was produced at a moment of civil war, during the War of the Roses. Malory is then denouncing the loss of aristocratic values in political as well as in moral terms.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Interestingly, the medieval source for most part of future retellings of the Arthurian legends is precisely *Le Morte d'Arthur*, perhaps because it is a condensation of early

From the Middle Ages onwards, this appropriation of the figure of Arthur in order to achieve political goals never ceased to happen. Alongside literary authors, political rulers also resorted to Arthur to legitimize their own governments. Henry II, Henry III, Edward I and Edward III, Henry V among others, they all saw in Arthur the perfect means to disseminate their propagandistic and political ideas.

In all these texts and contexts, Arthur is then a ductile figure that is shaped according to the main worries and characteristics of a specific social and cultural context.

### Arthur on Film

In 1987, Kevin Harty coined the expression *Cinema Arthuriana* which he defines as: “a form of medievalism, the attempt as old as the birth of the early modern or Renaissance period to revisit or reinvent the medieval world for contemporary purposes”.<sup>4</sup> By resorting to the legends of Arthur to reflect about modern times, *Cinema Arthuriana* has offered us countless films, some good, others not so much. The vast majority of these films tend, in fact, to be very poor. The reasons for this situation may lie on the fact that the Arthurian legends form a myriad of medieval texts that offer many difficulties for having been written from the 9<sup>th</sup> to the 15<sup>th</sup> century, consisting of a vast collection of works that contain not only one legend of Arthur but many.<sup>5</sup> Moreover, in the absence of historical data that can prove the existence of a real Arthur, directors feel free to be highly

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material. However, Malory’s text was written in the 15<sup>th</sup> century, offering a perspective of the age of Arthur that is very different from what it might have been in 5<sup>th</sup> century Britain.

<sup>4</sup> Expression coined in Kevin J. Harty, “Cinema Arthuriana: A Filmography”, *Quondam et Futurus*, 17 (Spring, 1987), 5-8; 7 (Summer, 1987), 18. The definition is taken from: Kevin Harty, *Cinema Arthuriana, Twenty Essays*, North Carolina, McFarland, 2002, 7.

<sup>5</sup> “There was never a story of the Grail, and never could be. On the other hand there were stories of as many different Grails as there were writers exploring the potent name” (A. T. Hatto, preface to Wolfram von Eschenbach, *Parzival*, Harmondsworth, Penguin Books, 1980, 5)

imaginative, inventing episodes and characters that do not appear in the medieval sources, disregarding the very texts that gave rise to the legends. Some of these episodes are, in fact, extemporary as far as medieval culture is concerned. Actually, most directors feel free to draw on the figure of Arthur to reflect about the contemporary world of politics.

*Camelot*, for instance, is one of those cases. The film was released in 1967 and was directed by Joshua Logan, featuring Richard Harris in the role of Arthur and Vanessa Redgrave as Guinevere. This film is a musical and was based in the musical with the same name created by Lerner and Lowe in 1960 for Broadway. But while the musical debuted only three weeks after the election of J. F. K. as President, thus associating his government to the Golden Age of Arthur, *Camelot*, the movie, appeared after J. F. K.'s death, when the Americans were beginning to question their participation in the War of Vietnam. Hence, *Camelot*, the Broadway musical, makes the face of J. F. K. shine through Arthur's face, which stands as a symbol of the President's government, whereas *Camelot*, the film, is an appeal for the coming of another President Arthur-Kennedy type who could bring order to the country.<sup>6</sup> In this sense, both *Camelots* are inscribed in a political interest for the Arthurian legends which have always lured Americans. In the words of Winston Churchill:

[the legend of King Arthur is] a theme as well founded, as inspired, and as inalienable from the inheritance of mankind as the *Odyssey* or the Old Testament. Let us then declare that

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<sup>6</sup> A week after her husband's death, Jacqueline Kennedy gave an interview to Theodore H. White in which she clearly associates JFK to Arthur. In this interview, which has become popularly known as "The Camelot Interview" and resulted in an article published in *Life* magazine, Jaqueline quotes a line from the musical — "Don't let it be forgot, that once there was a spot, for one brief shining moment, that was known as Camelot" — revealing that it belonged to J.F.K.'s favourite song from the film. At the same time, she identifies his government with the Golden Age of Camelot: "At night before going to bed...we had an old Victrola. He'd play a couple of records. I'd get out of bed at night and play it for him when it was so cold getting out of bed. It was a song he loved, he loved 'Camelot.' It was the song he loved most at the end... on a Victrola ten years old...it's the last record, the last side of 'Camelot', sad 'Camelot.'...'don't let it be forgot that for one brief shining moment there was Camelot." (in <http://www.jfkclancer.com/pdf/Camelot.pdf>)

King Arthur and his noble knights, guarding the Sacred Flame of Christianity and the theme of a world order, sustained by the valour, physical strength, and good horses and armour, slaughtered innumerable hosts of foul barbarians and set decent folk an example for all time. (Finke and Schichtman 73)

Arthur's legends are then for America an example of world order. The reign of Arthur is the model of a good government set in a time when the king and his knights maintained the land in peace, following and fighting for the laws of Christendom, keeping the barbarians away and exalting chivalric values such as bravery, strength, loyalty and the defense of freedom. By the appropriation of the legends of Arthur, American artists and politicians "exalt the virtues of a putatively democratized chivalry and figure America as the true heir to Camelot's utopia, arguing that returning to the values of the days of King Arthur will ensure national peace and prosperity in the homeland and enforce a desirable American authority abroad." (Aronstein 2).

### **The Arthur of *Excalibur* by John Boorman (1981)**

*Excalibur* was directed by an Englishman and mainly filmed in Ireland.<sup>7</sup> It was released in 1981, having then divided opinions among critics. For the detractors of the film, the movie obliterates the important symbolism of Christianity in the Quest. Besides, the action is meant to have taken place in the 5<sup>th</sup> century, when Arthur supposedly lived, but the armours and castles seem to have come directly from the 15<sup>th</sup> century.

We believe that *Excalibur* is a very singular film in the context of Arthurian cinema and it has been very misunderstood mainly because to understand its plot and its images one has to be acquainted with the nature

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<sup>7</sup> John Boorman's first idea was to do a film about Merlin called *Merlin Lives!* But the studio (Universal Artists) suggested an adaptation of *The Lord of the Rings* by J.R.R. Tolkien instead. However, the studio rejected the script, considering that the filming would prove extremely expensive and Boorman started to devise another story based on *Le Morte d'Arthur* by Sir Thomas Malory.

of the myths that were called upon. Boorman was not at all interested in capturing the medieval atmosphere of the 5<sup>th</sup> century or in conveying a portrayal of Arthur as the Christian King of French romances. In fact, although the film claims to have been based on Malory, the truth is that it is not a faithful rendering of *Le Morte d'Arthur*.

First of all, Boorman is not concerned about the historical truth as he himself stated to a journalist to whom he gave an interview in 1981: "I think of the story, the history, as a myth. The film has to do with mythical truth, not historical truth; it has to do with man taking over the world on his own terms for the first time. So the first trap to avoid is to start worrying about when or whether Arthur existed." (Kennedy, <http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com/files/EXCALIBUR.htm>) Boorman wanted to capture Celtic myth from which all the Arthurian legends emerged, creating a film that is totally ahistorical.<sup>8</sup>

Secondly, more than drawing on Malory, *Excalibur* seems to have been inspired by such critical works as *The Golden Bough*, by Sir James Frazer, and *From Ritual to Romance*, by Jessie L. Weston, which reflect upon the importance of the cult of vegetation myths in pre-Christian times.

In this sense, the visual atmosphere of the film seems to have come directly from a Pre-Raphaelite painting, clearly alluding to the medieval imaginary created in the nineteenth century about Arthur and his knights: Guinevere (played by Cherie Lunghi) and Morgana (played by Helen Mirren) look like two Pre-Raphaelite *dames sans merci* with their long hair floating around them in an erotic and, at the same time, tempting and menacing way; the knight's armours are those of the knights portrayed in Pre-Raphaelite paintings; the scenes that evoke the *grass and flower* patterns of the Pre-Raphaelite aesthetics, as well as the *greenerie* which

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<sup>8</sup> He stresses this idea when saying: "What I'm doing is setting it in a world, a period, of the imagination. I'm trying to suggest a kind of Middle Earth, in Tolkien terms. It's a contiguous world; it's like ours but different. I want it to have a primal clarity, a sense that things are happening for the first time. Landscape and nature and human emotions are all fresh. I tell the actors that they are not reenacting a legend. They are creating it, and so they themselves don't know what's going to happen — it's unfolding." (Kennedy, <http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com/files/EXCALIBUR.htm>)

surrounds characters and landscape, particularly the sword Excalibur, thus intensifying its symbolic meaning as an object that comes from the Other World; the sparkling shine of the knight's armours and of the lake which are also invested with a powerful significance as reflections of a spiritual light coming from primordial times when reality was perpassed by a sacred meaning. And of course, Arthur: first, the boy king, somewhat *naive*, and later a man subjected to his fatal destiny. It is interesting that Boorman chose Nigel Terry — an actor coming from classical theatre — to play the role of Arthur, as he did with Nicol Williamson to play the role of Merlin. Terry manages to keep the balance between his hero-like qualities and his failure as a king, between his fury and his resignation.

Wagner's music also contributes to this misty and mysterious "Celtic atmosphere". "The Death of Siegfried" (from *Der Ring des Nibelungen*) and *Tristan and Isolde* help to create the tragic tone of the film, unfolding in an apocalyptic ending. In this sense, *Excalibur* consists of a dechristianization of the legends in many aspects. We would like to draw attention to two of these aspects: 1) Galahad is totally absent from the film and the outcome of the Quest is accomplished by one of the oldest Grail heroes — Percival; 2) The movie conflates Arthur with the Fisher King and with the Grail itself which serves Arthur and not Christ.

By centring the work in Celtic myth and distancing himself from French sources, Boorman is telling us one important thing: his film is going to be about England, and, in this sense, he is acting as much as Malory did five centuries ago. Let us remember that Malory, although based on French sources, replaced the legends in English soil, in a time when England was recovering from the Hundred Years War against the French, but starting an inner civil war with the Wars of the Roses. If Malory, with *Le Morte d'Arthur* intended to reclaim Arthur from the French in a patriotic urge, as Boorman also does, at the same time, he is warning those in command of the realm against the possible death of an age threatened from within in political as well as in moral terms, as we have said before. In a sense, Boorman is doing the same by resorting to Arthur in order to promote conservative values as the only means to guarantee peace in England, as we shall see further ahead.

In fact, in *Excalibur* we learn that the king and the land are one: if the king is wounded so is the territory, if the king is healthy the land will

prosper: “One land, one king”, as Arthur cries when he finds the Round Table. This lesson is taken from Celtic mythology, in which the king has to marry the goddess of the land in order to gain from her the Sovereignty that allows him to rule over the kingdom. The success of this union brings peace to the land. And peace is precisely the gift that Arthur brings to Britain in a time of blood and war. We learn, in the opening scenes of the film, that the land was immersed in a period of chaos and disorder. In this apocalyptic scenario, after Uther’s failure to be the one, Arthur emerges as the young hero who is destined to receive the sword of sovereignty and unite the whole territory and its people under his rule, thus bringing order into chaos. Furthermore, by identifying the Fisher King and the Grail with Arthur himself, the movie is investing the king with a divine aura. When the image of the Grail is replaced by the figure of Arthur, we realise that the movie suggests that the cup is a symbol of Arthur’s authority and monarchy and not the object associated with Christ and the Christianization of society.

The movie, then, promotes such values as those of political authority and social hierarchy as the only means to maintain peace. In this sense, *Excalibur* appeals to the conservative social values propagated by the government who held the power when the film was produced: the Thatcher government, very identical to Reaganism in America.<sup>9</sup> This idea led to Susan Aronstein’s claim that, even though the script for the film had been conceived a decade before Reagan’s presidency (1981-89), in *Excalibur*, Arthur acquires the status of a hero connected to the New American Right, together with Rambo, Rocky and Indiana Jones.

Arthur, then, becomes the symbol of these authoritative forms of policy. Therefore, *Excalibur* expresses nostalgia for a time of conservative values, a time when man was also one with nature, living in harmony with everything that surrounded him and accepting his place in the cyclical order of the universe.<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Thatcher’s government ruled between 1979 and 1990 and Regan started his government as President of the USA in 1981, precisely the date when the film was released.

<sup>10</sup> “For a century now, we’ve been rushing headlong into the future; we’ve made a cult out of progress and we’ve forgotten our former selves, our former patterns of behavior,

However, this harmony does not seem to be perfect in *Excalibur*. First, because the goddess of the land abandons the king and, therefore, both the king and the land become ill. In *Excalibur*, the goddess of the land is identified with Guenevere, portrayed as the flower-maiden, particularly in the marriage scene. It is her betrayal of Arthur with Lancelot that breaks the bond between herself and the king, symbolized by the sword Excalibur, understood since the Middle Ages as one of the primal objects of the Goddess, that comes from the Other World to confirm the sovereignty of the monarch. When Arthur loses Excalibur, thrusting it between the two lovers he found naked in the woods, the land is wounded and so is Arthur. On waking up, Lancelot understands the consequences of his act, for he cries in fear: "The king without a sword. The land without a king."

Second, since *Excalibur* gives us then the idea of a land governed by a noble king who is betrayed and trapped by all around him: by his sister, by his wife, by his best knight and friend, by his son. His reign, although golden and prosperous, contains the seeds of its own destruction for its end comes not from wars with foreign armies but from within. Finally, because the narrative is surpassed by images of violence, lust and greed and Arthur himself cannot escape his fatal destiny, having been conceived in a night of lust when Uther breaks the bonds of the peace he had signed with Gorlois for a moment with Igraine.<sup>11</sup>

This undermining of the fragility of the reign of Camelot contributes to the movie's tragic tone that reaches its climax in the last scenes, when Arthur and Mordred kill one another in a scenario dominated by fire and blood, condemning the land to another period of chaos without heroes or kings (Arthur dies without leaving any successor).

Is Boorman in some way suggesting that history repeats itself, that

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whose origins can be traced to the Middle Ages. We no longer have any roots; and today, in particular, when we contemplate the possible destruction of our planet, there's a thirst, a nostalgia for the past, a desperate need to understand it. We are attracted to the legend of the Grail because it speaks to us in a period when nature was unsullied and man in harmony with it." (John Boorman *apud* Finke 80).

<sup>11</sup> Merlin to Uther: "So, you need me again, now that my truce is wrecked. Years to build and moments to ruin, and all for lust". And later: "What issues from your lust [Arthur] shall be mine."



his homeland — England — is re-enacting this same story? Is he speaking to us through Merlin's words: "it is the doom of man that they forget?"<sup>12</sup>

Although *Excalibur* is a product of the Thatcher-Reagan era, it also expresses Boorman's distrust of some of its values, rejecting, in Aronstein words, "the myths of individualism and the pursuit of personal gain central to Reagan's social and economic policies". (Aronstein 152)

Following Aronstein words, we intend to go a little further and suggest that what Boorman is really telling us is that there are no ideal rulers, that every government has its flaws and drawbacks. Even Arthur, the most mythical hero and king of all time, was far from perfect and, if the Golden Age he so successfully rose out of the ashes of civil war is an image of splendour and justice, it also hides evil, as the film clearly evidences in a dialogue between Arthur and Merlin:

Arthur: Tell me, Merlin, have we defeated evil?

Merlin: Good and evil, there is never one without the other.

Arthur: Where hides evil then in my kingdom?

Merlin: Always where you never expected. Always.

### **The Arthur of *King Arthur* by Antoine Fucqua (2004)**

The debate about the existence of Arthur has been going on for decades and it is far from knowing an end. This debate is, of course, futile and inconclusive since there are no archaeological data or texts known so far that can prove the historicity of Arthur.

Nevertheless, those who have claimed for an historical Arthur have presented several theories about who he might have been, the most well known being the one defended by Kemp Malone, in 1924, and more recently, the one suggested by C. Scott Littleton and Linda Malcor in *From*

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<sup>12</sup> Boorman assumes that he is in fact reflecting about England's state of affairs when he argues in the same interview that the Arthurian myth "(...) as with all myths, they took on the color of the age in which they were written. Tennyson's *Idylls of the King*, for instance, or Burne-Jones and the Pre-Raphaelites described and painted the 12<sup>th</sup> century Arthurian tales in terms of their era. And they ended by telling you more about the Victorian age than about the legend." (Kennedy, <http://americancinemapapers.homestead.com/files/EXCALIBUR.htm>).

*Scythia to Camelot* (1994). According to Kemp Malone, the figure of Arthur has its origins in a Roman soldier called Lucius Artorius Castus, a commander of a Roman legion stationed in Britain in 2 A.D. The “Sarmatian hypothesis”, in turn, was defended by C. Scott Littleton and Ann C. Thomas in 1978.<sup>13</sup> These authors claim that the Arthurian legend derives from the Sarmatian troops that fought for Rome in Britain in 2 A.D. Linda Malcor was precisely the research consultant for *King Arthur*, the film that claims to present “the untold true story that inspired the legend”.<sup>14</sup>

In this sense, this movie stands in clear opposition to *Excalibur*, eliminating everything that has to do with myth: there is no Quest for the Grail, no wasteland, no Fisher King. But, if all the aspects referred to in the film intend to be historical, there are countless flaws and anachronisms, so many in fact that Shippey declares: “the strident claims of historical truth made by the producers (...) perhaps license one to say, in reply, that its history is at best dubious, and its geography frankly ludicrous.” (Shippey 310)

It is not our purpose in this article to point out those flaws but to reflect upon Arthur’s portrayal in the film where he begins to be introduced as the Sarmatian hero Artorius but ends up by rejecting the power of Rome, to set an allegiance with the Woads (the Picts), thus becoming King of all Britons.

The film builds, therefore, on ethnic identity, outlining the differences among Romans, Saxons, Sarmatians and British, and assigning them to two groups, each of them connected to good or evil. While Romans and Saxons are evil, Sarmatian and British are good. After defeating the Saxons and abandoning his utopian ideas about Roman civilization, Arthur marries Guinevere, the woad warrior-princess, reshapes his identity becoming a Breton and uniting all the British under his command.

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<sup>13</sup> Scott Littleton and Ann C. Thomas, “The Sarmatian Connection: New Light on the Origins of the Arthurian and Grail Legends” in *The Journal of American Folklore*, 1978, (in <http://www.jstor.org/discover/10.2307/539571?uid=3738880&uid=2&uid=4&sid=21101954191263>)

<sup>14</sup> Slogan in the DVD cover.

Nevertheless, *King Arthur* is mainly a film about freedom, as Tom Shippey clearly argues: at first, freedom of the Sarmatian warriors from the bond to the Romans, but later “freedom to make choices, (...) freedom from foreign domination, freedom as a natural state of humanity” (Shippey 316). Not only is the word “freedom” constantly repeated throughout the movie, but also the very ideals of liberty and free will are encapsulated in the figure of Arthur — a follower of Pelagianism, a defender of the weak, the founder of the Round Table. Arthur is portrayed as a noble and courageous warrior who believes that all men were created equal so that freedom is, in fact, a right that naturally belongs to the human race.

In this sense, the visual atmosphere of the film is totally different from that of *Excalibur*: there are no ethereal landscapes impregnated with symbolic meanings, but instead scenes that could actually have happened in a distant past in the real world.

Whereas Boorman features the Arthur of myth, Fucqua wants to portray Arthur the soldier — a real man who makes a way of living out of real fights, a man who goes to war without fear and trusting his own beliefs. Clive Owen fully meets the requirements of this role as a robust and board-shouldered actor whose muscles are evidenced throughout the film.

Fucqua seems interested in stressing Arthur’s warrior ideals and attitudes, which are also evidenced by the music originally composed by Hans Zimmer for the film. Although we may listen to some soft melodies that accompany the intimate scenes between Arthur and Guinevere, *King Arthur* mostly features a soundtrack with epic tones appropriate to reflect the marching of big armies and the pounding of hooves against the soil.

*King Arthur*, with its emphasis on war, has been considered by some as a late reaction to the War of Vietnam, mainly because David Frantoni, the scriptwriter, established that association in an interview led by John Matthews which was published in *Arthuriana*: “[The Arthurian story] became to me the American GI experience — strangers in a strange land, killing to stay alive and hating doing it.” (Matthews 116)

Furthermore, in another interview involving various participants in the film, the link between the narrative and the War in Vietnam is made again, this time by Jerry Bruckheimer, the film’s producer: “He [Frantoni] had it all worked out and in many ways it seemed similar to the fall of Saigon” (Hesse, <http://www.phase9.tv/moviefeatures/kingarthurfeature1>).

shtml) and again “We needed to pay heed to the legend, at the same time we needed to make him [Arthur] a universal soldier”. (Hesse, <http://www.phase9.tv/moviefeatures/kingarthurfeature1.shtml>)

The connections to the War in Vietnam are various, as Shippey again remarks:

If one follows this parallel through, in *King Arthur* what happens metaphorically, is that the surly and disillusioned American GI's (the Samartians), in Vietnam (Britain), free themselves from the imperial government that has turned its back on them (Rome or Washington), make common cause with their former enemies (the Woads, the Vietcong), and defeat their real enemies. (Shippey 316).

*King Arthur* is dealing with a wound that has never been healed by Americans even after three decades have passed over the Vietnam War. How can one deal with the fact that America has not won the war even when it was acting as a saviour to those oppressed by communism? How can one deal with the feeling of defeat or even with the sense of guilt awoken by images of the conflict? By presenting a hero in conflict with himself, who changes his mind, deciding to fight not for those whom he is supposed to obey, but for his own cause, *King Arthur* is sublimating the notion of free will and, at the same time, reassessing universal values. It is possible to act wrongly when, in the end, truth and virtue finally prevail.

This means that, even though Fucqua's film intended to present the real Arthur, in the end what matters is not if the King's historicity was proved or not, but, as in all the other films, what message does this hero and king convey to the world.

### **To conclude:**

Whether Arthur existed or not, his presence on screen fulfils the same role it has always accomplished from the very beginning, when the legends began to take form: his figure is used to convey or undermine certain ideological values and disseminate political agendas. In this sense, by retreating to a medieval past, the Arthurian films mentioned and *cinema arthuriana* in general draw on the figure of Arthur as a means to reflect on the present as an age of crisis. Arthur appears as a means to reflect about

the nature and exercise of power. He is a hero of all times designed to perform any role that can contribute to the maintenance of the various national identities, either British or American.

*Rex quondam, rex futurus*, the once and future king, Arthur was and will continue to be, in literature and on screen, the major hero of all time, “the great national fount of myth and symbol” in Peter Ackroyd’s words, always and forever adapting to every age and to every place. (Haydock 165).

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## Filmography

- Boorman, John. (dir) *Excalibur*, Warner Bros, running time: 135 minutes, DVD, 1981.
- Fucqua, Antoine. (dir) *King Arthur*, Touchstone Pictures, running time: 121 minutes, DVD, 2004.

**ABSTRACT**

Arthur is by far the most paradigmatic British hero. Appearing for the first time in the literary, as well as in the historical and political context of medieval Wales, as a Celtic war hero opposing the Saxon invaders, he soon crossed the borders of the Welsh territory to become the king of an entire nation. With the contribution of Geoffrey of Monmouth and subsequently of French and English medieval writers, Arthur not only turned into a symbol of kingship but mainly into the face of British territory and identity, embodying the fate and hopes of the British people. As a messianic hero, he is par excellence the protector of the land, a role fulfilled in the past that will be reenacted in a possible future.

From the Middle Ages onwards, the figure of Arthur has lured writers, painters, and artists in general. It is no wonder then that screen-writers and film directors also felt attracted to this potent hero and decided to celebrate his deeds through motion pictures. Is it thus our intention in this paper to reflect about Arthur and his presence on screen, taking two main films into consideration: *Excalibur* by John Boorman (1981) and *King Arthur* by Antoine Fuqua (2004).

**KEYWORDS**

Arthur; Boorman; *Excalibur*; Fuqua; *King Arthur*

**RESUMO**

Artur é certamente o herói mais paradigmático da cultura britânica. Tendo surgido pela primeira vez no contexto literário e político da Idade Média galesa enquanto herói celta que se opõe às forças saxônicas, Artur cedo transpõe as fronteiras do País de Gales para se tornar no rei de uma nação inteira. Com os textos de Geoffrey of Monmouth e dos escritores franceses e ingleses, Artur transformou-se num símbolo de realeza e, acima de tudo, no rosto do território e da identidade britânicos, corporizando o destino e a esperança do povo das Ilhas Britânicas. Enquanto herói messiânico, Artur é, por excelência, o protector da terra, um papel que cumpriu no passado e que voltará a desempenhar num possível futuro.

Desde a Idade Média que a figura de Artur tem seduzido escritores, pintores e todo o género de artistas. Não é, pois, de estranhar que também os argumentistas e realizadores de cinema se tenham sentido atraídos por este herói e decidido celebrar os seus feitos no grande ecrã. Neste artigo, pretendemos assim reflectir sobre a presença de Artur no cinema, recorrendo à análise de dois filmes: *Excalibur* de John Boorman (1981) e *King Arthur* de Antoine Fuqua (2004).

## PALAVRAS CHAVE

Arthur; Boorman; *Excalibur*; Fuqua; *King Arthur*

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# Knights' Tales: Looking at Representations of the Knight on Film

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# Knights' Tales: Looking at Representations of the Knight on Film

## Introduction

In the work *Travels in Hyperreality*, Umberto Eco states: “It seems people like the Middle Ages” (61). Judging by the vast number of films produced with a medieval background or with characters dated from the Middle Ages, like *Robin Hood*, it looks like Eco was probably right. In truth, over the 20<sup>th</sup> and 21<sup>st</sup> centuries filmmakers have turned to medieval subjects as a source for plots. The films that result from this return to the past are commonly known as medieval films<sup>1</sup>, a term which has come to denote films that portray the Middle Ages. While there are different adaptations with distinct storylines, it is interesting to notice that the figure of the knight, perhaps more than any other, has gained a role so significant that the depiction of a man on horseback is often enough for viewers to identify a film as “medieval”.

Leading figures during the European Middle Ages, knights dominated the medieval period and became one of its most emblematic symbols. However, it was only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that these men started acquiring a specific status and only later did knighthood and chivalry become tied, a fact frequently overlooked by filmmakers. In addition, the medieval subjects used are often simplified for mass audiences, which can lead to the development of stereotyped characters like “the knight in shining armour” or “the damsel in distress”. Therefore, one inevitably wonders to what

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<sup>1</sup> The term “medievalistic film” has also been used to refer to this kind of cinematic adaptation. However, although it obviously reinforces the idea that these films are works of medievalism, “medieval film” is the commonly used term in academic research and publications, which is why it will henceforth be used in this article as well.

extent our opinion about medieval knights is affected by on-screen representations. To address such issues this article will begin by briefly discussing knights' roles in the Middle Ages and their evolution from a group of mounted warriors to a powerful elite of chivalrous horsemen. Second, it will consider how the European medieval knight has been depicted in English-speaking cinematic representations, addressing questions like: "what different kinds of 'medieval films' are there?" and "how important is accuracy?"

### **'The bravest and finest': Cavalry in the Middle Ages**

The Knight is an elusive, chameleon-like figure; the moment we try to define him, he appears in a different guise. His forerunners first appear against the background of the anarchy of ninth and tenth century society. They are little more than simple fighting men, skilled in horsemanship and the use of arms, valued for their function as defenders and feared as potential disturbers of the peace. (Barber 21)

Unlike what we are sometimes led to believe by modern adaptations of medieval subjects, the knight's place in medieval society is not easily understood or particularly clear as: a) their role in the social sphere changed throughout the Middle Ages; and b) most of the information we have access to is found in romance, *chasons de geste*, and in records of ceremonies in which squires were made into knights.<sup>2</sup> However, by simply looking at the cavalry in the 11<sup>th</sup> century, we can easily grasp how different it was to the mounted warriors of previous centuries.

Cavalry began not as elite, but as a group of warriors whose ability to ride a horse into battle and fight on horseback distinguished them from the remaining combatants. Although the legions of the Roman Empire had a cavalry, their strength lay mostly in their powerful infantry and only towards the 4<sup>th</sup> century (late Roman Empire) did Roman cavalry start having an increasingly important role in battle. It was only after the invasions carried out by the peoples in northern Europe that there was an

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. Barber, Richard. *The Knight and Chivalry*. Woodbridge: Barbell, 1995.

increase in the number of warriors who were able to fight on horseback. The development of this new armed force was slow especially because, on the one hand, the adoption of stirrups, which increased the stability of the rider's seat, happened later in the 8<sup>th</sup> century, and, on the other hand, it was very expensive to arm and provide for knights and their horses. Furthermore, it was only in the 6<sup>th</sup> century that economy and civil society improved sufficiently to allow a class of semi-professional soldiers to re-emerge.

These warriors could either be men whose superiority in battle lay in their riding and fighting skills or vassals who distinguished themselves in combat. Mounted warriors were engaged to join a lord's army, defend his domains during war, and maintain peace. For their loyalty, bravery and skilfulness, the lord ensured them a place, usually in his court, where they lived and trained. Under the feudal system, it was also the lord who supplied the knights' equipment.

Initially, the bond between a lord and a mounted warrior consisted of nothing more than an oath a soldier could break in favour of a better position in a different court. Solemn contracts, called "commendations", only became common by the 7<sup>th</sup> century in a formal ceremony of homage. Finally, in the 8<sup>th</sup> century the system of vassalage was operating from the highest to the lowest levels of society. From this moment on a new class was born composed of men whose families were well-established, but not necessarily noble, or newcomers who had made fortunes through successful adventures.<sup>3</sup> Thus, there is a clear distinction between these warriors and the nobility, who possessed an older genealogy and was at first more powerful. According to George Duby, in *The Chivalrous Society*, the title "noble men" was attributed to all knights in the first decades of the 14<sup>th</sup> century, which, alongside with landholding and arranged marriages to women of noble birth, led to a complete merge of both groups. However, Richard Barber in *The Knight and Chivalry* claims that the distinction between the mounted warrior and the older nobility was already gradually eroding by the 12<sup>th</sup> century. As a result, although it remains under debate, we know that from the 11<sup>th</sup> century onwards being a knight was more than simply being a soldier on horseback.

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<sup>3</sup> Cf. Milliken, E. K. *Chivalry in the Middle Ages*. London: MacMillan, 1968.

There are three main reasons that allow us to identify when a mounted warrior came to be seen as a knight. Firstly, formal knighting ceremonies were developed. These became central moments in a knight's life and marked the coming of age of a warrior and the completion of his military apprenticeship. Barber tells us that: "The idea that distinguishes knighthood from the mounted warrior is that of an elite, selected group, with a formal ceremony of admission" (27). Secondly, a deep-seated sense of pride in descent grew, and a restriction on entry to the ranks of knight was established. Men of low birth were soon deemed unfit and the initial notion that any knight could dub whomever he wanted was replaced by the idea of hierarchy. Thirdly, around the 13<sup>th</sup> century, a series of ideological transformations, which were initially aimed at controlling martial energies, took place, becoming a crucial part of a knight's honour code. According to Ramon Llull<sup>4</sup> in *The Book of the Order of Chivalry or Knighthood* (c. 1279-1283) "the duty of a Knight is to support and defend the Holy Catholic Faith" (II. 2.) and "to support and defend his earthly lord" (II.8). About the moral characteristics of a knight, Llull adds that "(...) justice, wisdom, charity, loyalty, truth, humility, strength, hope, promptness and all other similar virtues pertain to the preparedness of the Knight's soul" (II.11). As a result, we can suppose that it was no longer enough for a knight to be a skilled warrior, he also had to be courteous, protect ladies and damsels, fight for justice and the nation, defend the Church and the Christian faith, and be honest, loyal and true to this lord and fellow knight.

Obviously such change had an undeniable influence on knighthood, transforming the rude warrior into an idealistic figure. Why is such a figure so appealing though? What makes modern audience so fascinated with the Middle Ages and knighthood in particular?

In "Boys to Men: Medievalism and Masculinity in Star Wars and E.T.: The Extra-Terrestrial", Tom Henthorne suggests that the medieval period is often used "to affirm the existing social order by idealizing the Middle Ages as a period of peace and order, when both convention and authority were respected" (73-74). Perhaps, to a certain extent, this is so

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<sup>4</sup> Ramon Llull, Anglicized Raymond Lull, was an important Majorcan philosopher, writer, logician and a Franciscan tertiary.

but, as Umberto Eco pointed out, the concept that each person has of the Middle Ages is incredibly diverse and one must first determine, like he did, “which Middle Ages one is dreaming of” (68)? Almost two decades later, in “Beyond Historical Accuracy: A Postmodern View of Movies and Medievalism”, Keith Kelly supports this idea, stating:

The Middle Ages succeeds in being many things for a modern audience: a mythic world where archetypal individuals or even archetypal cultures can take believable form, a realm where spirituality and even magic can be accepted without question, a time of uncomplicated heroism, of visceral violence, of injustice, of moral rigor and of depraved fanaticism. (16)

If one “dreams” of the Middle Ages as a period of “uncomplicated heroism”, the knight who is fantasized as a warrior with a code, a hero and often a saviour, would certainly fit as the perfect main character for traditional cinema. Let us then look at how the knight is depicted in English-speaking ‘medieval films’ and find out which Middle Ages are we dreaming of when we enter a film theatre.

### **Knights’ on Screen: Selected Tales**

The truth is this, the cut fell to the Knight,  
Which everybody greeted with delight.  
And tell his tale he must (...)  
And in a cheerful style he then began  
At once to tell his tale, and thus it ran.  
(Chaucer 25-26)

Chivalry was declining in Geoffrey Chaucer’s day, but in the author’s renowned work *The Canterbury Tales* (c. 1386-1387), “The Knight’s Tale” is the first of the collection of stories. Although this tale was most likely intended to show knights’ flaws, it definitely also comes to prove the importance this social class still had at the time of its writing. Today, as we turn to cinematic representations, it is clear that the knights depicted on screen are often the idealized figures of the late Middle Ages. These hero-knights wear shiny armours; they are tall, handsome, brave, and, as a result, time and again take the main role in these adaptations.

Medieval films<sup>5</sup> do not constitute a genre, like the melodrama, for instance, but are thought of as a genre of medievalism, which according to Kevin J. Harty: “takes a long view in which the present and the future can be studied in light of the past and the past can be reimagined in light of the present and the future” (3). Simply put, and using William Woods’ words, “‘medievalism’ may be defined as simply looking back and (...) imagining our past” (39). Such definition seems to suit the numerous medieval films produced since Cinema was born in 1895.<sup>6</sup> In fact, English-speaking medieval films focus on various subjects that range from the early Middle Ages (with a number of screen adaptations of the Old English poem *Beowulf*<sup>7</sup>), to the late 14<sup>th</sup> century. While, on the one hand, some medieval films are inspired by literature<sup>8</sup>, such as *Sword of the Valiant: The Legend of Sir Gawain and the Green Knight* (Dir. Stephen Weeks, 1984), based on the anonymous poem *Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*. On the other hand, other films stem from historical events, like *The Seventh Seal* (Dir. Ingmar Bergman, 1957; often considered the best film about the Black Death in medieval Europe<sup>9</sup>) or figures, like Joan of Arc or Richard the

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<sup>5</sup> While, as we have seen, the term medieval film is applied to movies related to and set in the Middle Ages, no film can obviously be truly “medieval” in origin.

<sup>6</sup> In 1895 the Lumière brothers, Auguste and Louis, shot their first film that showed workers leaving the Lumière Factory. Later that year, the Lumières started private showings of their films which were followed by public screenings in the basement of a café in Paris. In 1897, Georges Méliès presented the first of his cinematic retellings of the life of Joan of Arc and in the following year, Georges Hatot directed a film entitled *Jeanne D’Arc*.

<sup>7</sup> Some adaptations of the medieval poem *Beowulf* are: *Beowulf* (Dir. Yuri Kulakov, 1998), *Beowulf and Grendel* (Dir. Sturla Gunnarsson, 2005) and *Beowulf* (Dir. Robert Zemeckis, 2007).

<sup>8</sup> Other examples of medieval films based on literary works are *The Canterbury Tales* (Dir. Pier Paolo Pasolini, 1972) and *Morte d’Arthur* (Dir. Gillian Lynne, 1984).

<sup>9</sup> The Black Plague, one of the most devastating pandemics which peaked in Europe around the years 1348-50, has been a source for medieval films including: *Black Death* (Dir. Christopher Smith, 2010) and *Season of the Witch* (Dir. Dominic Sena, 2011). Other historical events which have been adapted by medieval films are, for instance, the crusades, which we will analyze further on.



Lionheart.<sup>10</sup> Notwithstanding, it is clear that most medieval films are often closer to works of fiction than to accurate historical representations.

Perhaps, because medieval films partake in a “conversation with the past” (Kelly 7), they have frequently been a target of criticism by medievalists. However, regardless of their popularity or acceptance within academia, these movies seem to have a special allure for audiences, which is probably why there is an enormous list of films<sup>11</sup> dedicated to the Middle Ages. Some of the most commercially successful medieval films have been released in the 21st century and include *Robin Hood* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 2010) which has made an estimate \$321,669,741 worldwide; *King Arthur* (Dir. Antoine Fuqua, 2004) with an estimated gross of \$203,567,857 worldwide; and *Beowulf* (Dir. Robert Zemeckis, 2007) that has made an estimated total of \$82,195,215 in the US alone and a worldwide gross of \$196,149,662.<sup>12</sup>

For the purpose of this work, we shall focus on medieval films that feature knights as core characters to their plots. Hence, we have come to divide these films into four main types. They are: Arthurian Films, Knight Films, Crusades Films and Time Travel Films.

*Arthurian Films* are dedicated to the legend of Britain’s mythical once and future king, Arthur, and his Knights of the Round Table. Names such as Lancelot, Gawain, Tristan, Percival, and Galahad have become a part of our collective imaginary and the Arthurian legend is today, as it was during the Middle Ages, a source of renewed adventures. Examples of Arthurian Films can be found in *Camelot* (Dir. Marty Callner, 1967), *Excalibur* (Dir. John Boorman, 1981), *First Knight* (Dir., Jerry Zucker 1995), *King Arthur*, *Tristan + Isolde* (Dir. Kevin Reynolds, 2006), and so on, in which the focus is clearly on the knights of Camelot and their

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<sup>10</sup> Of the many cinematic envisions of Joan of Arc’s life, we can point out *Jeanne d’Arc* (Dir. Georges Méliés, 1897), *Jeanne la pucelle* (Dir. Jacques Rivette, 1994) and *The Messenger: The Story of Joan of Arc* (Dir. Luc Besson, 1999).

<sup>11</sup> For a listing of medieval films see Harty, Kevin J. *The Reel Middle Ages. American, Western and Eastern European, Middle Eastern, and Asian Films about Medieval Europe*. Jefferson and London: McFarland & Company, 1999.

<sup>12</sup> All the estimated gross profit is in accordance with the information made available at the website <http://www.boxofficemojo.com/?ref=ft>

adventures. According to Nickolas Haydock, in *Movie Medievalism*, Arthurian legend remains one of the West's master myths because:

(...) Arthur is capable of embodying almost any desire — romantic, rationalist, or racist; nationalistic, nostalgic, or New Age; fundamentalist, fascist, or futuristic; postcolonial, postideological, or even post-Twin Towers. Indeed it is possible to take the temperature of almost any Western age or society simply by attending to what it makes of his story. (165)

Since Arthurian Films centre their plots on knights' adventures, it seems that these can also be considered under the title of *Knight Films*. However, because of the deep-set nature of Arthurian myth in Western culture, we believe they stand as a separate subgenre. Knight Films are focused on the exploits, journeys, and undertakings of knights, who are not related to Arthur's court, in what is generally a process of self-discovery. An example of these films can be seen, for instance, in *Ladyhawke* (Dir. Richard Donner, 1985) and *A Knight's Tale* (Dir. Brian Helgeland, 2001). In the former, while listening to songs like "We will Rock you" by Queen, the audience follows the tale of William Thatcher, a squire of low birth who through his jousting skills becomes a full knight. Interestingly both Knight and Arthurian Films often feature traveling, either in a country or to foreign lands. Nonetheless, no medieval film better represents journeys to far-off territories than Crusades Films.

Distinct from the remaining medieval films, *Crusade Films* are linked to a specific historical time, the period of the crusades (11<sup>th</sup> to the 13<sup>th</sup> century), and to a particular geographical location, Jerusalem. Films such as *The Crusades* (Dir. Cecil B. DeMille, 1935), and *Kingdom of Heaven* (Dir. Ridley Scott, 2005) can be taken as examples of this group. These adaptations are most commonly based on the six major crusades against the Muslim territories in the East, representing the trip of one or more knights from the West to the Holy Land where they are meant to restore Christianity by fighting against the infidels. In this kind of adaptation the trip often ends up being one of self-discovery. A clear instance of this is Ridley Scott's *Kingdom of Heaven* where young Balian of Ibelin<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>13</sup> Balian of Ibelin (c.1143-1193) was a French noble in the crusader Kingdom of Jerusalem

embarks on a journey to Jerusalem which will forever change him.

Finally, there are medieval films that depict the journey as a crucial part of the film's plot, but unlike Crusades Films, in which the characters geographically travel from one point to another, in *Time Travel Films* the characters' trip is one across time. This type of plot variation usually steams from Mark Twain's well-known novel *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889). In fact, there are several on-screen adaptations of Twain's work, like *A Connecticut Yankee* (Dir. David Butler, 1931) and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (Dir. Tay Garnett, 1949), among many others. The premise of this type of medieval film is generally the same: someone from the present travels back to medieval Europe or, although less common, someone from the Middle Ages is transported into the present. In films such as *A Knight in Camelot* (Dir. Roger Young, 1998), *Black Knight* (Dir. Gil Junger, 2001), and *Timeline* (Dir. Richard Donner, 2003) we can find examples of this kind of medieval film in which the time-traveling main characters find themselves amidst an unknown land, where they normally help solve conflicts.

In addition to these medieval films, we can also point out the ones that feature medieval elements but are not considered medieval as they are not set in the Middle Ages, a feature that ultimately is what distinguishes medieval films. These movies can be science fiction films, like the *Star Wars* series (Dir. George Lucas, 1977-2005), which, with its Jedi Knights and light sabers, clearly invoke a medieval past; or fantasy films, like the *Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Dir. Peter Jackson, 2001-2003). This is especially true of the last film, *The Return of The King* (2003), that undoubtedly reminds of Arthur — the King that was and will be, the King that shall return when his people need the most. Finally, there are also adventure films in which the search for an item or an object from the Middle Ages is key to the plot. These films are set in the present time and portray modern heroes' quests to obtain an ancient artifact, the most famous one being the Holy Grail. Examples of this can be found in the films *Indiana Jones and*

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and is an actual historical figure. The film *Kingdom of Heaven* provides a highly fictionalized version of Balin as the illegitimate son of Godfrey the Baron of Ibelin (a fictional character).

*the Last Crusade* (Dir. Steven Spielberg, 1989) and *The Da Vinci Code* (Dir. Ron Howard, 2006).

### **Conclusion: Films Get Medieval**

Medieval films have been a constant throughout the life of cinema, since the silent era with Georges Méliès silent movie *Jeanne d'Arc* to the 21<sup>st</sup> century, their popularity is seemingly unweaving. The reasons as to why they are so well-liked probably have to do with the fact that the Middle Ages succeed in being many things for its modern audience. As Umberto Eco stated in the work *Travels in Hyperreality*, we have always patched up or mended the Middle Ages “in order to meet the vital requirements of different periods” (68) so topics like heroism, gender relationships, loyalty, kinship and religion can all be related to the medieval period. In his article “Authenticating Realism in Medieval Movie”, William Woods goes on to ask: “Would we recognize real medieval life if we saw it?” (39) Indeed our view of the Middle Ages seems to be so deeply influenced by films, books, paintings, and so on, that it is difficult to claim without doubts what being medieval is or is not. Let us then go back to the question asked in the beginning of this paper: ‘To what extent is our opinion about medieval knights affected by on-screen representations?’

In 2010 Paul Sturtevant made a study in which a number of viewers were invited to watch films and comment on how “medieval” these appeared to be. When summarizing the conclusions drawn from this research, the author stated: “(...) participants’ previous knowledge of the period was a greater influence on their interpretation of the film than what they saw. Participants sometimes constructed false memories in line with their expectations, and were most excited about the parts of the films which fit with their knowledge” (268). If one considers these results, then it would look as if we are all ‘dreaming’ of a medieval period that fits the memories we have established, whether in our childhood, through our studies or, of course, through the films we have watched. Therefore, we might assume that a medieval film which does not fit into what we deem to be “medieval” will be regarded as “not good” or “inaccurate” for, like William Woods states: “(...) despite their mythic overtones and romance coloring, films with medieval themes, like medieval histories, are required by their

audiences to deliver a convincing picture (...)” (39). Consequently, how we perceive and accept the representation of knights on screen is deeply intertwined with our own ideas of what a knight is, which means that medieval films are, in fact, a product of a particular cultural moment — the time they were produced in and the audience who watched them. Therefore, since, ultimately, all of us are ‘dreaming’ about our own Middle Ages, we could conclude that it is not the cinematic representations that deeply affect the viewer’s ideas about the Middle Ages, but it is the spectator who influences the moving pictures depicted on-screen.

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**ABSTRACT**

The knight dominated the medieval world and distinguished it from the classical era. However, in the early Middle Ages the knight was little more than a mounted warrior whose strength and prowess in battle could be procured by the wealthiest lord. In fact, it was only in the 11<sup>th</sup> century that these men started acquiring a specific status and only later did knighthood and chivalry become tied. Today, the knight remains a leading figure and is at the center of many modern adaptations of the medieval period.

The present paper will focus on different portrayals of the knight in English-speaking films. What medieval features are kept? To what extent is accuracy important? How do these films contribute to our own modern day view of the knight and the Middle Ages? These are some of the questions this short paper seeks to answer.

**KEYWORDS**

Medieval Film; Knights; Medievalism; Adaptations; Middle Ages

**RESUMO**

O cavaleiro dominou o mundo medieval, distinguindo-o do período clássico. Contudo, no início da Idade Média, o cavaleiro era pouco mais que um guerreiro montado cuja força e destreza em batalha podia ser adquirida pelo senhor mais rico. De facto, foi somente no século XI que estes homens alcançaram um estatuto específico e apenas mais tarde os conceitos de cavalaria e cavalheirismo foram associados. Hoje, o cavaleiro continua a ser uma figura de relevo, ocupando, por isso, um lugar de destaque em muitas adaptações modernas do período medieval.

O artigo irá concentrar-se em representações do cavaleiro em filmes falados em inglês. Que características medievais são mantidas? Até que ponto é que questões de fidelidade são importantes? Como contribuem estes filmes para a visão

actual do cavaleiro e da Idade Média? Estas são algumas das questões que este breve estudo pretende responder.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Filmes Medievais; Cavaleiros; Medievalismo; Adaptações; Idade Média

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*Lawrence of Arabia* (1962):  
A Tragic Hero in an Ever-Lasting Quest

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## *Lawrence of Arabia* (1962): A Tragic Hero in an Ever-Lasting Quest

“I loved you, so I drew these tides of man into my hands  
and wrote my will across the sky in stars  
to earn you Freedom, the seven pillared worthy house (...).”  
(T.E. Lawrence, dedication to S. A. in *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*)

The film *Lawrence of Arabia*, directed by David Lean and released in 1962, is based on the figure of T. E. Lawrence, the legendary English officer who led Arabs in their struggle against the Turks during World War I.

Having attended Oxford from 1906 to 1909, where he studied archaeology, he first travelled to the Middle East on scholarships to study the influence of the Crusaders on modern architecture. There he stayed for months, making Arab friends and learning their language. Later on, at the outbreak of the war of 1914, when England allied with France against Germany and Turkey, he was dispatched to Cairo, in Egypt, to work for the Bureau of Arab Affairs, and became involved in the Revolt of the Arabs against the Turks in 1916.

Meanwhile, he was assigned a position as liaison officer to Prince Feisal, and took part in military operations, blowing up Turkish trains and taking the city of Aqaba. In 1918, under orders from General Edward Allenby, he led an army of Arab tribes to coordinate with the British forces in their attack and capture of Damascus. After his return to England, he enlisted in the Royal Air Force under a false name and in 1935 he died in a motorcycle accident, which some thought a suicide. Winston Churchill, one of the prominent figures who attended his funeral, considered him: “one of the greatest beings of our time” (Santas 29), and he was praised both as a man of action and as a classical scholar who, among other things,

translated the *Odyssey* of Homer. His autobiography, entitled *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, published in 1926 with his own account of the two-year Arab campaign, did prove him a literary master and historian, while contributing to his status of a mythical hero of the desert and a liberator of an oppressed people.

Owing to this reputation of a hero of modern times, several attempts were made to film his story during the 1950s, namely by Alexander Korda, but they were thwarted by Lawrence's living brother, Professor Arnold W. Lawrence, who was his brother's literary executor and who refused to sell the rights of *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* to cinema producers.

Nevertheless Sam Spiegel, the producer of Lean's epic *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), was eventually able to buy the rights from Professor Lawrence. Born in Poland, Sam Spiegel was one of the independent producers who, with the gradual collapse of the studio system in the 1950s, began to come to the fore in Hollywood, being involved in a limited number of projects and usually releasing them through a major studio like Columbia. Aiming at producing films for the world market, they engaged top directors and well-known stars.

In 1959 Sam Spiegel contacted Michael Wilson, who had collaborated on the script of Lean's previous film, assigning him to write a script for his new epic. Apparently owing to the excess of action sequences, his version was, however, disliked by Lean, who decided to invite Robert Bolt, the author of the famous play *A Man for All Seasons*, to take over the project and rewrite the screenplay.

Although using *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* as his basic source, Bolt deliberately chose to alter history for dramatic purposes, with the agreement of the director who, while not disregarding historical accuracy, did not think that an epic film had to be a historical document.

The question of accuracy and loyalty to the original source is thus unavoidable, and one on which historians, critics, and filmmakers do not always agree. To falsify history is regarded by some as unacceptable and even Steven Spielberg, an avowed admirer of Lean and of *Lawrence of Arabia*, admits that the inaccurate account of the Arab Revolt is nowadays more liable to hard criticism than at the time the film was released (Santas xxix). But his overall opinion is still extremely laudatory, as we may conclude from the following statement: "I don't know any director who doesn't go

down on one knee whenever *The Bridge on the River Kwai* or *Lawrence of Arabia* is discussed. I feel a great deal of reverence for David Lean". (Organ 60)

The main departures from the source are obviously related to the necessity to compress the whole story within a film whose length is, nevertheless, much above the average (222 minutes in the original version).<sup>1</sup> Thus, for instance, Lawrence's expedition against Aqaba is shown as the first major event, which omits an entire sequence described in *Seven Pillars*. On the other hand, Robert Bolt chose to make Lawrence ignorant of the so-called Picot-Sykes agreement — an agreement between France and Britain — until a crucial scene in the later stages of the film, while the historical Lawrence was aware, almost from the beginning, of the secret Western projects, which caused him a heavy feeling of guilt. In his introduction to the book, T. E. Lawrence had indeed confessed:

It was evident from the beginning that if we won the war these promises would be dead paper, and had I been an honest adviser of the Arabs I would have advised them to go home and not risk their lives fighting for such stuff (...). I risked the fraud, on my conviction that Arab help was necessary to our cheap and speedy victory in the East, and that better we win and break our word than lose. (Lawrence 8)

Another departure from the book is the importance given to the episode at Deraa, after Lawrence is lashed and possibly raped by the Turks. Although this event is recorded in *Seven Pillars*, it is not described as a turning point

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<sup>1</sup> "At the time of the premiere in December 1962, the picture ran 222 minutes. When the film was about to go into general release in February 1963 (...) Spiegel hoped that strategic cuts would increase the tempo of certain scenes that seemed to develop too slowly (...). Lean aimed to shave away twenty minutes so carefully that the audience would never notice. He and Coates thus brought the running time to 202 minutes. (...) A quarter of a century after *Lawrence's* initial release, the film archivist Robert Harris got permission from Columbia to restore the film to its original length. Lean was euphoric. (...) When Lean took a look at the restored print of the film, he decided to snip out a few frames here and there that he thought slowed down the pace; by doing so he brought the running time to 217 minutes, slightly under the original 222 minutes. (Phillips 315-317)

in the attitude of the author, who goes on with his drive to Damascus with no signs of change of personality.

These and other inaccuracies of the film, mainly related to historical figures and events, lead critics like Constantine Santas to consider the film as follows:

Not so much a chronicle of the Arab campaign — as *Seven Pillars* does — but a story of personal relations, the rise and fall of a hero, who is (...) a ‘flawed’ character — a word used many times by Lean himself to describe the heroes he prefers. (Santas 32)

On more than one occasion, Lean has actually made the following confession: “Lawrence is an enigma and I’ve always been fond of enigmas. I liked the ‘flawed heroes’. Perfection is dull”. (Phillips 257)

As we shall see, Lean’s avowed predilections for tragic themes and flawed characters may be seen as responsible for the profile of a protagonist who happens to be similar to the tragic heroes of Ancient Greek tragedies, while the plot also incorporates elements traditionally pertaining to that genre. But we should not forget that T. E. Lawrence himself put emphasis on his own centrality in the story he had told, namely by writing: “In these pages the history is not of the Arab movement, but of me in it”. (Lawrence 6). As for the accuracy of the narrative, he insisted on warning the reader that it should not be seen as an impartial document. In his own words: “It does not pretend to be impartial. I was fighting for my hand, upon my own midden. Please take it as a personal narrative pieced out of memory”. (Lawrence 3)

To this recognition of the subjectivity of Lawrence’s narrative we must add the subjectivity of a screenwriter more interested in character development than in historical action. The result is a film based on history, but concentrating mainly on two topics: the Arabian desert (which many have considered to be the real hero of the film) and Lawrence himself, in the superb performance of British actor Peter O’Toole.

As for the desert and the numerous long shots depicting its immensity, the intended impression is a sort of religious feeling, as reported by Lean: “When you are in the desert, you look into infinity. It’s no wonder that nearly all the great founders of religion came out of the desert” (Santas 42). Lean seems here to be echoing Lawrence himself, when he wrote about the



Bedouin of the desert: “There unconsciously he came near God” (Santas 42). And in the film, when an American journalist asks Lawrence: “Just what is it, Major Lawrence, that attracts you to the desert?” he gives an enigmatic answer: “It’s clean”.

Thus, more than being only an appropriate scenery for the action, the desert gains a symbolic dimension in the performance of a hero who will be eventually confronted with the presence of external forces which are stronger than human willpower — the notion so persistently cultivated in the West. Fate, or Necessity, a concept inherent both to the ancient tragic vision and to the Arab culture, may provide an explanation for some of the unexpected and undesired reversals, both personal and collective, which threaten the success of Lawrence’s quest. It is this same vision that is implicit in the sentence pronounced by Auda, one of the Arabs, when he observes: “It was written then”.

In the classic sense, as described by Aristotle in his *Poetics*, the tragic hero may suffer the interference of external forces, but the reversal of his fortune (*peripeteia*) is above all the consequence of a fatal flaw (*hamartia*) which he will sooner or later acknowledge, in a moment of the action which Aristotle called *anagnorisis*, and which precedes the catastrophe. Being of great stature, as shown in the course of his brave deeds, the hero also has a vulnerable side, either related to aspects of his personality, or as the result of his human ignorance, which makes him unknowingly commit grave errors.

In *Lawrence of Arabia* the traces of character quite evident from the start in the protagonist are his megalomania and vanity, or, using the words of the Arab Ali in the film, the “blasphemous conceit” of a Westerner convinced of his capacity to unite the Arab tribes and to reach victory over the Turks. *Hybris* is the Greek term used by Aristotle that may well be applied to an attitude that challenges the boundaries of human action, as indeed the historical Lawrence has admitted:

The dreamers of the day are dangerous men, for that they may act their dream with open eyes, to make it possible. This I did. I meant to make a new nation, to restore a lost influence, to give twenty millions of Semites the foundation on which to build an inspired dream-palace of their national thoughts.  
(Lawrence 7)

In Part One of the film, after Lawrence's death and funeral, a long flashback shows him as the real driving force in the course of events, in spite of his being initially regarded as "half-mad" and as an eccentric by his superiors. General Murray, for example, tells him: "I can't make out whether you're a bloody madman or just half-witted", receiving for an answer the following unexpected remark: "I have the same problem, Sir".

The climax of his actions is seen at the end of Part One, with Lawrence at the peak of his glory and being admired both by the Arabs and by his fellow officers. This climax also coincides with the entrance of an American journalist, Jackson Bentley (played by Arthur Kennedy) who is seeking a heroic figure in order to raise America's interest in the European war. Acting as both a biographer and commentator within the film, he will say about Lawrence: "Yes, it was my privilege to know him and to make him known to the world. He was a poet, a scholar and a mighty warrior. He was also the most shameless exhibitionist since Barnum and Bailey". Lawrence's habit of dressing in Arab robes does undoubtedly enhance the exotic and romantic aura around him and, accordingly, Lean has put deliberate emphasis on the tone of excitement and adventure in this first half of the film, as becomes evident in his notes about the Aqaba sequence:

The mood is of pure success, the visual impression that of irresistible momentum ... In other words let the suffering and squalor (*sic*) of war be evaded at all intent and the glamour of it deliberately exaggerated, so that the audience is left stirred, excited, breathless with no time to reflect, only to enjoy, after the long slog across the desert and with Sinai to come. (Chapman 102)

But from this point onwards, Lawrence becomes the involuntary puppet of external forces which he cannot control, being now aware of the existence of an agreement between Britain and France to have Arabia carved between them after the war. In spite of this revelation, and although feeling betrayed, Lawrence still goes on, in hopes that he could eventually unite and liberate the Arabs.

The turning point in the action takes place when Lawrence is captured at Deraa, being tortured and perhaps raped by the Turks — an episode which, in the film, seems to be responsible for his change of attitude and for his desire to get out of his military assignments. His inner conflict

between two selves — the European and the Arabian sides — seems definitely to have no resolution. Moreover, having been an instrument of warfare, he is now advised by his superiors to let them be the workers of peace — something which is somehow explained in the words of Prince Feisal, when he observes: “Young men make wars and the virtues of war are the virtues of young men: courage and hope for the future. Then old men make the peace, and the vices of peace are the vices of old men: mistrust and caution”.

Part Two of the film is altogether darker than Part One, both thematically and visually, with more scenes shot in darkness and in medium or close shots. And in the final scene Lawrence is seen returning to England with the broken posture of someone being exiled to his own country. On his way to the ship that will take him back to England, he passes a group of Arabs on camels, a sort of reminder of his recent past, and he also passes a motorcyclist — which evokes the initial scene of the film in which, riding a motorcycle, he finds a tragic death.

As James Chapman and Nicholas Cull have noticed: “*Lawrence* is unusual for a mainstream film, certainly for a Hollywood movie, in its suggestion of the futility of individual agency. (...) *Lawrence* ends in failure: its protagonist is powerless to deliver on his promises to the Arabs”. (Chapman 103)

The final sequences of the film give emphasis to the theme of colonialism, and especially to the British Empire’s manipulation of international conflicts. The liberation of Arabia from the Turks was, in fact, a means of advancing the interests of France and Britain in that region, and the film denounces it even more clearly than T. E. Lawrence had done in his book.

The historian Jeremy Wilson relates this fact to Bolt’s left-wing tendencies and to his being known as strongly anti-war and a prominent figure in the British anti-nuclear movement. He even quotes a letter written by Bolt, in which he has stated: “In the film, in dramatic — and therefore crude — terms I have tried to show how War and nothing else was the villain of the piece.”<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Cf. T. E. Lawrence Studies: [http:// www.telawrence.info/telawrenceinfo/legacy3film/film4.htm](http://www.telawrence.info/telawrenceinfo/legacy3film/film4.htm)

This historian therefore concludes that Bolt saw *Lawrence of Arabia* as an appropriate vehicle for his political message. But, on the other hand, we should also notice that anti-imperialism is a feature common to four of the five epics directed by Lean, in particular concerning the British Empire and the excesses and blindness of imperial powers in several parts of the world. Besides *Lawrence of Arabia*, this is the case in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (1957), *Ryan's Daughter* (1970) and *A Passage to India* (1984).

Representing the apotheosis of the cinema of Empire, *Lawrence of Arabia* may actually be seen as a watershed, since after its release there was a pronounced shift towards a more critical representation of the imperial project<sup>3</sup>- a shift which is somehow iconically represented in the division of this film into two parts, as James Chapman and Nicholas Cull have observed:

The film is in two parts: a heroic and triumphalist first half, seen through the eyes of Lawrence himself; and an anti-heroic second half, a study of imperial hubris, told from the perspective of the American journalist Jackson Bentley. (Chapman 88)

As these authors stress in the work entitled *Projecting Empire*, *Lawrence of Arabia* stands now as one of the great masterpieces of world cinema, one of the greatest of all epics, and also: “a bitter and disillusioned study of the legacy of imperialism” (Chapman 107). In 1963 the film won 7 Oscars (including Best Picture and Best Director) and Peter O’Toole was nominated for an Oscar as Best Actor in a leading role, having won a BAFTA Film Award as Best British Actor. It is also worth while noticing that in 2003 the American Film Institute named T. E. Lawrence of *Lawrence of Arabia* one of the top ten film heroes of all time (Phillips xvii).

Moreover, the film may nowadays be seen as a statement about the remote reasons for today’s troubles in the Middle East, which go back to

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<sup>3</sup> “The critique of imperialism suggested by *Lawrence of Arabia* indicated an ideological shift in the cinema of Empire. This was evident in films produced in the wake of *Lawrence*, particularly *Zulu* (1964) and *Khartoum* (1966). Both films dramatize successful challenges to British imperialism by emergent nationalist forces who are presented as worthy opponents”. (Chapman 106)

World War I and its aftermath. The great powers and interests of that day are shown to be responsible for the lack of national unity among the Arabs, with the subsequent divisions of Arabia into different nations.

The dream of a united Arab nation, a dream shared by Lawrence and the Arabs, has thus collapsed and, in the twenty-first century, almost a hundred years after the incidents recorded in this film, peace in the Middle East seems more and more to be an ever-lasting quest. Or, as Kevin Jackson has suggested: “As long as the conflicts in the Middle East persist, Lawrence’s ghost will continue to return”. (Jackson 112)

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**ABSTRACT**

Being based on a real-life historical hero — T. E. Lawrence, who fought side by side with the Arabs in the First World War — the cinematographic adaptation of his work *Seven Pillars of Wisdom* directed in 1962 by David Lean and with a screenplay by Robert Bolt gives us the portrait of an eminently tragic hero. Admitting that his heroic status in the film is by no means clear-cut, this paper aims at demonstrating that he nevertheless displays the main features of the typical tragic hero, as presented in the ancient Greek tragedies. The quest he is pursuing relates, on the other hand, to the history of a region that, until nowadays, has been continually torn by conflicts rooted in the First World War and its aftermath.

**KEYWORDS**

Adaptation; tragic hero; quest; First World War

**RESUMO**

Baseada num verdadeiro herói histórico — T. E. Lawrence, que lutou ao lado dos Árabes na 1ª Guerra Mundial — a adaptação cinematográfica da sua obra *Seven Pillars of Wisdom*, realizada em 1962 por David Lean e com argumento de Robert Bolt, dá-nos o retrato de um herói eminentemente trágico. Admitindo que o seu estatuto de herói não tem contornos inequívocos no filme, pretendemos mostrar que, apesar disso, ele apresenta as principais características do típico herói trágico, tal como surge nas antigas tragédias gregas. Por outro lado, a sua demanda relaciona-se com a história de uma região que, até aos dias de hoje, tem sido dilacerada por conflitos enraizados na 1ª Guerra Mundial e suas consequências.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Adaptação; herói trágico; demanda; 1ª Guerra Mundial

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# *Cromwell* (1970): a God-sent Hero in a Time of Revolution

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## *Cromwell* (1970): a God-sent Hero in a Time of Revolution

Historians have described the middle of the seventeenth century in Western Europe as a period of gloom and uncertainty, of a general crisis in intellectual, political, moral and religious values, illustrated by revolts and revolutions in several countries. The English Revolution of 1640, also known as the Civil Wars or Clarendon's Great Rebellion, epitomizes the atmosphere of anxiety and conflict, in which time-hallowed institutions and traditions were called in question and the world turned upside down. The bitter struggle for supremacy between the Stuart king, Charles I, and Parliament led to the outbreak of a bloody civil war; hundreds of communities were split and members of the same family fought on opposing sides. In August 1642 the king raised his standard at Nottingham and declared war on Parliament. After the battle of Preston in September 1648, chaos reigned in England (Morrill, 2008: 98). Although the majority of the people yearned for a peaceful settlement, the king was tried and beheaded in 1649, monarchy and the House of Lords were abolished and a Commonwealth established. Following these sweeping transformations the new republican regime commissioned Oliver Cromwell to conquer Ireland (1649-50) and subdue Scotland (1650-51), missions the now Lord General discharged brilliantly and ruthlessly. In December 1653 Cromwell became Lord Protector.

Biographers have described Cromwell as "God's Englishman" (Hill 1970), "Our Chief of Men" (Fraser 1997), "An Honourable Enemy" (Reilly 1999) and as "God's Warrior" (Gentles 2011). As one of the major historical figures of the English Civil Wars it comes as no surprise that Cromwell has been portrayed in the cinema several times, but this paper will convey the perspective of a researcher in the history of ideas in early modern England and focus mainly on the film *Cromwell*, directed and

written by Ken Hughes, with Ronald Harwood as script consultant, released in 1970 in the U. S. A. by Columbia Pictures. This film is all the more significant as the publicity boasted of many years of research and, according to the New York Times reviewer, Vincent Canby<sup>1</sup>, had its claims for accuracy certified by Will and Ariel Durant. Yet, despite these credentials, the movie has become famous for its numerous inaccuracies. On January 20<sup>th</sup>, 2004, David Annandale<sup>2</sup> remarked: ‘Apart from some famous dialogue, any resemblance to actual history is coincidental and purely unintentional, but there’s still a decent amount of entertainment to be had.’

The director Ken Hughes became obsessed with the subject after reading a biography of Oliver Cromwell in the early 60s and is said to have read more than 120 books about him over the next nine years.<sup>3</sup> According to Rob Nixon, Hughes’s purpose to pull together a tragic drama having “all the haunting inevitability of Greek tragedy” became possible when he met Irving Allen, a producer who shared his obsession with Cromwell:

By the time principal photography began in the spring of 1969, they had poured their mutual interest into a huge cinematic undertaking, with more than 200 workers at Shepperton Studios building the largest outdoor set ever constructed for an English-made film (...) Close to 4,000 costumes were made, 16,000 separate props items found or made, and thousands of wigs ordered from all over Europe.

Unfortunately this lavish care with physical details did not extend to historical events. At the outset of the film, John Pym (Geoffrey Keen), leader of the parliamentary opposition, and Henry Ireton (Michael Jayston), Cromwell’s future son-in-law, ride out ahistorically to meet Cromwell (Richard Harris) at his home in an attempt to convince him to stay and not to immigrate to America. This scene, set in the first months of 1640, when Charles I summoned Parliament, shows us Cromwell as someone who

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<sup>1</sup> <http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?res=9E01E5DD173BEE34BC4F51DFB667838B669EDE>

<sup>2</sup> <http://upcomingdiscs.com/2004/01/20/cromwell>

<sup>3</sup> Rob Nixon: <http://www.tcm.com/this-month/article/193982%7C0/Cromwell.html>.

had already stood in the parliament of 1628 for the rights and privileges of the common people, and had become an important political figure, whose support was deemed essential by the leaders of the opposition. However, all this does not match history. In 1640 Oliver Cromwell was a minor country gentleman who had made next to no impact (Gentles 3) in the 1628 parliament and had played no political role whatsoever since then. The film reverses the political standing of John Pym and Oliver Cromwell. Pym was a famous parliamentary opponent of the Crown, Cromwell was unknown. If someone wished to rally someone's support, it would have been Cromwell to seek Pym's support, not the other way round. At the opening of the Long Parliament in November 1640, Cromwell was a nobody.

The exaggeration and the falsity of Cromwell's portrayal continue when Pym and other parliamentary leaders (Cromwell is among them) meet the King, played by Alec Guinness, present him with the Grand Remonstrance and Cromwell, portrayed by Richard Harris, makes a speech advocating the need to 'move forward to a more enlightened form of government, based upon a true representation of a free people, known as democracy'. Besides the anachronism of such a concept of democracy, Cromwell only met Charles I some years later and, if the director wishes to make us believe — and I am sure he does — that Cromwell was a democrat in our sense of the word, a champion of the rights and liberties of the common and ordinary people, then he is wrong once more, because Cromwell demonstrated in several occasions that he wished to preserve the traditional hierarchical order of English society. As Henry Ireton made clear at the Putney debates against the army radicals, the right to vote was restricted to those with a "permanent fixed interest" in the kingdom, i.e. to men of property:

I think that no person has a right to an interest or share in the disposing of the affairs of the kingdom, and in determining or choosing those that shall determine what laws we shall be ruled by here — no person hath a right to this, that hath not a permanent fixed interest in this kingdom, and those persons together are properly the represented of this kingdom, and consequently are [also] to make up the representers of this kingdom (...) (Woodhouse 53-54)

Then comes a famous scene portraying the King's attempt to arrest five Members of Parliament, namely John Pym, John Hampden, Sir Arthur Haselrig, Ireton and Cromwell, according to information previously supplied by Sir Edward Hyde. All but Cromwell leave the Commons room, and there he sits quietly, alone and boldly facing the King and his imminent arrest. Cromwell was justly famous for his physical courage, but unfortunately for the director, neither Cromwell nor Ireton were two of the five members. By 1642 Cromwell acted as the attack dog (Gentles 14) of main opposition leaders such as the Earls of Bedford and Warwick, Viscount Saye and Sele, Oliver St. John, John Hampden and John Pym, and became known by his radical religious views but did not play any major role in the events leading to the outbreak of the first civil war.

Any attempt to portray Cromwell's career, Charles I's political decisions or the evolution of the republican regime on the screen must understandably compress a multitude of diverse data and leave out many significant events or even add fictional characters and their respective actions. A historical film is chiefly entertainment and nobody expects such a film to abide by the standards of academic history, but as presentations of history they become liable to scrutiny. Filmmakers usually publicize unfounded claims to accuracy, as was the case with Arthur Penn's *Bonnie and Clyde*, James Cameron's *Titanic*, Oliver Stone's *JFK*, (Freeman 7-8) and Fred Zinnemann's *A Man for All Seasons* (Marshall 51). Every art has its own rules, its own economy. But this economy cannot be held responsible for unexpected and unnecessary omissions, distortions and inventions, as becomes increasingly clear in the scene depicting the battle of Naseby in June 1645.

First, it is baffling to realize that Marston Moor (2 July 1644), the biggest battle of the Civil Wars, gets no mention or allusion at all, and that the director preferred to portray Edgehill, the first important battle taking place in 1642, but which ended in stalemate, in sharp contrast to the crushing defeat imposed on the King in Marston Moor. Cromwell played a conspicuous and decisive part in facing the best of the King's cavalry troops and overwhelming them (Gentles 36), demonstrating an unexpected military expertise. Secondly, in Naseby, the film misleads the audience as regards an invented superiority of the King's forces, amounting to 7.000, as against Cromwell's 3.000. As a matter of fact, Royalists, with 12.500,

were heavily outnumbered by the 17.000 soldiers commanded by Sir Thomas Fairfax (Gentles 43) and not by Cromwell, Lieutenant-General and second in command. Then, adding a touch of pathos to the heroic image of Cromwell which he is painstakingly composing, the director shows us Oliver's elder son killed in action, his body on a horse led by his younger brother. However, Cromwell's son had already died of fever in 1644.

Cromwell's reputation had been steadily growing after Marston Moor, not least because of his capacity to recruit, train, discipline and communicate to his troops his utter conviction that they were the instruments of a divine plan God had devised for England as an elect nation (Woolrych 96-7). After Naseby, that 'happy victory', Oliver Cromwell enjoyed the status of a popular hero whose deeds were regarded as signs or providences of God's approval, as Cromwell himself repeatedly emphasized. His string of military victories at Preston (1648), Dunbar (1650) and Worcester (1651) demonstrated that God had a plan for England, however unfathomable, and that Cromwell was His tool to eradicate corruption, to carry out a reformation of manners, and lead the 'poor godly people' to peace and prosperity.

The invasion and bloody submission of Ireland, the unexpected and crushing defeats inflicted on the Scots and the Royalists are Cromwell's major achievements, and in his eyes confirmed time after time the righteousness of his providentialism, but the director Ken Hughes preferred to omit any reference to such outstanding events and to indulge in his fantasies of making Cromwell arrest the King, Charles I, at Oxford, and of portraying Sir Thomas Fairfax, the actual Commander in Chief, as if he were a mere messenger conveying the information of John Pym's death to Cromwell in church. Needless to say, both facts are false. It was Cornet Joyce, not Cromwell, who arrested the King, and John Pym had already died three years earlier, in 1643.

A few minutes later Cromwell is depicted as negotiating a settlement with the King, putting forward the proposal of a constitutional government to be framed by Parliament and headed by a king. Cromwell says: "An England without a king is unthinkable." Generally speaking, the scene matches history and should be placed in the context of Parliament's and Cromwell's attempts to come to terms with the King. However, when

Charles's negotiations with Ireland and Scotland became known and his duplicity uncovered, Cromwell, who had just stated that the army had fought to institute a parliamentary system and overthrow the monarchical tyranny, realized that the King must stand trial, even if Parliament opposed such unconstitutional and dangerous path and most people craved for a speedy and peaceful settlement.

To overcome the expected opposition of Parliament to the army's plans to put the King on trial, Colonel Pride actually purged those MPs nourishing unfavourable opinions, while the film shows Cromwell and his troops invading the House of Commons and claiming a majority. Once again, Cromwell is ascribed a prominent role he did not play, but the irony is not lost: a stalwart defender of the rights and liberties embodied in Parliament finds out that his sword must rule after all. I suppose it is apt to quote Cromwell's actual speech of rejection of the King (Fraser 275): "Since the Providence of God hath cast this upon us, I cannot but submit to Providence, though I am not yet provided to give you my advice."

And this meant that Cromwell would no longer attempt to reach an agreement with the King. Furthermore, to quote John Morrill's words (2009: 210), the film is "outrageously free in its combination of characters and events", especially in the ways it depicts Sir Edward Hyde, who would become Earl of Clarendon after the Restoration in 1660. Early in the film Edward Hyde is portrayed as King Charles adviser at the arrival of the Earl of Stratford from Ireland, but shortly afterwards we see him enter the Commons room and inform Ireton of the imminent arrest of five MPs, as if he had betrayed the King. Later on, when Cromwell is suppressing a mutiny in his camp, Hyde arrives unexpectedly and discloses highly sensitive information: the King has been secretly negotiating with the Scots. But to crown these wild fantasies Edward Hyde is depicted at the trial as testifying against the King! Nothing less than high treason, based on the supposedly most abject and vilest behaviour of one of Charles's closest advisers.

None of this squares with what actually happened. At the end of 1641 Sir Edward Hyde became the King's propagandist (Seaward x), drafting statements and declarations for the King. When civil war broke out, he became involved in most important negotiations and belonged to the main core of royalist advisers. He had joined the court at The Hague



when Charles I was put on trial and so could not be present to give evidence; his loyalty was never questioned. Therefore, in this movie we are not dealing with a bunch of inaccuracies but with the utter falsification of history which is intellectually reproachful.

Near the end of the film we find Cromwell back home, brooding by the fire, looking as if he had retired and was living on his farm, following the example of the Roman farmer Cincinnatus who led his armies to victory, rejected the offer of dictatorship and returned to his farm<sup>4</sup>, when in real life he invaded Ireland and slaughtered those papists and ‘barbarous wretches’ (Stevenson 158) at the sieges of Drogheda (September 1649) — “a name of infamy down through the centuries” (Gentles 113) — and Wexford where he condoned indiscriminate massacres (Stevenson 157; Gentles 115). Cromwell returned then to England and, following a decision taken by the Council of State, launched the invasion of Scotland, not without regretting his duty to fight a Protestant people. He imposed crushing defeats to the Scots at Dunbar (1650) and to Charles II’s army and allied Scots at Worcester (3<sup>rd</sup> September 1651). Two years later, on 16<sup>th</sup> December 1653, Oliver Cromwell became Lord Protector and established a military regime.

Once we keep these facts in mind it becomes clear they don’t fit in the wholly invented image of Cromwell fancied by Ken Hughes and must be left out of the film; otherwise he would be portrayed as a dictator — a tyrant, in seventeenth-century terminology — and not as a champion of the underprivileged. It has been recently noticed (Smith 220-1) that the Cromwell who appears in films is Cromwell the military leader, the crusader or the regicide, but never Cromwell as Lord Protector. We see him as fighting for an ideal, rebelling against a tyrannical king, and struggling for a representative political system rather than the ruler who, though venerating Parliament, proved unable to cope with his own parliaments and dissolved them, or who established the Major-Generals regime (August 1655 – January 1657), the closest England ever came to becoming a police state (Gentles 164). The truth is that Cromwell as Lord Protector, convinced as

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<sup>4</sup> Smith, <http://www.popmatters.com/review/cromwell/>

he was that the English were a godly nation and that the liberty of conscience of the godly minority should be safeguarded, never achieved an extended popular support for his military rule and failed in many ways to bring about those changes he had dreamed about. The portrayal of failure is neither attractive nor commercially rewarding, and that is why the last phase of Cromwell's life has not been portrayed on film.

However, so great a gulf between claims to accuracy and the numerous errors and distortions calls for an explanation, as I suspect that they should not be considered as simple mistakes or discrepancies growing out of ignorance or absent-mindedness, but rather as a *coherent, deliberate and invented view* of what Cromwell should have been — and still represented — according to Ken Hughes's hidden political agenda. Timothy Chant<sup>5</sup> situated the film *Cromwell* in the context of the bitter aftermath of the revolutionary decade in the 1960s, felt by many as a time of change:

By 1970 such idealistic pretensions were beginning to fade, and such revolutions as had occurred were slipping into increasingly brutal military dictatorships not wholly dissimilar to that of Cromwell's which Hughes attempts to excuse. (...) there can be discerned a very definite attempt to explain the failure of the 1960s revolutionary spirit and the vaunted Labour government of Wilson by explaining the failure of the English Revolution through being an internal betrayal which forced into being a brutal military tyranny.

This interpretation places the film in an English context, but there is an alternative view put forward by Lesley Smith.<sup>6</sup> In fact, the director, the cast and the subject matter were all British, but the film was released first in America in 1970 at the peak of the demonstrations against the war in Vietnam and became relevant in the American context of General Wesley Clark's candidacy to U.S. Presidency. In fact, Smith argued (7 October 2003) that *Cromwell* portrayed the ideal of the citizen-soldier, a Cincinnatus

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<sup>5</sup> [http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~histweb/scothist/brown\\_k/film/closed/reviews/cromwell.html](http://www.st-andrews.ac.uk/~histweb/scothist/brown_k/film/closed/reviews/cromwell.html)

<sup>6</sup> Smith, <http://www.popmatters.com/review/cromwell/>

of his day, as a kind of über-politician, a purer and more altruistic politician. As Hughes framed Cromwell as the archetypal reluctant hero struggling for the rights of the common people, he also managed to “recast the military, particularly its leaders, as betrayed by politicians of all stripes” and “to frame Cromwell further as a proto-American democrat”.<sup>7</sup>

Such blatant anachronisms should make us aware of the power of cinema to propagate biased, distorted and misleading history, especially when claims to accuracy are often included as part of the publicity for historical films (Freeman 6) or when filmmakers tailor the past to convey a political message, as was the case with *Cromwell*. Historical films usually are both a powerful source of entertainment and of disseminating particular beliefs which may prove offensive or unacceptable to contemporary social groups, even if they are historically accurate. Historical accuracy can't be elevated to become the sole and decisive criterion, but all of us should beware of distortions and oversimplifications.

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<sup>7</sup> Idem

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**ABSTRACT**

Three hundred and fifty years after his death Oliver Cromwell remains a highly polemical historical figure producing contradictory assessments of his deeds and beliefs. Cinema is a powerful medium which has developed a controversial relationship with history, especially with the criterion of historical accuracy. It is no wonder that, from the outset, a biopic of Cromwell would give rise to disparate judgements, but the film *Cromwell*, directed by Ken Hughes and released in 1970, is particularly striking on account of its numerous errors and conscious distortions which this paper aims to analyse. Hughes's portrayal of Cromwell as a proto-democrat and champion of the rights of the common people owes more to the director's hidden agenda than to the amassed historical knowledge of the real Oliver Cromwell.

**KEYWORDS**

Cromwell; Charles I; Civil Wars; Stuart age; Film studies

**RESUMO**

Três séculos e meio após a sua morte Oliver Cromwell permanece uma personalidade histórica muito controversa que origina juízos contraditórios sobre os seus actos e as suas ideias. O cinema é um meio poderoso que tem mantido relações problemáticas com a história e, em particular, com o critério de rigor histórico. À partida, seria de esperar que um filme biográfico de Cromwell despertasse opiniões desavindas, mas o filme *Cromwell*, realizado por Ken Hughes e estreado em 1970, destaca-se pelos seus erros e distorções em grande escala, cuja análise constitui o objectivo deste estudo. A caracterização de Cromwell como um democrata *avant la lettre* e defensor dos direitos do povo deve mais a propósitos implícitos do realizador do que ao conhecimento histórico acumulado sobre o verdadeiro Oliver Cromwell.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Cromwell; Charles I; Guerra Civil; Época Stuart; Estudos de cinema

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# **CULTURAL POLITICS AND IDENTITY**





*Maria Papoila, An(other)*  
Ideological Lesson from  
the *Estado Novo*

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# *Maria Papoila*, An(other) Ideological Lesson from the *Estado Novo*

## **Introduction**

This article describes how cinema, alongside many other recreational activities, was very commonly deployed and used as an apparently efficient tool within the propaganda mechanisms put into practice by the Portuguese *Estado Novo* in order to teach the new regime's so called true lessons to the 'Nation'. To support this argument I will refer to *Maria Papoila*, a film produced by Leitão de Barros in 1937, and expand on how this movie was clearly meant to represent an(other) ideological lesson taught by the *Estado Novo*, and dedicated to one of the humblest groups in the Portuguese society of that time.

## ***Estado Novo*, António Ferro and Propaganda**

Of the several features that define political regimes such as the Portuguese *Estado Novo*, in power between 1926 and 1974, I will highlight two factors so as to better support the purpose of this article. I will then focus on the importance attributed to rural and popular culture, on the one hand, and on the role performed by propaganda, on the other.

Nationalist or nationalist oriented ideologies believe that the true essence of nations is found away from the major cities, in the most remote locations, where people supposedly continue living as they once did at the beginning of that specific nation's history. In rural environments, the regional and national characteristics seem to have been frozen and stored away from any type of external intervention. This particular countryside somehow has allegedly enabled its inhabitants to embrace their religious and labor duties in a happy, honest and balanced way. According to such

beliefs, cities prevent this same humbleness and genuineness, and are home to people neither so happy nor so honest.

For sixteen years, António Ferro, the journalist who first introduced António de Oliveira Salazar to the Portuguese nation in 1932, shaped and nurtured the image of a new country triggered by the National Revolution of 1926 and shaped by the new political leader. In fact, as director of both the SPN (the Bureau for National Propaganda) and the SNI (National Bureau for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism) his key task was that of following Salazar's guidelines and implementing the most appropriate propaganda strategies ensuring that nationals and foreigners became acquainted with the 'real' and 'authentic' core of Portugal. Every area of society seemed to serve as an effective tool for the accomplishment of this goal. Thus leisure and recreational activities also fell under the close supervision of the regime and, with the help of effective censorship mechanisms, were designed to tell the 'Nation' nothing but its own true stories.

At this stage I should recall that Ferro had become a particular enthusiast of 'living images', as he referred to cinema after visiting the United States of America. Ferro co-wrote the script for *The May Revolution*, a movie about the 1926 revolution shown to visitors at the 1937 Paris International Exhibition.

### **Cinema during *Estado Novo***

Several authors (Nunes 305; Torgal, *Estados Novos*, Vol. I 56) consider the 1930s, and especially 1933, as a period crucial to establishing and implementing the Portuguese *Estado Novo*. In fact, 1933 saw Ferro's interviews of Salazar published in book form, a new Constitution founding a new political regime, a decree law setting up the new state police force with another launching the Bureau for National Propaganda, the kind of entity inherently required by such political regimes.

It should also be acknowledged how significant this same decade was to the young industry of cinema. In fact, 1933 was also the year that Portuguese sound cinema debuted. *Canção de Lisboa*, by Cottinelli Telmo, was the first movie with sound fully produced in Portugal. This was also when several later renowned movie directors such as Leitão de Barros —

the director of *Maria Papoila* —, Jorge Brum do Canto, Chianca de Garcia or Arthur Duarte began their professional activities.

In September 1933, the same decree law setting up the Bureau for National Propaganda stipulated cinema, as well as radio and theatre, as vital tools for spreading national propaganda across Portugal (Decree Law nr. 23:054, 25<sup>th</sup> September 1933). Cinema was thereby officially acknowledged as an effective way of showing the real nation both to the Portuguese and to an international audience. As Luís Reis Torgal stated, “cinema was an easy strategy for attracting the population and therefore a useful tool for spreading the images and the symbols of the nation” (Torgal, *Estados Novos*, Vol. II 77 — my translations). Everything which did not suit the ideology was necessarily withheld from plots, and cinema indeed proved as essential as any other propaganda strategy, such as folklore and tourism, as well as leisure and recreational activities, and, in particular, focused on teaching lessons about so called Portuguese feats, the country’s artists and popular culture. In 1935, Salazar himself stated that the major goal of cinema was to inform and to teach (Salazar 38). In August 1938, a magazine called *Viagem. Revista de Turismo, Divulgação e Cultura* mentioned that it “was impossible not to consider cinema as one of the strongest and most convincing tools of propaganda” (*Viagem. Revista de Turismo, Divulgação e Cultura*, nr. 2 August 1938 2).

Hence, it is correspondingly clear why the Portuguese regime under Salazar invested so much in the cinema industry. In the early 1930s, Leitão de Barros and Cottinelli Telmo teamed up to found Tóbis, a studio described in September 1934 by *Diario de Lisboa*, a daily newspaper, as “an important cell of national cinema” (*Diario de Lisboa* 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1938 2). The same article also referred to the effort and passion that had actually been put into opening these studios and fitting them with the most recent and modern equipment then existing. Tóbis would prevent Portuguese production from being influenced by the “environment that existed outside Portugal” (*Diario de Lisboa* 3<sup>rd</sup> September 1934 2), a fear that haunted Ferro, as prior to the launch of Tóbis some areas of film production were taken care of internationally, as Portugal did not have the necessary equipment and skills to do so at the time.

In 1935, the *Estado Novo* propaganda used mobile cinema, which Ferro labeled as the “caravans of images”, enabling the lessons approved

by the regime to be shown across Portugal and thus reaching the poorest but most 'authentic' groups of society. Two years later, the regime had already produced and broadcast over fifty documentaries about the particularities of the *Estado Novo*. That number kept increasing with new productions illustrating particular moments in Salazar's regime. In fact, the foundation and restoration commemorations of 1940, public displays of support for Salazar, the opening of the national stadium in Jamor, and life in the colonies all featured as the subject of several documentaries in the 1940s.

Indeed, the Bureau for National Propaganda decided to raise the number of Portuguese productions released and distributed and in 1946 Ferro and the National Bureau for Information, Popular Culture and Tourism (following a slight restructuring of the official bureau of propaganda) launched cinema awards for those movies best portraying the *Estado Novo* ideology and in which the characters were mainly historical or rural representations.

### *Maria Papoila*

Leitão de Barros, the director of *Maria Papoila*, was labeled as Salazar's movie director since he was the producer of not only several films sponsored by the regime to promote its ideology, but also of several other events planned by the *Estado Novo*, such as the double commemorations of 1940. Not only was he involved, as aforementioned, in founding Tóbis, but he was also the director of the first Portuguese sound movie, although it was actually finished in Paris, *A Severa* (1931), a biography of a famous *fado* singer and her romantic life. The movie received epithets such as a 'real poem of the race' and the 'most Portuguese movie' ever, as described by the posters, which promoted it.

In turn, *Maria Papoila* was also produced by de Barros and released in 1937. It praises the brave deeds performed by a young rural woman played by Mirita Casimiro, who moves to the big city to work as a domestic servant, following a pattern common at the time. As expected, a conflict involving the man Maria Papoila loves go against the established order, which is only reorganized *in extremis* thanks to genuine feelings of that deemed best representative of the "Nation".

Maria Papoila is the name of the main character, a young girl born in central Portugal, in a small and remote village, who had never seen either the sea or a city. Her name encapsulates her own characteristics: *Maria*, a very common female name traditionally related with representations of purity and kindness, and *Papoila*, the name of a wild and apparently weak flower, the poppy, which actually proves a lot stronger than it first appears. Maria was consequently the easiest means to represent the values linked to rural life so greatly appreciated and advocated by Salazar and his regime. The young woman followed the same path imposed on thousands of Portuguese citizens at that time, and that involved travelling to either Lisbon or Oporto, the major cities, where they would strive to find work and to cope with fairly hostile environments, difficult not only to integrate into and understand but also even to survive. In this milieu their linguistic skills, outfits and behaviours in general would easily classify them as outsiders. Most of those watching *Maria Papoila* would also quickly and personally identify with the plot which told of the honest and brave journey of that naïve and happy girl on the train to the big city, where she would work, try to fit in and fight injustice.

Once in Lisbon, Maria fell in love with one of the guests in the house, where she was working as a domestic servant as her genuine and true feelings continued to shape her attitudes. The boy is accused of a crime of which he is innocent, but because he does not want to reveal the name of a rich urban girl with whom he was with at the time of the crime, he ends up in court. The miraculous solution happens when loving Maria Papoila dares compromise her honor so as to save the man she loves. Thus order is only reestablished because of the rural honesty portrayed by Maria Papoila.

A recurrent confrontation between urban and rural paradigms is identified throughout the movie. From the outset, during Maria's train trip to Lisbon, there is the loneliness and sadness of those travelling first class contrasting with the happiness and joy of the lower class passengers, who sing and dance throughout the entire journey. The first group includes a single representative of the city, while the second is composed of Maria and her travel companions, also soldiers, (i.e. the "true Nation") and those who defended and were ready to die for their homeland (*patria*).

This same confrontation continues when Maria arrives in Lisbon, where several public infrastructures were simultaneously under construction.

In this vibrant and bustling city, she encounters crowds, hears noises and visits bars packed with drunk and violent gamblers and women who are smoking and drinking. Lisbon's popular festivities organized by Ferro's Bureau for National Propaganda, drawing on the precious creativity of de Barros, were at the extreme end of urban leisure and recreation. These were the meeting points for domestic servants and soldiers and the places where they would dance and date, trying to reproduce the behaviours they had while in their rural country villages.

From beginning to end, *Maria Papoila* is organized around this confrontation between two opposite ways of living. The urban world and the rural world perceived respectively as dishonest and honest ways of life. Once the balance is broken, it is only the rural and honest essence of the "Nation" that restores order and saves the innocent, trapped by all the vices of the city.

### The Lesson

As David Corkill and José Carlos Almeida argue in *Commemoration and Propaganda in Salazar's Portugal: The Portuguese World Exhibition of 1940*, "cinema was identified as an important propaganda instrument. The government lavished resources on film and newsreel in order to ensure that its ideas were transmitted to audiences, and major public events were recorded on documentary films" (Corkhill and Almeida 7). Lauro António also maintains that the productions dating to the *Estado Novo* period did exhibit the ideology of Salazar even if conveyed in a rather disguised format (António 52).

When considering the film *Maria Papoila* (1937), the above-mentioned statements are easy to agree with. In fact, at first glance, what audiences watch is simply a love story that does not turn out as expected. However, this actually served as a means for presenting a very clear and detailed lesson on the new 'Nation' under construction by Salazar with precious assistance from Ferro and the Bureau of National Propaganda.

How far was *Maria Papoila* fiction? The plot reproduced thousands of personal stories, of individuals who had followed exactly the same path as Maria Papoila herself. Such narrative similarities to real life plots and



characters cannot but be understood as disguised moments of propaganda, since those watching the film would easily identify with a story deliberately constructed to that end and shown on the screen to ensure they accepted the lessons being taught.

Ten years after becoming Minister of Finance, Salazar published a set of posters called ‘The Salazar Lesson’. Those documents were designed to clearly convey the human characteristics deemed worthy of praise by the *Estado Novo* and to set out the benefits generated by the new political paradigm. In several different places, Salazar gets referred to as professor of the ‘Nation’ (*Escola Portuguesa – Boletim do Ensino Primário Oficial*, 6<sup>th</sup> February 1936, n<sup>o</sup> 69 118, Ferro 1943 11-12) and would almost as often be mentioned as the politician empowered to speak about lessons handed down by the regime whether dedicated to the Portuguese people or to an international audience.

Bearing this in mind, I do not hesitate in arguing that *Maria Papoila* represents another regime-sponsored lesson with the clear purpose of emphasizing the distinct differences between the countryside (the real “Nation”) and the cities (places lacking in national authenticity). In turn, this served to teach how the genuine national values of honesty and loyalty, so highly praised by the authorities, were only found in nature and rural communities, where external influences had failed to contaminate the true essence of Portugal.

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### ABSTRACT

Portugal lived in a nationalist oriented regime called *Estado Novo* for almost fifty years, between 1926 and 1974. The official mechanisms of propaganda were vital tools to validate the new ideology and recreational activities, for example, were important tools used by the bureau of propaganda to brief the “Nation” on the new truths of Portugal. Therefore, the regime invested a lot in the production of the kind of apparently light comedies which are still familiar to most of us in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. 1937 *Maria Papoila* was produced by Leitão de Barros and praises the brave deeds of a young rural woman who moved to the big city to work. As expected, a conflict happens and it can only be solved thanks to the genuine feelings of that representative of the “Nation”. This article argues that *Maria Papoila* was used as an effective propagandistic strategy to teach another clear ideological lesson to the “Nation” of António de Oliveira Salazar.

### KEYWORDS

Portugal; *Maria Papoila*; propaganda; ideology; cinema

### RESUMO

Portugal viveu num regime político de cariz nacionalizante, designado por Estado Novo, durante quase cinquenta anos, entre 1926 e 1974. Os mecanismos oficiais de propaganda desempenharam um papel vital na legitimação da nova ideologia, tendo o Secretariado de Propaganda Nacional um importante aliado nas atividades de recreio organizadas para ensinar as novas da “Nação”. Neste âmbito, o regime investiu na produção de comédias aparentemente ligeiras que ainda hoje nos são familiares. *Maria Papoila*, realizada por Leitão de Barros, em 1937, elogia os ímpetus heroicos de uma jovem rural que foi para a cidade trabalhar. Como esperado, surge uma situação de conflito que acaba por ser resolvida *in extremis* graças aos sentimentos genuínos desta representante da “Nação”. Este artigo pretende discutir o modo como a película *Maria Papoila* foi usada como uma

estratégia propagandística eficaz para ensinar outra lição ideológica à “Nação” de António de Oliveira Salazar.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Portugal; *Maria Papoila*; propaganda; ideologia; cinema

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*Long Night's Journey Into Day:*  
Mapping the Rehabilitation  
of South Africa's Fractured Society

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# *Long Night's Journey Into Day: Mapping the Rehabilitation of South Africa's Fractured Society* The South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission's Mandate and Structure

Shortly after the first democratic elections in South Africa in 1994, the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission (TRC) was set up to, among other tasks, examine the nature, causes and extent of gross human rights violations committed during the apartheid regime, specifically during the thirty-four year period between 1 March 1960 and 10 May 1994 (the date of Nelson Mandela's inauguration as President).<sup>1</sup> The TRC effected its mandate through three committees: the Human Rights Violations Committee, the Reparation and Rehabilitation Committee and the Amnesty Committee.

The Human Rights Violations Committee undertook to bring perpetrators and victims of human rights violations face-to-face in non-judicial public hearings across the country between 21 April 1996 and 29 March 1998. According to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume 6 (1998), during its two year operational period, the Human Rights Violations Committee collected a total of 21,519 victim statements, containing more than 30,384 gross violations of human rights. Approximately ten percent of the victims were heard in public hearings. Victims were given the opportunity to tell their stories and, ultimately, to confront their perpetrators before an audience; perpetrators were given the same opportunity to disclose publicly unknown information about crimes committed during the apartheid regime.

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<sup>1</sup> The Promotion of National Unity and Reconciliation Act 34 of 1995, which established the terms and conditions of the TRC, defines gross human rights violations as "the killing, abduction, torture, or severe ill-treatment of any person; or any attempt, conspiracy, incitement, instigation, command or procurement to commit" any of the aforementioned acts (3).

## The Centrality of Forgiveness in the Reconciliation Process

It has been widely recognised in literature that Nelson Mandela and Desmond Tutu played a crucial role in defining the guiding principles shaping the TRC's work. Desmond Tutu, the TRC's Chairperson, in particular, has been linked to the centrality of forgiveness in the radical proposal for interpersonal reconciliation that framed the TRC's endeavour to promote restorative, rather than retributive justice (Amstutz 2005; Graybill 2002). As Desmond Tutu (9) explains in the Foreword to the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report*, Volume One, "We believe ... that there is another kind of justice — a restorative justice which is concerned not so much with punishment as with correcting imbalances, restoring broken relationships — with healing, harmony and reconciliation".<sup>2</sup> Central to the restorative justice model is the restoration of the equilibrium in relationships, thereby enabling the offender's reintegration into the community.<sup>3</sup>

However, the intermeshing, during the Human Rights Violation Committee proceedings, of the concepts of reconciliation and forgiveness caused unease and raised, from the start, several fundamental questions: Is reconciliation a transaction between perpetrators and victims, whereby the former offer contrition and confession in exchange for the latter's forgiveness? Does reconciliation simply aim at peaceful coexistence between previously estranged people? Does forgiveness necessarily lead to reconciliation?

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<sup>2</sup> According to Gibson (2002) the TRC process was underpinned by four theories of justice, notably, distributive justice, which provides compensation to victims; restorative justice, which emphasises restoring dignity to victims by means of symbolic reparation (an apology); procedural justice, which ensures victims and their families are given a "voice" as they get to tell their stories publicly and, hence, receive recognition that they were wronged; and retributive justice, which is premised on the punishment of offenders.

<sup>3</sup> The African philosophy of *ubuntu* was pivotal to this process. As Desmond Tutu (1999) discusses in *No Future Without Forgiveness*, the values nurtured by the ancestral communitarian model of *ubuntu* — generally translated as "humaneness" or "the essence of being human" — advocate that each person, rather than an abstract being, is a living force in a constellation of relationships. Accordingly, *ubuntu* promotes exercise of the responsibility of the self for the other as both the precept of social existence and the recognition of a shared humanity.



Volume One of the *Truth and Reconciliation Commission of South Africa Report* clarifies that forgiveness does not mean reconciliation. The latter is a process of re-establishing relationship and settling differences so that cooperation and a sense of harmony are achieved. On the other hand, it establishes that forgiveness is important in the process of coming to terms with a traumatic past, since “It is about seeking to forego bitterness, renouncing resentment, moving past old hurt, and becoming a survivor rather than a passive victim” (119).

With this in mind, I wish to take a closer look at what the process of forgiveness entails. In the emerging field of study of psychology of forgiveness, Wade et al. (634) define forgiveness as:

an intra-personal process, in which those who have been hurt release negative thoughts and feelings for the offending person and gain some measure of acceptance for the events ... However ... forgiveness does not necessarily have to include reconciliation ... forgiveness is not condoning a hurtful action, forgetting the wrong, or ignoring the natural consequences of the offence. Finally, forgiveness is not simply reducing the negative thoughts or emotions associated with unforgiveness.

Wade et al. stress that true forgiveness “requires the ability to see others in realistic terms (both the good and the bad) and to hold them accountable to natural consequences, yet still to feel compassion, empathy, or some degree of positive feelings for them” (634). Pumla Godobo-Madikizela<sup>4</sup> (2002) considers the factors and circumstances leading to forgiveness and claims that key among them is the expression of remorse. In this respect, Godobo-Madikizela highlights the opportunity provided by the TRC hearings for perpetrators to express remorse for their deeds, enabling “what is termed the *paradox of remorse*”<sup>5</sup> (21). The author contends that

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<sup>4</sup> Pumla Godobo-Madikizela is a clinical psychologist who served on the South African Truth and Reconciliation Commission’s Human Rights Violations Committee from 1996-1998.

<sup>5</sup> According to Godobo-Madikizela (“Remorse” 21), the “paradox of remorse” stems from the perpetrator’s feeling of regret, self-reflective thoughts and emotions that “produce the paradoxical experience of the perpetrator as a wounded self”.

“[G]enuine remorse humanizes perpetrators and transforms their evil from the unforgivable into something that can be forgiven” (8).

In practice, few perpetrators offered apologies and showed regret for their deeds. Quite often, when this happened, there was doubt as to whether expressions of remorse by perpetrators or forgiveness by victims/victims’ family members were sincere and voluntary, or a direct result of the TRC’s moral discourse and the repeated appeal to tolerance, compassion, forgiveness and reconciliation. As Amstutz (202) points out, “[T]he TRC made room for, if not directly encouraged, individual and collective forgiveness through its emphasis on the restoration of relationships through confession, empathy and amnesty”.

Forgiveness and reconciliation seldom took place during the TRC process, but what ought to be appreciated is that, for the first time in the history of South Africa, conditions were created that both favoured forgiveness and reconciliation and promoted the reconstruction of a deeply divided society. It was often found, however, that following a perpetrator’s confession and expression of remorse, for the victims/family members of victims, feelings of empathy and compassion were neither immediate nor easy to negotiate. When it took place, forgiveness stemmed from deep internal struggle, grief, anguish and pain (Godobo-Madikizela 2003; Graybill 2002; Tutu 1999).

### ***Long Night’s Journey into Day: A Cinematographic Treatment of Forgiveness***

This process is masterfully explored in the segment dedicated to the mothers of the Guguletu Seven in the documentary film *Long Night’s Journey into Day*, directed by Frances Reid (2000).<sup>6</sup> Shot over a period of two and a half years, the film chronicles the stories of victims and perpetrators in four cases brought to the TRC: the murders of Amy Biehl and the Craddock

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<sup>6</sup> Other documentary films have focused on the TRC, most notably Mark Kaplan’s *If Truth Be Told* (1996), *Where Truth Lies* (1998) and *Between Joyce and Remembrance* (2004); Gail Pellett’s *Facing the Truth with Bill Moyers* (1999); Antjie Krog and Ronelle Loots’s *The Unfolding of Sky: Landscape of Memory* (1999) and Lindy Wilson’s *Guguletu Seven* (2000).

Four, the Magoo Bar Bombing and the murders of the Guguletu Seven.

I wish to focus on the Guguletu Seven case to consider how Reid's treatment of the face-to-face encounter between a former member of a secret government death squad and the mothers of seven young men that were assassinated in 1986 in the township of Guguletu in Cape Town provides insights into the process of forgiveness discussed earlier and invites contemplation about the possibility and limits of forgiveness. Emmanuel Levinas's (1969) ethics of alterity offers a framework for examining the response evoked by the face-to-face concrete encounter with the suffering of another human being.

The segment begins with images of the township of Guguletu, accompanied by the voice of a narrator who provides brief information about the death of a group of young men that became known as the Guguletu Seven. A national news bulletin of the time reports that police had killed seven terrorists in an early-morning shootout in Guguletu after uncovering ANC plans to ambush a patrol. Footage shot by the police video unit shows the bullet-riddled corpses of the men lying in pools of blood on the road and in the bushes nearby a police van. One of the bodies is being dragged by a rope tied around the waist. The camera zooms in on weapons lying on or next to the bodies.

The next sequence intersperses on-screen text detailing the findings of an official inquest that absolved the police with the testimony of three of the murdered men's mothers and footage of the TRC hearings in November 1996. The mothers describe how they had heard or seen images on the News of their sons' deaths. Eunice Miya, Jabulani Miya's mother, breaks out in tears. The camera cuts to members of the audience who are visibly moved. One of the Commissioners and Archbishop Tutu provide words of comfort.<sup>7</sup>

In an external interview, Edith Mjobo, Zandisile Sammy Mjobo's mother, describes the experience of having been arrested and beaten up during interrogation after her son's burial while dealing with the pain of having lost her son. The vignette continues with the screening, in the

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<sup>7</sup> See Bennet (2005) for a discussion of both the (dis) affect in *Long Night's Journey Into Day* and the emotional responses to the mothers' and the perpetrators' testimonies.

hearings, of a police video detailing police action during and after the shoot-out. Nine policemen subpoenaed by the TRC (as witnesses to the Guguletu Seven incident), as well as the mothers of the murdered men, are present. When faced with gruesome images of the men's corpses, accompanied by meticulous explanations in Afrikaans by police officers at the scene, some of the mothers lose control of their emotions and begin to wail and gesticulate wildly. The screening is brought to a halt while the distraught mothers and the impassive policemen are escorted out of the room.

The next sequence is composed of Sergeant Bellingan's testimony at the scene of the shoot-out, followed by his and Constable Mbelo's testimonies in the hearings.<sup>8</sup> The two policemen who applied for amnesty provide opposing accounts of the event. Sergeant Bellingan's is a calm, detached and unrepentant narration of why he shot one of the men. He believed his life was in danger. Conversely, Thapelo Mbelo claims that he was acting on orders: "The words that we used is that 'they should be eliminated'". He continues, "A man approached us, raising his arms [...] He never tried to shoot us or even reach for his firearm. I shot him once. He was lying on his back. I shot him in the head".

The camera cuts to an external interview with Mbelo, alternating between his testimony and a preparatory meeting between the family members of the victims and Pumla Godobo-Madikizela, a TRC Commissioner who counsels the mothers about a subsequent meeting that was to take place, in which they would come face-to-face with Mbelo. In the interview, Mbelo explains why he applied for amnesty. He reveals that all the policemen involved in the shooting had lied at a waiver trial and later inquest. He now wants to disclose the truth.<sup>9</sup>

At the preparatory meeting, Cynthia Ngewu articulates her anger about how Mbelo had deceived the youths, expressing little interest in his

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<sup>8</sup> Sergeant Bellingan and Constable Mbelo were the only two of the more than twenty-five policemen involved in the Guguletu Seven shooting that applied for amnesty.

<sup>9</sup> On-screen text reveals that Bellingan and Mbelo had been sent to Guguletu from Vlakplass, a secret government death squad centre. Bellingan was one of three black operatives who infiltrated a group of ANC activists. A TRC Commissioner explains that this had been a well-planned operation where the young men had been lured into a trap.

explanations. This impassioned outburst is validated in the next frame when Mbelo admits, "We didn't have feelings. It felt just like a day's work had been done".<sup>10</sup> He later reflects about what separates him from Bellingan, and why he needs to face the mothers: "Bellingan is a white man. I'm a black man [...] Every day he is going to the bar with his white friends. I have to go to my black brothers and sisters, so we are not on par".

The last scene of this segment focuses on the private meeting between Mbelo and family members of the murdered men. The description of the sequences leading up to this meeting sought to provide a sense of how Reid frames and renders visible the tension and outburst, control, or even absence of emotion in the hearings, compelling the viewer to acknowledge the range of emotions and responses displayed by the participants in the testimonial process. Importantly, Reid reiterates the anguish and pain of victims/victims' family members as they relive traumatic events, opening up wounds that have not yet healed. One is led to question whether, in these circumstances, compassion and forgiveness are at all possible.

Establishing the camera as observer in the face-to-face encounter between Mbelo and the mothers of the victims, Reid offers the viewer a privileged insight into the dialogic and emotional engagement that takes place during the meeting. Speaking in a calm and quiet tone, and looking the women in the eyes, Mbelo addresses them with the following plea:

My name is Thapelo Mbelo. I am ashamed to look you in the face. I know that it is painful for you to be faced with a person who has done you wrong and talk to him. I know some of you may forgive me, others may never forgive me. I know that I have done wrong, that I have done evil things here on earth. And I want to say to you as parents of these children who were there that day, I ask for your forgiveness from the bottom of my heart. Forgive me, my parents.

Edith Mjobo responds contemptuously, asking Mbelo how he felt the day he saw the video footage. Confronted with the mothers' inevitable rage,

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<sup>10</sup> There is a shift to an interview with one of the TRC Commissioners, who explains how black police personnel got drawn into the police force and were used to keep down the resistance of the people.

Mbelo is only capable of voicing, “I feel bad”. Edith Mjobo is not appeased and continues to accuse him mercilessly of selling his own blood for money. Mbelo tentatively argues in his defence that he had been forced to do what he did. This only seems to infuriate the mothers even further. What they cannot accept is, as Cynthia Ngewu states bitterly, the fact that he betrayed his own people. Visibly disturbed, all Mbelo can add is, “Mama, I don’t know what to say. We have hurt you”.

Mbelo’s respectful address triggers an emotional response in Cynthia Ngewu, who tearfully recalls how her son was dragged through the dirt with a rope. In a shot/reverse shot sequence, the viewer’s attention is directed to Cynthia Ngewu’s grief, her facial expression revealing sadness and distress. Mbelo looks at her, transfixed, failing to respond in any way, other than with the gaze. The close-up captures Mbelo’s sad and subdued expression. A facial muscle twitches as he acknowledges this mother’s pain. The camera then focuses on another mother, who snorts, “Your face is something I will never forget. I have no forgiveness for you!” There is contempt and anger in the narrowed eyes and lips, scrunched nose and furrowed brow.

In this sequence of shots, the face becomes, to borrow Paul Coates’s (3) expression, “the primary site of human communicativeness”. The close-up heightens the spectator’s awareness of the range of feelings and emotions that come to the fore in the impassioned exchange between the participants in this encounter. In his meditation on the facial close-up in film, the screenwriter and director Béla Balázs (125) considers that the close-up reveals “shades of meaning too subtle to be conveyed in words”. As Balázs writes, “[I]n the isolated close-up of the film we can see to the bottom of the soul by means of such tiny movements of facial muscles which even the most observant partner would never perceive” (122). In effect, the expression on Cynthia Ngewu, Mbelo and the other mother’s faces, as revealed by the close-up, conveys a far deeper meaning than words could articulate.

The dramatic climax in this scene is followed by an unexpected turn of events. Cynthia Ngewu addresses Mbelo as if she were seeing him for the first time and, invoking her Christian faith, states, “I forgive you my child, and the reason I say I forgive you is that my child will never wake up again. And it’s pointless to hold this wound against you. God will be the judge [...] I want to go home knowing the mothers are forgiving the

evil you have done, and we feel compassion for you". The segment ends with a sequence of shots of some of the mothers embracing Mbelo. The focus on the display of forgiveness at the end of the film conveys the idea that the opportunity to express their anger, resentment and sorrow, has enabled the mothers to work through their trauma, transcend hateful emotions, and begin a process of healing.

Although it takes place on camera, the meeting between Thapelo Mbelo and the mothers is framed as if it was a private experience, quite different from that of the audience-packed halls where the hearings were held. In the hall, the policemen had their backs to the mothers who were sitting in the audience, and were therefore screened from the women's rage. In the confined space of the private meeting, Mbelo is deprived of the support of his colleagues; he faces the women on his own. The camera takes on the role of a witness, encouraging the participants in the meeting to speak freely and earnestly whilst dramatising the tension in the face-to-face encounter.

Mbelo is met by the accusing looks, the hostility, resentment, sorrow, and angry words of the mothers who hold him accountable for their sons' murder. Released from the carefully structured model of the hearing, the mothers let their emotions run free. The camera explores the expressivity of their faces. Discussions of the facial close-up in film theory describe the face as a site of signification, whilst stressing the capacity of the close-up to overwhelm the spectator (Balázs 2003; Epstein 1977). Jean Epstein (13) considers its magnifying effect, claiming that "The close up modifies the drama by the impact of proximity. Pain is within reach. If I stretch out my arm I touch you".

I want to suggest that the facial close-up engenders compassion not only because of its intensifying effect, but also because it exposes what Emmanuel Levinas's (*Totality* 75) calls "the nakedness of the face". In the scene discussed earlier, the camera alternates between Mbelo's face and that of the mothers, zooming in for a close-up, lingering there as the speaker looks the Other<sup>11</sup> in the eye. There is, to borrow Levinas's (*Ethics* 86)

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<sup>11</sup> I am following the convention used in Levinas's texts with regards to the "Other" (with a capital "o") to refer to the personal other or other person.

words, “an essential poverty in the face” as the participants in the face-to-face encounter expose themselves, revealing their vulnerabilities. From a Levinasian perspective, “the face” is not, strictly speaking, the anatomical face. It is the locus of the encounter with another human being, which induces one to an ethical responsibility and an infinite respect for someone who confronts us. This stance is what enables the transformation witnessed by the viewer.

### **Concluding thoughts**

Frances Reid’s treatment of the Guguletu Seven deepens our understanding of the effects of massive trauma on individuals and communities, and the painful emotions occasioned by the face-to-face encounters between victims and perpetrators during the TRC process. It promotes reflection on the difficulty and possibility of both forgiveness and transformation. Whereas for some victims it was possible to seek healing and closure, and perhaps even forgiveness, for others, feelings of anger, resentment and revenge were more easily sustained. Godobo-Madikizela (*A Human* 120) explains that “One reason we distance ourselves through anger from those who have hurt us [...] is the fear that if we engage them as real people, we will be compromising our moral stance and lowering the entry requirements into the human community.” However, perpetrators’ sobering reflection on the deeds committed and the pain caused dispelled victims’ feelings of anger, hatred and revenge, revealing that an honest expression of apology can engender a transformative process, whereby victims let go of their anger and hatred and perpetrators reclaim their sense of humanity. As Godobo-Madikizela (*A Human* 99) observes,

A sincere apology does not seek to erase what was done. No amount of words can undo past wrongs. Nothing can ever reverse injustices committed against others. But an apology pronounced in the context of horrible acts has the potential of transformation. It clears or “settles” the air in order to begin reconstructing the broken connections between two human beings.



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### ABSTRACT

Change has been a recurring keyword in every domain of thought and action in South Africa since the dismantlement of apartheid and the implementation of democracy following the 1994 democratic elections. Politically, legally, and symbolically, this process broke with an extensive period of oppression and violation of human rights. However, the new government believed that the most significant change in social consciousness would take place at the Truth and Reconciliation Commission's public hearings. The TRC was seen as a vehicle for social repair which provided release from the legacy of fear, hatred, revenge and guilt, and redirected people's desire for vengeance. I approach this theme by considering Frances Reid's (2000) cinematographic treatment of the role of compassion and forgiveness in healing severed relationships and promoting a course of action capable of transfiguring social exchange and providing new grounds of human community in the documentary film *Long Night's Journey Into Day*.

### KEYWORDS

Truth and Reconciliation Commission; remorse; forgiveness; apartheid; cinema

### RESUMO

A palavra mudança tem figurado em todos os domínios de pensamento e acção na África do Sul desde o desmantelamento do apartheid e a implementação da democracia a seguir às eleições democráticas de 1994. Do ponto de vista político, legal, e simbólico, este processo pôs fim a um longo período de opressão e violação dos direitos humanos. Contudo, o novo governo acreditava que a mudança mais significativa da consciência social viria a ter lugar nas audiências públicas da Comissão da Verdade e Reconciliação. A CVR era considerada um veículo de reparação social que libertava as pessoas do legado do medo, ódio, vingança e culpa, redireccionando a sua vontade de vingança. Esta temática é abordada através da análise do documentário *Long Night's Journey Into Day* (2000), de Frances Reid, em que o realizador se centra no papel da compaixão e do perdão na reconstrução de

relações destroçadas, fomentando uma conduta capaz de transformar e promover novas formas de interação social.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Comissão da Verdade e Reconciliação; remorso; perdão; apartheid; cinema

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# Redeeming the Old South in David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*

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# Redeeming the Old South in David O. Selznick's *Gone with the Wind*

## **Introduction:**

The 1939 filmic adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* is informed by the same kind of Romantic nostalgia we find in the pages of this timeless award-winning novel, offering its viewers a conflicting vision over the nature and significance of the period of time which followed the end of the American Civil War. Northerners understood that period as one of "Reconstruction", whereas Southerners envisaged it more as a time of "Restoration". I wish to examine in this paper how the film attempts to redeem the South, in line with the essential premise(s) of Mitchell's novel, through its representation of a pre-Civil War idyllic, romanticized South, devoid of the pernicious effects of the "peculiar institution", subjected in a first instance to the aggression of a great Northern invader and, upon its defeat, by a civilian army of Carpetbaggers. In particular, I wish to show how the vision of both the novel and the film are coincidental in their portrayal of this period of American history, Melanie Wilkes being the character which best embodies the values and mores of the Old South — kindness, self-sacrifice, gentility —, whereas Scarlett O'Hara, the heroine both in the novel and in its cinematic version, is the personage which rapidly embraces the principles and ideals which the North represents — materialism, self-interest, acquisitiveness.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The strength of Southern women, who held society together as their men went off to war, is thoroughly evident in the film. From a feminine perspective, the film and the novel may be read as the restoration of a woman, Scarlett, who against all odds succeeds in raising herself from poverty to newly-found wealth and status.

Covering 1037 pages in its paperback edition, *Gone with the Wind* (*Tomorrow Is another Day* was its initial title) was published in June 1936. Its author, the Georgian Margaret Mitchell (1900-1949), won the National Book Award for that year and the Pulitzer Prize for Fiction in the next one, but she never published anything of importance after that.<sup>2</sup> Like other Southern apologetic fiction writers, namely Caroline Lee Hentz (1800-1856), who defended slavery in her novel *The Planter's Northern Bride* (1854) in terms of its humaneness and economic benefit for the country as a whole, Mitchell believed that the bond which existed between slave masters and domestic servants within Southern households was similar to that which existed among members of the same family.<sup>3</sup>

In American film history, *Gone with the Wind* marks a shift in the film industry from an interest in social and economic matters, which had been predominant throughout the Great Depression, to one based for the most part on pure entertainment. King Vidor's *Our Daily Bread* (1934), Charles Chaplin's, *Modern Times* (1936) and William Wyler's *Dead End* (1937) illustrate quite eloquently this preoccupation with the impact of dire circumstances, whether arising from poverty, unemployment or homelessness, upon the individual and the group. The treatment of the subject of race, though, was not new. It had been a major issue in D. W. Griffith's film *The Birth of a Nation* (1915), which had "congealed", in the words of David Levering Lewis, "racist interpretations of Reconstruction in the popular mind" (viii). The making of *Gone with the Wind* was marred by disagreements between George Cukor, the film's first director, and David

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<sup>2</sup> In 1996 a novella entitled *Lost Laysen* was brought out, supposedly written by Mitchell when she was 16, as well as a collection of writings from her youth. The articles she wrote for the *Atlantic Journal* have also been published. *Gone with the Wind* reached a sales volume of one million copies within six months of its publication and was rereleased many times over the course of the years. It was translated into twenty seven languages and more than thirty million copies were sold. Mitchell sold the rights to *Gone with the Wind* soon after its publication for \$50,000.

<sup>3</sup> In non-fiction, a particular important name associated with the defense of slavery is that of George Fitzhugh (1804-1881), whose *Southern Thought* (1857) highlights the interdependence between Blacks and Whites. He argued that slavery was a humane and benevolent system of labor which benefited both races.



O'Selznick, its omnipotent producer, who were unable to see eye to eye right from the start of the shooting. For this reason Selznick, who kept a powerful grip on the production and direction of the film, ended up replacing Cukor by Victor Fleming, who was, in turn, briefly replaced by Sam Wood.<sup>4</sup> Through his company, Selznick International Pictures, he bought the motion picture rights the year the novel was published and had the final word on the hiring of the film directors, the screenwriters and the leading cast members. It was his the decision to cast Vivien Leigh as the leading female character, including the choice to engage Will A. Price and Susan Myrick to help her with her diction and Southern accent. Selznick also kept a vigilant eye over the sketch artists, set builders and wardrobe designers. His name features prominently in the opening frames of the film, in the poster advertizing it and in the twenty-five cent booklet sold at the theatres where it was shown, with detailed information on the careers of the most important cast members.<sup>5</sup>

The musical score of *Gone with the Wind* was written by Max Steiner, who was well-known in Hollywood circles for his compositions for theatre and film. Selznick was responsible for the hiring of Steiner, under contract with Warner Bros. His film score captured remarkably well the nostalgic elements present in the film, the sense of a long-lost golden era when Southern life was trouble-free and its citizens coexisted peacefully with their domestic and plantation slaves, in particular the recurrent musical theme associated with the O'Hara's plantation, Tara. Central to Steiner's compositional technique, present in many of the classical Hollywood film scores he wrote, including *Cimarron* (1931), *The Most Dangerous Game* (1932), *King Kong* (1933), and *The Informer* (1935), was the idea every character should be associated with a particular musical theme and that whenever possible there should exist "direct synchronization between music

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<sup>4</sup> The shooting was concluded on July 1, 1939, massively over budget, its total production costs having reached \$4,250,000. Originally there were five hours of film, cut first to four hours and twenty seven minutes and finally to three hours and forty minutes in its commercial version.

<sup>5</sup> In this order: Clark Gable, Vivien Leigh, Leslie Howard, Olivia de Havilland, the production team, David O'Selznick, Victor Fleming, Sidney Howard, including the novel's author, Margaret Mitchell.

and narrative action”, coupled with “the use of the leitmotif as a structural framework.”<sup>6</sup> (Kalinak 113)

*Gone with the Wind* was filmed in Technicolor, one of the major innovations in the American film industry in the 1930s. Its use involved the simultaneous exposure of three different strips of film, which added vividness, depth and amplitude to filmed sequences and accentuated particular details of the set design and décor, wardrobe, landscape and scenery. In the case of *Gone with the Wind* these aspects are particularly evident in the remarkable scenes of the barbecue at Twelve Oaks, of the dead and wounded lying outside Atlanta’s main railway station, or of the burning of the city itself, in which seven Technicolor cameras were used.

Margaret Mitchell turned down Selznick’s offer to collaborate directly in the making of *Gone with the Wind*, but suggested the name of Wilbur Kurtz as a consultant on the history of the South and Susan Mirren as an advisor on the customs and manners of Southerners. A number of changes were made in the adaptation of the novel to the film by screenwriter Sidney Howard, many events and scenes having been eliminated altogether.<sup>7</sup> The modification of lines requested by the censors of the Production Code Administration was also complied with: in the film there are no references to rape, prostitution, or the Ku Klux Klan. One exception, though, was permitted: the word “damn” in the closing scene of the film, regarded as racy language for the moral standards of the time, as dictated by Hollywood’s Production Code. *Gone with the Wind* received ten Academy Awards, including Best Film for 1939.

*Gone with the Wind*, the novel, is set primarily against the background of the Reconstruction, the twelve-year period in American history from 1865-1877 wherein the South of the United States was under military rule, its central theme being the end of a “civilization” caused by a war fraught with high ideals, but short on pragmatics. The expression “gone

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<sup>6</sup> The film score of *Gone with the Wind* included sixteen main themes and close to three hundred different melody segments, which added deepness and intensity to the emotional content of the film in scenes such as Ellen O’Hara’s wake, Ashley’s return from the war front, or Melanie lying in her deathbed.

<sup>7</sup> The script was written by Sidney Howard, but several other authors worked on it, including F. Scott Fitzgerald.

with the wind” refers to the wind of destruction that had swept through Georgia and destroyed the way of life of its citizens, most notably that of the O’Haras, whose plantation had been ravaged by Northern armies: “Was Tara still standing? Or was Tara also gone with the wind which has swept through Georgia?” (Mitchell 389). Both the film and the novel hark back to the legend of a “lost civilization” of cavaliers and belles which had existed in the South before the Northern onslaught, a place where the values of honor, loyalty, chivalry dominated and where slaves had been well-treated by their masters, free from abuse and content with their existences. À-propos this lost civilization, Ashley Wilkes, the perpetual paramour of the heroine of the novel, for instance, says pragmatically in both the film and Mitchell’s narrative: “In the end what will happen will be what has happened whenever a civilization breaks up. The people who have brains and courage come through and the ones who haven’t are winnowed out.” (Mitchell 513). In addition, he describes the perfect society which had existed before the war as a kind of “Götterdämmerung”, in effect, a dusk of the gods (Mitchell 513). This idea of a lost civilization began to be cultivated soon after the conclusion of the war as Southerners started to celebrate the war and its heroes by erecting statues, building and restoring cemeteries and commemorating special dates.<sup>8</sup> In the periodical literature of the time, in magazines such as *New Eclectic* (later renamed the *Southern Magazine*), *Century Illustrated*, *Atlantic*, and *Scribner’s*, life in the *antebellum* South began to be portrayed in fabled terms in narratives written from the perspective of Southerners, naturally, and with a much softer tone as regards the conflict and its consequences.<sup>9</sup> Both the film and

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<sup>8</sup> A reference is made in the film to the “Association for the Beautification of the Graves of the Glorious Dead”.

<sup>9</sup> *Scribner’s* published a series of articles between 1873 and 1874 entitled “The Great South”, portraying this section of the Union in a much more favorable light. *Century Illustrated* did the same in articles published between November 1884 and November 1887. For detailed analyses of these matters, see Kathleen Diffley’s “Home from the Theater of War: The Southern Magazines and the Recollections of War” and Janet Gabler-Hover’s “The North-South Reconciliation Theme and the ‘Shadow of the Negro’ in *Century Illustrated Magazine*”, in *Periodical Literature in Nineteenth-Century America*, Kenneth M. Price and Susan Belasco Smith, eds. (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1995).

the novel are infused with the idea that white Southerners had lost the war, but not their souls, and were now about to regain their society in a process of redemption. In fact, Mitchell's portrayal of Reconstruction corresponds to the prevailing interpretation of this period of America's past among historians of the 1930s, dominated by the works of William Dunning and John W. Burgess, whose school of thought maintained that Reconstruction had been a period of corruption and fraud dominated by Carpetbaggers without any scruples, Scalawags who had collaborated with the enemy, and ignorant freedmen unfit for taking part in the political life of the country.<sup>10</sup>

### Reconstruction vs. Restoration

The origins of the American Civil War, the bloodiest military conflict the U.S. has ever been involved in, are well documented.<sup>11</sup> Suffice it to say that when the hostilities began in 1861 the country was divided sectionally between a rich and powerful industrial North and a rural, economically dependent agrarian South, with both sections of the Union underestimating each other's forces and feeling overconfident about their victory. The Civil War effectively destroyed the economy of the South, whereas that of the North slowed down as the war progressed, but then recovered its *antebellum* momentum and continued to expand over the next decades. The period of time that went from the conclusion of the Civil War (1865) to the end of military rule in the rebel states (1877) is usually referred to as "Reconstruction" and corresponds roughly to Part Two of *Gone with the Wind*. Its historiography has been full of controversy, reflecting in many instances the biases and prejudices of the scholars who have studied it. Historically, though, Northerners have tended to regard this twelve-year period as their attempt to refashion Southern society along a new model

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<sup>10</sup> Their most important historiographical works were, respectively, William Dunning's *Reconstruction, Political and Economic, 1865-1877* (New York, 1907) and John W. Burgess' *Reconstruction and the Constitution, 1866-1876* (New York, 1902).

<sup>11</sup> The number of fatalities was staggering: 360,000 Union soldiers dead and 275,000 wounded; 258,000 Confederate soldiers dead and 100,000 wounded. Total number of deaths: 618,000. Cf. James Brewer Stewart, "Civil War", *The Oxford Companion to United States History* (Oxford: Oxford Univ. Press, 2001), p. 132.

of social and political organization more in line with the aims and aspirations of the rest of the Union. Southerners, however, have shown a tendency to view it more as a process of "Restoration", a course of action whereby their pre-Civil War status within the Union could be regained.

The filmic "Reconstruction" of the Old South depicted in *Gone with the Wind* is centered on the O'Haras, a planter family from Georgia, as they struggle to hold on to the Southern way of life under the novel circumstances created by the Civil War. Although historically at the heart of this conflict had been the issue of free *versus* slave labor in the new territories of the Union, and concomitantly the legal status of the black population in American society, the issue of race relations is secondary in *Gone with the Wind*, two women dominating thematically both the novel and its filmic adaptation: Scarlett O'Hara and Melanie Wilkes played by actresses Vivien Leigh and Olivia de Havilland, respectively. Scarlett O'Hara, the cunning, shrewd daughter of a wealthy landowner, represents the Southern belle turned businesswoman. The daughter of an Irish immigrant who had married into a well-off Southern family, Scarlett is selfish, egoistical and slightly immature in both the film and the novel. She is unpatriotic and lacks interest in the war effort, caring little for the wounded, for example, when she walks among the dead and injured Confederate soldiers lying inside Atlanta's railway station. She survives the trials brought about by the conflict between the North and the South because she is able to adapt, displaying pragmatism and self-reliance, Northern qualities *par excellence*. She is ready to give up her Southern breeding and abandon her manners and morals for the sake of wealth, remarking at one point in the novel that money was the only "certain bulwark against any calamity which fate could bring" (Mitchell 635). She is ruthless as a businesswoman and is not afraid of doing business with Northerners, as she declares in the film: "I am going to make friends with the Yankee Carpetbaggers and I am going to beat them at their game."<sup>12</sup>

By contrast, Melanie Wilkes (*née* Hamilton), the wife of Ashley Wilkes (Leslie Howard), is pure, gentle and self-sacrificing. With her high

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<sup>12</sup> For this reason, at a given point in the film as well, Melanie Wilkes tells Scarlett: "You're doing business with the same people who robbed us."

morals, virtuosity and compassion, she symbolizes the *antebellum* South in both the novel and the film. Caring and loving, she displays her Christian values on many occasions, namely when she feeds ex-Confederate soldiers on the stairs of Tara in one of the scenes in the film (Scarlett sees them as a “plague of locusts” (Mitchell 496)). In the novel, she is not afraid of going to see Belle Watling (played by actress Ona Munson), the brothel owner, to thank her for having provided an alibi to Ashley on the day the Ku Klux Klan raided Shanty Town (in the film, it is Belle Watling who comes and sees her). Her humanity is particularly evident in Mitchell’s fictional narrative as well when she succeeds in reconciling the two women’s associations who disagreed on whether or not the graves of Yankee soldiers should be cleaned, an episode which was left out of the film. Scarlett thinks Melanie is naïve, almost stupid, for not realizing she loves her husband Ashley, the man she has been infatuated with since the famous barbecue at the Wilkes. Upon his return from the war, Ashley, just like Melanie, tries to hold on to his Southern principles of honor, gentility, respectability, though he too, like Rhett Butler (a role played by Clark Gable), as we can infer from both the novel and the film, was not convinced the “Glorious Cause” was worth dying for. Both Scarlett and Melanie are pivotal characters in the vision of the South and its people offered by Mitchell’s novel and Selznick’s production because they embody conflicting notions of what it meant to be a Southerner.

In hindsight, Reconstruction can only be regarded as a partial success. Although many Blacks were elected to state legislatures, held posts in government, and a small number even became members of Congress, their living conditions did not improve significantly as they remained economically dependent upon property owners through the sharecropping system. It is generally agreed that the North wished to return quickly to a situation of political normalcy in the Union and consequently turned a blind eye to many of the outrages being perpetrated against the freedmen. Moreover, the federal government had not been able to make the Freedmen’s Bureau, the agency created to help the ex-slaves integrate *postbellum* society politically and economically, an effective tool in protecting and defending the newly-acquired rights of the black population. In Mitchell’s narrative, the racist Tony Fontaine, for instance, justifies the murder of Jonas Wilkerson (an episode left out of the film), Tara’s old overseer, precisely because he “kept

the darkies stirred up” politically, finding it unacceptable that the ex-slaves should be allowed to vote when many White Southerners had been disfranchised. Tony’s words attest to the future implications of the Black vote, as he saw it: “Soon we’ll be having nigger judges, nigger legislators — black apes out of the jungle —” (Mitchell 629). Yet, it is undeniable that major progress was made in some areas during this period, W. E. B. Du Bois being one of the first scholars to argue that Reconstruction had indeed brought major benefits to the Black population. In his essay “Reconstruction and its Benefits”, delivered at the 1909 gathering of the *American Historical Association*, in New York City, he maintained that Reconstruction had provided all Southerners, Negroes included, access to public education, social legislation and democratic rule, a proposition which was far from being consensual among historians of the time.<sup>13</sup>

### Yankee North and Old South

No one is more disparaged in the film version of *Gone with the Wind* than Yankees. The tone of anti-Yankeeism is set right at the beginning of the film when Ellen O’Hara (Barbara O’Neil), Scarlett’s mother, returns from the home of Emmie Slatterly (Isabel Jewel) and tells her husband, Gerald O’Hara (Thomas Mitchell), to dismiss Jonas Wilkerson (Victor Jory), the best overseer Tara has ever had. Gerald offers the following remark on Wilkerson, the immoral and principleless Yankee who has fathered Emmie a child: “What else can you expect from a Yankee man and a white trash girl?” (Mitchell 73). In another sequence in the film, the very same Wilkerson is vilified by Scarlett when he shows up at the plantation with

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<sup>13</sup> The essay was published in the July 1910 volume of the *American Historical Association*. Du Bois’ essay was embryonic to his later seminal work *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880*, first published in 1935, which changed the whole debate over this period. In it, Du Bois questioned the hitherto assumption that Reconstruction had failed due to Negro ignorance and incompetence and placed the struggle for the emancipation and political rights of Southern Blacks within the much wider context of “proletarian exploitation”. Cf. David Levering Lewis’ introduction to W. E. B. Du Bois, *Black Reconstruction in America, 1860-1880* (New York: Simon and Shuster, 1995), p. xii.

Emmie, now his “trashy wench” wife. Wilkerson has prospered under Reconstruction and wishes to purchase Tara when he hears that the O’Haras cannot afford the taxes on the property. In the film itself, we hear Scarlett referring to Northerners as “Yankees, dirty Yankees” when she sees the ravaged home of the Wilkes, Twelve Oaks. In the novel, on the other hand, she calls them “a race of dollar-lovers” (169) and accuses Rhett of being a mercenary rascal like them, because he had broken the blockade and gone off to New York harbor, where the Union men had sold him goods. Scarlett blames the Yankees for the \$300 worth of taxes she has to pay in order to save Tara, money which she tries to borrow unsuccessfully from Rhett.<sup>14</sup> Taxes were a major issue for the former plantation owners as the new state governments raised property taxes to a higher level than they had been before the war (Reynolds 226). In different ways, both Scarlett and Rhett managed to bridge the gap that separated Southern gentility from Northern businessmen by succumbing to materialism and/or greed, thus betraying Dixie in the eyes of Southern society. For this reason both may be regarded as collaborationists and/or Scalawags.

For the characters of *Gone with the Wind*, both in the novel and film, the enemies of the South during the Reconstruction period — this scourge far worse than the war or the armies of Sherman — were the Scalawags, the Carpetbaggers, the Republicans, and the Freedmen’s Bureau. But who were these individuals, the object of so much denigration in both the novel and its filmic adaptation? Mitchell herself defines the Scalawags as “Southerners who had turned Republican very profitably”, and the Carpetbaggers as “those Yankees who came South like buzzards after the surrender, with all their worldly possessions in one carpetbag.” (507) It is a characterization that corresponds to the image viewers get of these individuals in the film, namely in the sequence where a Carpetbagger

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<sup>14</sup> In the film, Rhett alleges that the profits he made as a blockade runner are all “tied up in foreign banks” and consequently cannot help her. In the novel, gossip has it that he actually stole the Confederate Army treasury, an accusation which is never clarified. But Rhett is well-treated by the Yankees: we see him in the film playing poker with the Union officers who are keeping guard over him after the war, while he is held in an Atlanta prison for his blockade-running activities.



offers forty acres and a mule to a “credulous black”, as the city of Atlanta is being rebuilt. The phrase is an allusion to the unfulfilled pledge of President Lincoln to the freedmen of the South and which has come to symbolize one of the many broken promises of the U.S. government to this segment of the population.

A character in *Gone with the Wind* in both its literary and cinematic versions which stands out as a Scalawag is Frank Kennedy (Carroll Nye), Suellen O’Hara’s (Evelyn Keys) fiancée. He is the example of a Southerner who became a successful businessman in *postbellum* Georgia as a result of his activity as a merchant in hardware, furniture and lumber (we are told in the film that he owned a “prosperous store and a lumber sawmill as a sideline”). In total disregard for her sister’s feelings for him, Scarlett seduces Frank so as to obtain the \$300 dollars worth of taxes she needs to save Tara from the hands of the federal taxman.<sup>15</sup> She marries him, eventually, and persuades him to let her buy a sawmill and to employ convict workers instead of “free darkies”, the start of her business career as a tycoon who exploits cheap labor. Jonas Wilkerson, the above-mentioned overseer of Tara, and his assistant Hilton, a character omitted in the film, but who married Cathleen Calvert, a planter’s daughter, are also characters who typify Scalawags.

Both the Scalawags and the Carpetbaggers were thoroughly disliked by the population of the South and the object of vilification and violence during the Reconstruction period. They were often thought to be, or to have been, collaborationists, traitors, or rogues.<sup>16</sup> Historically, though, among the Carpetbaggers we find not only the Northern investors and entrepreneurs who went South in search of a business opportunity, but also the Union soldiers who decided to stay behind. We find, too, the members of the American Missionary Association who developed their community

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<sup>15</sup> Merchants like Frank Kennedy, the owners of stores that popped up all over the countryside of the South, were the only class to do well financially in the aftermath of the conflict, because they sold goods on credit.

<sup>16</sup> “Waving the bloody shirt” — the shirt of Carpetbaggers flogged by Whites — was a common feature of Southern life during the *postbellum* period (Brogan 355).

work there after the great conflict. In his *History of the United States* (2001), Hugh Brogan observes: “No two groups [Scalawags and Carpetbaggers] have been more maligned in American history, precisely because Reconstruction could not have gone so far as it did without them.” (361)

### Race and Politics

There were two reactions when the South entered politics under the administration of Andrew Johnson: one violent, as the riots, massacres and Ku Klux Klan activities attest; the other, legal, embodied in the so-called “Black Codes” (1865-1866) the Southern legislatures enacted soon after they were restored. Prevented from participating directly in the political process through the Democratic Party, many Whites engaged in the destabilizing activities of the Ku Klux Klan, the Knights of the White Camelia, or the Redeemers.<sup>17</sup> For these white supremacist groups, “redeeming” meant saving the South from the grips of Republican Party control, which had been slow to react to Klan violence (Perman 40). The historian Eric Foner writes in his *Reconstruction – America’s Unfinished Revolution, 1863-1877* (1989) that “the Klan was a military force serving the interests of the Democratic party, the planter class, and all those who desired the restoration of white supremacy.” (425) Fearful, thus, of what is termed as “Negro rule” in the novel, Frank Kennedy, Scarlett’s second husband, and Ashley, Melanie’s husband, raid Shanty Town with other well-meaning citizens, under the pretence that they wish to punish Scarlett’s attempted rape and/or robbery (Mitchell 786).<sup>18</sup> (In the filmic adaptation of the novel, though, we are told that the purpose of the raid was to clean the woods of

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<sup>17</sup> The Redeemers included “secessionist Democrats and Union Whigs, veterans of the Confederacy and rising young leaders, traditional planters and advocates of a modernized New South” (Foner 588). Its political program matched the political agenda of White supremacists: to convince Northern capitalists to invest in the South; that Southerners should take control of the political process in their states; that Southern Whites knew what was best for the freed Blacks and for Dixie.

<sup>18</sup> Full details of this episode can be found in chapter XLV of the novel, pp. 772-94. For white Southerners, “negro rule” meant that ex-slaves could now be seen in positions of authority as sheriffs, postmasters, and other low-ranking administrative posts.

undesirables.) The “political meeting”, as it is alluded to in the film, attended by these well-meaning Southern citizens, was in fact a *vigilanti* raid on Shanty Town carried out by the Ku Klux Klan, a reference which is omitted in the film but not in the novel.

Another episode which is omitted in the film but is quite revealing as to the level of violence perpetrated against those thought to be collaborating with the enemy is the murder of Wilkerson, the former overseer of Tara and an official of the Freedmen’s Bureau (in the film adaptation only), stabbed cold-bloodedly by Tony Fontaine on account of his “nigger-equality business” and for believing that “niggers had a right to — white women.” (Mitchell 630)<sup>19</sup> Many Southerners felt that the Klan violence committed against the black population paled in comparison to the ignominies committed by Negroes against white women, this being what had spurred Southern men into action, according to the narrator of *Gone with the Wind*: “It was the large number of outrages on women and the ever-present fear for the safety of their wives and daughters that drove Southern men to cold and trembling fury and caused the Ku Klux Klan to spring up over night.” (Mitchell 640). Though not interested in politics, Scarlett had heard “say that the South was being treated as a conquered province and that vindictiveness was a dominant policy of all conquerors.” (Mitchell 507) Unaware that Ashley and Frank were involved in KKK activities, Scarlett confesses at one point in the novel that it was unfortunate that Southerners had had to take the law into their own hands, in line with the widely-held belief among Southern gentility that the North wanted to keep the South down so as to prevent it from rising to its feet once again. Indeed, resorting to violence so as to settle disputes was thought to be a personality trait of Southerners, as the words of the Yankee captain who comes looking for the culprits of the raid on Shanty Town make clear in the film: “It’s about time you rebels learned you can’t take the law into your own hands.”

The South had a long tradition of “regulation”, or vigilantism. During Reconstruction, the activities of the above-mentioned *vigilanti* groups aimed to reassert Democratic control over the political process in the

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<sup>19</sup> For the gruesome details of this episode, see chapter XXXVII, pp. 628-32.

South, as these paralegal groups attacked and victimized not only Blacks, but also Scalawags and Carpetbaggers (Northern teachers included). Active from 1867 onwards, these secret societies were terror organizations (an original American invention) who considered it as their Christian responsibility to keep Blacks in their place. They intimidated mostly the black population so that it would not participate in the political lives of their communities or take on posts in the state or federal administration. Foner observes in this respect: "Through this constant vilification of blacks, carpetbaggers, scalawags, and Reconstruction, 'the old political leaders' fostered a climate that condoned violence as a legitimate weapon in the struggle for Redemption."<sup>20</sup> (434). Scarlett, herself, shows no sympathy for Negroes in Mitchell's novel, thinking them stupid: "They never thought of anything unless they were told." (Mitchell 400) The exception are the three loyal Black servants who stayed behind at Tara, Mammy, Pork and Dilcey, while the remaining ones, over one hundred, are described by the narrator of *Gone with the Wind* as "trashy niggers" because they had left with the Yankees (Mitchell 399). As a matter of fact, there is no concern for or empathy with the plight of the Negro on the part of the narrator of *Gone with the Wind*. Mitchell may occasionally draw on the use of "local color", reproducing the dialect and/or pronunciation of Southern Blacks, but that is done purely for literary effect. Consequently, both Mitchell's novel and Selznick's filmic adaptation of it reinforced the prevailing view of Reconstruction among Southerners in the 1930s, a period which they associated with abusive business practices, corrupt government officials and a drifting mass of ignorant Negroes at a loss to find their place in the

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<sup>20</sup> The activities of these terror organizations grew so intense that President Ulysses S. Grant ordered in 1871 the so-called "KKK trials", following a series of racial incidents in South Carolina. The 1871 report on the activities of the Ku Klux Klan in this state concluded that "in the nine counties covered by the investigation for a period of approximately six months, the Ku Klux Klan lynched and murdered 35 men, whipped 262 men and women, otherwise outraged, shot, mutilated, burned out, etc., 101 persons." Quoted in W. E. B. Du Bois, *Reconstruction*, p. 676. Two other major episodes of racial violence at the time were the Coushatta Massacre, in which six White men murdered eight Negroes, and the Colfax Massacre, which took place in Louisiana, on Easter Sunday, 1873, where 280 Negroes were killed.

new, reconstructed South.<sup>21</sup> For David Reynolds, “The Compromise of 1877” between Northern Republicans and “Redeemers”, those Southern conservatives who changed tactics when the federal government outlawed the Ku Klux Klan in 1871, effectively sealed the demise of Blacks to social and political equality in the South (228).

## Conclusion

Unquestionably, the end of the Civil War and the Reconstruction period that followed represented major steps in the consolidation of the American nationality, putting an end to one of the ugliest aspects of the American political nation — chattel slavery. However, the vision we have of the South and Southerners in *Gone with the Wind*, the novel, and its eponymous film adaptation, is one where the wounds caused by the Civil War are still open. The South may have been redeemed during Reconstruction, but it was a redemption accomplished through violence, intimidation and revenge, not for the nation as a whole, but rather for its white population. In that sense, neither the film nor the novel helped Southern Whites reconcile themselves with their history, much less with their black, fellow citizens. Notwithstanding this, the possibility of reconciliation between Scarlett O’Hara and Rhett Butler, an estranged couple in the final chapter of the book and in the closing sequences of the film, lingers on in the minds of readers and/or viewers of *Gone with the Wind*, pointing perhaps to a not so distant future where the North and the South will come together and partake unequivocally in America’s promise of justice, fairness and equality for all.

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<sup>21</sup> Brogan argues that the Reconstruction program failed because it was backward-looking in its attempt “to make over the South in the image of the *antebellum* north”, attributing that failure to two sets of reasons: in the first place, the South was thoroughly divided over race, between ex-Confederates and Republicans (whether Scalawags or Carpetbaggers) and naturally on the issue of class (i.e. between yeoman farmers, poor landless whites, and a landed, though bankrupt, planter aristocracy); secondly, economics: land continued in the hands of the planter class, though it was impoverished, bankrupt and politically weakened (Brogan 364-5).

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### ABSTRACT

David O. Selznick's filmic adaptation of Margaret Mitchell's *Gone with the Wind* (1936) is informed by the same kind of Romantic nostalgia we find in the pages of this timeless award-winning novel, offering its viewers a conflicting vision over the nature and significance of the period of time which followed the end of the American Civil War. Northerners understood that period as one of "Reconstruction", whereas Southerners envisaged it more as a time of "Restoration". I wish to examine in this paper how producer David O. Selznick attempts to redeem the South in his filmic adaptation of this text, in line with the essential premise(s) of Mitchell's novel, through his representation of a pre-Civil War idyllic, romanticized South, devoid of the pernicious effects of the "peculiar institution", subjected in a first instance to the aggression of a great Northern invader and upon its defeat by a civilian army of Carpetbaggers.

### KEYWORDS

Carpetbaggers and Scalawags; Ku Klux Klan; Reconstruction; Redeemers; Yankees and Anti-Yankeeism

### RESUMO

A adaptação fílmica do romance de Margaret Mitchell *Gone with the Wind* (1936) por David O. Selznick está imbuída do mesmo tipo de nostalgia romântica que podemos encontrar nas páginas inesquecíveis desta premiada obra. A adaptação fílmica do romance coloca os espectadores do filme perante duas visões do Sul no que diz respeito à natureza e ao significado do período que se seguiu à conclusão da Guerra Civil Americana. Os Unionistas entenderam-no como tendo sido um período de "Reconstrução", enquanto os Sulistas tenderam a considerá-lo como uma época de "Restauração". Neste ensaio pretende-se analisar o modo como o produtor David O. Selznick redime o Sul na sua adaptação fílmica do romance de Mitchell, de acordo com a(s) premissa(s) essencial(ais) da obra em



questão, ao sugerir uma representação idílica e romantizada de um sul pré-Guerra Civil isento do impacto pernicioso da chamada “instituição peculiar”, sujeito numa primeira instância à agressão do grande invasor do Norte, e após a sua derrota a um exército civil de *Carpetbaggers*.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

*Carpetbaggers and Scalawags*; Ku Klux Klan; Reconstrução; Redentores; *Yankees* and *Anti-Yankeeismo*

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Identity and Otherness  
in *Forrest Gump*: a Close-up  
into Twentieth-century America

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## Identity and Otherness in *Forrest Gump*: a Close-up into Twentieth-century America

Shortly before dying, Mrs. Gump, Forrest's mother, tells him: "Well, I happen to believe you make your own destiny. You have to do the best with what God gave you," whereupon Forrest asks her, "What is my destiny?" She replies that he would have to figure it out for himself. In the 'making-of', Sally Field, who played the role of Mrs. Gump, also mentions fate as the core issue in the film, wondering whether our life is planned or, on the contrary, just flows by chance.<sup>1</sup> Posed this way, the question seems to depart slightly from her character's belief in free-will, that is, in human capacity to mould one's life path; however, it still confirms the relationship between one's choices and uncontrollable circumstances as central both to the plot and to the protagonist's development. The idea is already suggested in the opening credits sequence, through the image of the floating feather, whose unpredictable movement might imply the arbitrariness of life. Starring actor Tom Hanks wisely clarifies these apparently opposing views, by stating that "our destiny is only defined by how we deal with the chance elements in our life", thereby converging with Mrs. Gump's advice.<sup>2</sup>

*Forrest Gump* (FG), (1994) is one of Robert Zemeckis's most acknowledged films, awarded six Oscars, including for best film and for best director. Based on Winston Groom's 1986 novel of the same name, it is the lighthearted first-person narrative of how a simple-minded Southern young man dealt with those chance elements he encountered in life. In this

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<sup>1</sup> *Behind The Magic of Forrest Gump. Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump*: documentary (1984).

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

essay, we consider how this approach helps discuss the issues of identity and alterity as related to the socio-cultural and historical context framing the plot.

Early in the film, Forrest's mother tells him that he was "no different". The need for such a statement reflects her determination to make her son fit in, but paradoxically hints at how different Forrest was: apart from his back and leg deficiency, he was born with an IQ under 75. His difference is clearly presented in the opening scene, not only through characterization.<sup>3</sup> His way of speaking, his style of dress, even the way he sits, all evoke a child's common posture but also through diegesis itself: sitting at a bus stop, Forrest maintains a conversation with the person next to him, the listeners changing, but his story continuing in a detailed, chronological way that already reveals an idiosyncratic childlike, innocent approach to events and to people's behavior. Thus, the opening scene sets the tone of the film, the weight and the peculiarity of the main character, and the film structure: a flash-back narrative supported by Hank's voice-over and consistently resorting to archival footage, which illustrates visually what Forrest narrates.

In fact, the whole film develops in terms of a story-telling process. As Celestino Deleyto notes, narrative texts entail different ways of presenting a story, going far beyond the issue of literary genre or subgenre and resorting to various media of expression, such as cinema, television and video. In this context, cinema (by expanding the field) contributes hugely to making the study of narrative theory "consistent and complete" (217-18). Notwithstanding the relevance of narrative, a number of other elements in films, including technical devices, help convey significance and attain aesthetic effects (Reis 29). James Monaco distinguishes this "connotative" meaning from the "denotative", provided by image and sound, because cinematic recordings allow a closer and more accurate approximation to reality than the written word (178-9-180).

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<sup>3</sup> The concept of characterization refers to the distinguishing traits of the human elements in a story. Gump's is a clear example of indirect characterization, based on the character's speech, actions, reactions, gestures, which allow the construction of significant psychological, ideological, cultural, or social characteristics (Reis and Lopes 51-2).

In *FG*, however, the combination of all these elements appears unified by the narrative itself, especially due to focalization.<sup>4</sup> The story is told from Forrest's perspective; according to the leading actor, it is his very spirit and tone that form the backbone of the movie. In fact, in *FG*, focalization cannot be analyzed separately from character. For Zemeckis, Forrest is "a very decent man,"<sup>5</sup> and for Wendy Finerman, one of the producers, a remarkable figure with a unique personality (Passafiume par. 2). Forrest's particular characteristics thus provide the framework to discuss identity and otherness in a given cross-section of American time and history, thereby raising two interrelated questions which also hint at the value of narrative in the film: What is told? and How is it told?

The condition of otherness can be defined as the perception of not belonging, of being different in some way, because the other does not fit in the norm that rules the group and lacks its essential, common features, thus being seen as an inferior being. In fact and even though gifted people or geniuses can also be seen as "the other" because of their being different, the concept often applies to people with disabilities, a view that can be traced back to Greek culture. Hence, the issue of otherness can only be discussed in terms of a specific identity, from which it substantially differs (Melani <http://academic.brooklyn.cuny.edu>). The word identity derives from the Latin *idem*, meaning "the same", which implies the idea of being identical, of coinciding in some aspect (Vesey and Foulkes 147). It is the common, accepted, unifying pattern of a group that sets up its identity, be it cultural, social, or political, to cite a few, and it is against such a set of traits that the idea of otherness is defined; in like manner, one's identity, whether at the individual or the collective level, is also measured by its difference from others.

As mentioned earlier, the film resorts to first-person narrative, through the protagonist's voice-over, to tell Forrest's life, as an autobiography;

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<sup>4</sup> Deleyto considers focalization, precisely, "an essential code in film narratives" (231). In terms of narrative theory, focalization refers to the particular perspective or point of view from which a story is told, thereby determining both the quantity of information provided, for example about events, characters, places (Reis and Lopes 164-5).

<sup>5</sup> *Behind The Magic of Forrest Gump. Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump*: documentary (1984).

therefore, he is present in all scenes and it is through his own perspective that the viewer perceives them. However, events as narrated by Forrest seem to lack the degree of subjectivity implied in this type of narrative point of view. His language tends to be objective and simple, in most situations devoid of any abstract, non-literal meaning.<sup>6</sup> Such a use of language, both in understanding and in expression, reflects his astounding simplicity, especially in the way he sees things. For example, when his commanding officer in Vietnam, Lieutenant Dan Taylor, asks him and Bubba (his black friend), “Are you twins?”, he fails to grasp the underlying irony replying simply, “No, we are not relations”. Faced with discrimination from a very early age — in the school bus, for example, other children would refuse to give him a seat because of his braced legs — Forrest doesn’t make any judgments,<sup>7</sup> whether because of his uncorrupted state of innocence, or because of his limited comprehension. Probably both play a part, shaping his worldview and partly determining his choices — “making his own destiny”, in his mother’s words. Even if Forrest does not plan his options, they result from his inner nature and embedded values. Forrest’s state of innocence constitutes the key factor for his differentness for, unlike ordinary people, he remains untouched by evil. Brockmann contends that, because of the pity he arouses and of the empathy he shows towards other people, he resembles Wagner’s Parsifal, who also achieved salvation because of such traits (353).

Throughout his life, Forrest is guided by his mother’s judgment and by his love for Jenny. His mother’s comments on things would always enable them to “make sense”, an expression he consistently uses to show his understanding of life’s complexities. As for Jenny, she played a catalyzing character from very early on, because it was her concern for him that prompted him to run, for the first time, when threatened by other kids.

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<sup>6</sup> Even if no further details about his mental deficiency are given, in this sense it reminds the spectator of Asperger syndrome, where language is restricted to literal interpretation and its figurative sense unattainable.

<sup>7</sup> In this respect, he resembles Alexei in Dostoyevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov* (1879), as he, too, stands morally above both his brothers and the other characters for his noble, generous capacity of not judging other people’s actions, even if, like Forrest, he does not acknowledge that verbally.



Getting free from his leg braces allowed him to overcome his visible handicap — a hyperbolic illustration of Zemeckis’s idea that “no matter how many obstacles that are thrown in our path, there are ways to accept them and to live through them.”<sup>8</sup> This idea could suggest that *FG* would belong in a feel-good film category. Indeed, the feel-good factor can be identified in the film, especially because, resembling Frank Capra’s style,<sup>9</sup> it displays a disturbing theme in a lighthearted, comic way. The notions that disabled people are above suffering or that they possess super-human capacities converge with such a view and entail stereotypical beliefs that would account for their otherness, too. Moreover, some criticism of the film reads Forrest’s extraordinary capacities as part of a magical world, as if it were a fairy-tale, in which things happen in sharp contrast to reality. And, in terms of society’s perception of the disabled, Judith Sanders, for example, considered that the film perpetuated negative stereotypes of the disabled (36-7), while other reviews pointed out the positive message it conveyed, that no one should be excluded, humiliated or victimized (Klinger 47). From the perspective of this essay, both views probably coexist, but, considering the protagonist’s path, the latter seems to prevail. What is more, Forrest’s disability and the way he copes with it are firmly anchored in the real world and, above all, constitute the key narrative device that allows a fresh close-up into American experience.

Seemingly against all odds, Forrest’s extraordinary physical capacities put him in circumstances illustrative of American culture, history and society, from the fifties onwards; as Zemeckis puts it, Forrest “interacts with the tapestry of American history by accident, getting directly involved in historic events and meeting historic people.”<sup>10</sup>

In fact, people and events keep mounting up at a rhythm that some critics of the film viewed it as overdone. A. J. Hoberman, for example,

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<sup>8</sup> This idea appears as one of Zemeckis’s personal quotes in his IMDb biography. <http://www.imdb.com/name/nm0000709/bio>.

<sup>9</sup> In the late nineteen thirties, Frank Capra’s films addressed dark subjects in American society, conveying information and reflection on the American experience, namely issues related with the Depression, through comedy.

<sup>10</sup> *Behind The Magic of Forrest Gump. Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump*: documentary (1984).

comments that the film covers too many issues (41). Indeed, a synoptic narrative of events unravels like a historical catalogue or a documentary, Forrest interacting with them in such a natural way that, as Stephen Brockmann suggests, his story equals the history of USA after WWII (353). Events comprise, for example, the Vietnam War, the Watergate scandal, peace demonstrations, the sexual revolution of the sixties, to cite a few. Such a plot device, however unlikely, conveys an all the more comprehensive and representative portrayal of America in the second half of the twentieth-century, in which Forrest represents the unifying element. His peculiar way of interacting with people and events remains unaltered throughout a variety of circumstances, in a way highlighting how his personal success is consistently attained by means of his being different, in opposition to the path of characters that conform to accepted identity patterns.

A version of history is portrayed in the film with the valuable aid of special effects, intertwined with the archival footage mentioned earlier — a specific cinematic technique that allows facts and fiction to merge and which reinforces Forrest's narration in voice-over. In several scenes, the protagonist's intervention is inserted into historical footage, a technical feat<sup>11</sup> for example, when Forrest's and President Kennedy's hands meet in an apparently real greeting, or Gump participates in a historic ping-pong match.<sup>12</sup>

Of all the events Forrest goes through, the Vietnam War assumes particular relevance. Driven by good nature only, he becomes a hero when he manages to rescue some of his war mates and his commanding officer, Dan Taylor (played by Gary Sinise). The concept of heroism is critically addressed here, for while Forrest is awarded the Medal of Honor by President

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<sup>11</sup> In the early eighties, Woody Allen had used such an innovative blending of cinema and historical, actual people or events, creating a sort of more believable fictional documentary (Ethan de Seife, "The Treachery of Images". <http://www.spinaltapfan.com/articles/seife/seife1.html>). He used a variety of techniques prior to the digital technology of Forrest Gump.

<sup>12</sup> This scene refers to the U.S. national table tennis team's historic visit to China in 1971, as part of what became known as "Ping-Pong diplomacy". To show Gump's prowess and speed in the game, actors were required to mime the ping-pong match while the ball was put in graphically (*Behind the Magic of Forrest Gump*, 1994).

Lyndon Johnson and only slightly wounded, Dan becomes severely injured and loses both legs. Dan's handicap overtly opposes Forrest's childhood condition, clearly portraying a reversal of fortune, and the developing storyline acquires tones of the conventions of Greek tragedy. Becoming crippled most completely denies Dan's dream of war heroism; because he would prefer to have died, he resents Forrest for having saved him. His personal tragedy is considered by the actor, Gary Sinise, as the embodiment of "the crippled part of America", following the trauma of Vietnam War. The opposition of Forrest to Dan becomes striking, not only because of Forrest's bravery, but in particular due to his personality, as his restricted mental perception is in keeping with his pure values and principles. His motivation is always intrinsic, rationalized as "making sense", according to his mother's criteria, while that of others is extrinsic and shallow. It is his otherness, thus, that ironically brings him to the core of American mainstream beliefs, in this case, American patriotism and heroism.

Because of such a process, most critical reception of the film focused on political aspects and considered it conservative: a "testament to Republican values and virtues", in the words of conservative politician Patrick Buchanan (Tibbetts and Welsh 131), a "deeply reactionary periphrasis" of American history in the last decades of the twentieth century (Bergan 392), "aggressively conservative" and "reactionary" (Byers 421). The latter argues that by erasing relevant aspects of history, the film manages to rewrite it from a conservative perspective (424-6). Barbara Wang also analyses how *FG* was used by political conservatives to assert their views on American history. Like Byers, she also points to the erasure of relevant events, such as the assassinations of Malcolm X and Martin Luther King, which might imply that racism is no longer an issue in contemporary America (99).

The political aspects of *FG*, however important, do not constitute the focus of the present analysis, but deserve being mentioned as my reading may, to a certain extent, question such strictly political perspectives. For example, Forrest's friendship with Bubba, his black mate in the army, seems to deny any racial prejudice. Nonetheless, that Forrest does not call for racial equity is only because he does not acknowledge racial difference, an attitude that belongs in his peculiar way of regarding people and society, whose verisimilitude is supported by his own mental retardation. His generous help to Bubba's family after his death surpasses racial concerns,

too, even though Wang suggests that his gesture simply “overturns years of slavery”, shifting the focus to the entrepreneurial spirit that shapes the American dream (100). The scene of desegregation in Alabama University further illustrates Forrest’s unawareness of such issues: when faced with a racist comment on black students being allowed to attend university, he reacts with surprise, “Oh, they do? With us?”, but when Vivian Malone and James A. Hood<sup>13</sup> enter the building, he courteously grabs the girl’s notebook from the floor and hands it to her. The incident suggests that his politeness and good nature take over. Brockmann, who interprets Forrest’s behavior in light of his ignorance and innocence,<sup>14</sup> draws on the opening scene too, highlighting the fact that Forrest’s first listener at the bus stop is a black woman (353).

Forrest’s oddity serves to disclose a certain degree of ironic commentary on most situations. Whether he does not criticize or reject them becomes irrelevant, for his frequent objective descriptions or narrations pave the way for critical judgment. As Zemeckis said, what we see, we see through Forrest’s eyes;<sup>15</sup> for example, he sees the Ku Klux Klan plainly as wearing bed sheets and acting like a bunch of ghosts or spooks, a visual conceptualization that exposes its ridiculous side, to a certain extent underlined by Mrs. Gump’s commentary, suggesting subtle criticism: “Sometimes we all do things that, well, just don’t make no sense”. Again, when Jenny’s hippie mate, a peace activist, beats her, revealing the contradiction between words and actions, it triggers Forrest’s reaction, once more driven by friendship and chivalry rather than by ideological beliefs. Likewise, when his running marathon makes him an icon and he is repeatedly asked “Are you running for world peace?” it is the stereotypical aspect that is depicted

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<sup>13</sup> Vivian Malone and James A. Hood were the first two African Americans to enrol at the University of Alabama in 1963, until then an all-white university. The scene represents an important landmark in the process of desegregation in American history, despite Governor George Wallace attempts to boycott it, a fact that the film seems to oversee.

<sup>14</sup> Brockmann elaborates on the equation between ignorance and innocence by opposing it to the one of knowledge and guilt, founded on the biblical myth of the original sin by Eve in the Garden of Eden (357-8).

<sup>15</sup> *Behind The Magic of Forrest Gump. Through the Eyes of Forrest Gump*: documentary (1984).

and criticized. The fact that so many people followed him in his run pinpoints some ideological void, with its consequent quest for a leader and a cause to follow. In this respect, *FG* resembles a satire. Although Forrest's action is original and purposeless, it is mobilizing and successful, running counter to common, somehow stereotyped forms of intervention. This also provides a fine example of how otherness and identity may oppose one another and, simultaneously, be questioned.

Ironically enough, throughout his life Forrest deals with people who might symbolize different forms of alterity in American society: Bubba, a black person, Dan, a disabled one, Jenny,<sup>16</sup> a hippie and a druggie who later on gets Aids, a sign of the times of the early eighties associated with homosexuality and with the use of intravenous drugs. Nonetheless, while Forrest stands as the prototype of the different, when relating to each of those, he plays the role of spokesman for conventional, accepted behaviors; moreover, he has a core function in trying to help marginal people into the mainstream — whether by marrying Jenny, financing Bubba's family, or keeping friends with Dan Taylor and later on becoming his partner in the shrimp boat business. Incidentally, this is also one of the arguments for a conservative reading of the film that sees Forrest as the good American who manages to survive those who embody difference and because of that, are somehow doomed, as Thomas Byers states: "...attributes of otherness (blackness, femininity) are assimilated to Forrest himself, while the subjects in the real position of such otherness (Bubba, Jenny) must die" (422). This moral punishment appears reinforced inasmuch as Forrest's success and rewards belong in the realm of his virtues, faithful to common American values (Wang 101-2): "Forrest's survival lends an air of inevitability to the traditional American values that he 'naturally' upholds. Only 'socially productive' values — loyalty, innocence, obedience and innocence — will last" (101). In addition to this, as Kevin Stoda contends, Forrest's actions illustrate Zemeckis's enduring conviction of individual power over the collective, an idea he had conveyed before, for example in *Back to the*

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<sup>16</sup> On the other hand, through Jenny we get a thorough, extensive overview of the cultural landscape, namely in terms of pop culture, for example: she wants to become a folk singer, whereby Joan Baez's songs are evoked, and becomes a member of the hippie movement and of peace movements.

*Future* (1985) (<http://eslkevin.wordpress.com>, par.15). In the context of the present discussion, this individual strength is reinforced by the extraordinary characteristics borne out of oddity. Forrest's wedding is illustrative of his triumphant path, opposing Dan's, whose iron legs are the counterpart of Forrest's braces as a child. Thus, Dan seems to have borrowed metaphorically both Forrest's handicap and his status of difference, thereby moving to the realm of *the Other* himself.

Despite all the stances that have classified the film as conservative, Forrest's process of integration into the mainstream, which the concept of identity falls into, to a great extent results from the fact that he enters the world free of pre-references or prejudice. Every contact he makes is virginal and empirical, and therefore depoliticized.<sup>17</sup> Brockmann contends that Forrest's innocence not only opposes the evil, tragic events of American history, but also represents the innocent part of America itself, resisting all its flaws (356). In addition to this, and probably as importantly, it is our view that Forrest's lack of criticism and ignorance do not overshadow cruelty or injustice in what he shows us — a selection not based on politics, but merely on humanism — which also provides the possibility for every viewer to have this same kind of clean look, keeping merely to what is narrated in order to make their own judgment. Wang incidentally notes that, in the end, *FG* “was open to appropriation by both liberals and conservatives” (109), which to some degree undermines the insistence on the conservative bias of the film. One of the producers, Steve Tisch, reiterates that it “isn't about politics or conservative values. It's about humanity, it's about respect, tolerance and unconditional love” (Wang 109).

The originality of *Forrest Gump* partly lies in the fact that human values can overlay the political or ideological ones, whether some of them coincide or not. Forrest's unconditional upholding of such principles defines the essence of his otherness, while the socio-cultural and historical context framing his life allows for far much than a political reading of the film.

To conclude, Gump's path through life highlights the frailty of the conceptual opposition between identity (in the sense of being “identical”

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<sup>17</sup> Byers mentions that being depoliticized is precisely one of Forrest's traits, more often than not achieved through comic details (143).

and belonging to a larger, accepted group) and otherness, be it in political or in human terms, as his being different proved a special means to place him at the core of American identity, whose founding principles he helped reinforce and enrich. Nineteen years after being released, it is human potential in *FG* that prevails, namely by revising the concepts of identity and otherness. These may easily merge or be interchanged, either because, as Forrest wonders in the coda, “we each have a destiny”, or because “we’re all just floating around accidental-like on a breeze...”, or because of “both”. Whatever the reason, it is the human growth and the personal learning born from such a path that emerge as the ideological, ethical rationale for *Forrest Gump*.

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### ABSTRACT

Forrest Gump's life experience spans a few decades of the second half of the twentieth century. Major events in American history, encompassed by the social and cultural setting of the times, are displayed through the main character's particular angle, a first-person narrative where fact and fiction, History and stories are inextricably interwoven.

While Forrest's unique view of the world is shaped by his mental and physical limitations, he embodies oddity and otherness as seen from other people's eyes. However, whether because of his choices or merely out of chance, his difference seems to consistently bring him to the core of mainstream American values and dreams.

This article aims to reflect on this peculiar relationship between man and contemporaneity, focusing primarily on the dichotomy identity/alterity, both in terms of individual development and within the realm of American experience. The interrelation of both concepts in the film further enables the discussion on how criticism of American culture and history, on the one hand, and allegiance to it, on the other, may correlate, thereby contributing to enlarge the reflection on the meaning of *Forrest Gump*.

### KEYWORDS

Identity; otherness; American culture; *Forrest Gump*; twentieth-century History

### RESUMO

A vida de Forrest Gump abrange algumas décadas da segunda metade do século XX, ao longo das quais acontecimentos marcantes da história americana, bem como o respetivo contexto sociocultural, são apresentados através do ponto de vista do protagonista, numa narração em primeira pessoa que alia, de forma por vezes inextricável, factos e ficção, a História e as "histórias".

A perspetiva particular de Forrest acerca do mundo é, em larga medida, definida pelas suas limitações de carácter físico e mental, o que o torna, aos olhos dos outros,

uma figura de alteridade. No entanto, seja pelas suas opções ou tão-somente por uma questão de sorte, o facto de ser diferente parece colocá-lo, de modo sistemático, no centro dos valores e sonhos tradicionais da sociedade americana.

Este artigo pretende refletir sobre esta relação específica entre o homem e o tempo coetâneo, focando, sobretudo, a dicotomia identidade/alteridade, quer em termos de desenvolvimento pessoal, quer no contexto da experiência americana. A inter-relação dos dois conceitos no filme permite equacionar a forma como a crítica à sociedade americana e a fidelidade aos seus princípios de algum modo se articulam, contribuindo, assim, para o aprofundamento da leitura dos sentidos em *Forrest Gump*.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Identidade; alteridade; cultura americana; *Forrest Gump*; história do século XX

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**TIME, GENDER, IDENTITY  
AND PERFORMANCE**



Going Back to the Past to Dream  
of the Future:  
Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris*  
and Spielberg's *Lincoln*

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## Going Back to the Past to Dream of the Future: Woody Allen's *Midnight in Paris* and Spielberg's *Lincoln*

“A cinematic image of nostalgia is a double exposure, or a superimposition of two images — of home and abroad, of past and present, of dream and everyday life.”

Svetlana Boym. *The Future of Nostalgia*

In their introduction to the fourth edition of *Hollywood's America: Twentieth-Century America Through Film*, published in 2010, Steven Mintz and Randy Roberts state that the Academy Awards ceremony “gives Americans a chance to recognize the movies that entertain them, engaged their emotions, expressed their deepest hopes and aspirations, and responded most successfully to their anxieties and fears” (1). But highbrow critics very often dismiss Hollywood films and particularly the ones which are Oscar winners or nominees. The reason, some claim, seems to be that they see America’s “dream factory” as a kind of manufacturer of fantasies that, responding to Americans’ anxieties and fears, partakes in and reinforces the hegemonic structures of the dominant American ideology and society. Using different strategies, Hollywood movies very often materialize a “reality” which, quoting Sacvan Bercovitch about his understanding of American literature of the American Renaissance, “reflects a particular set of interests and assumptions, the power structures and conceptual forms of modern middle-class society in the United States, as this evolved through three centuries of contradictions and discontinuities” (419), of utopias and dystopias. In this way, Hollywood movies “have helped form Americans’ self-image and have provided unifying symbols in a society fragmented along lines of race, class, ethnicity, religion, and gender” (xi). However, undoubtedly they also underline a utopian impulse which over time, as Krishan Kumar clearly stated in *Utopia and Anti-Utopia in Modern*

*Times*, was converted into *the* national ideology, which, in my view has informed most of the American imaginary and imagination (cf. 81).

Between “dreams of new beginnings” and “nightmares of apocalypse”, Hollywood very often employs utopian strategies which largely contribute to the emergence of a critical dialogue with its own cultural context. Curiously, this process ends up reaffirming American society in utopian terms. On the other hand, and as Jaap Verheul states in an article entitled “Utopia and Dystopia in American Culture”, “whether symbolized as a City upon a Hill, a New Frontier, or a first New Nation, the American experiment has sought to inspire other nations and cultures” (1), and this is undoubtedly another role played by Hollywood movies.

In one way or another, Hollywood movies are indeed key cultural artifacts that very often open windows upon America’s shifting historical and social events and moments of crises or disillusionment. Opening these windows, as Svetlana Boym notes, discussing “Hollywood’s technonostalgia”, in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, “popular culture made in Hollywood, the vessel for national myths that America exports abroad, often induces nostalgia and offers a tranquilizer” (33). Indeed, as some theorists have pointed out, “the twentieth century began with utopia but undoubtedly ended with nostalgia.” (xiv)

By problematizing the historical, social and cultural changes which have affected people’s lives, Hollywood frequently brings to the screen nostalgic impulses which are ideologically manipulated through cinematic codes, thus reflecting the perception that America has of itself. Indeed, if in the seventeenth century nostalgia was considered a curable disease and in the 19<sup>th</sup> century a psychological disorder, today it is seen much more as a symptom of our age, “a defense mechanism in a time of accelerated rhythms of life and historical upheavals” (xiv), as Boym points out. In fact, we often look backward, because looking forward is too problematic and we need a sense of warm reassurance. Thus, the power of nostalgia lies especially in its capacity to bring before our mind’s eyes images from a time when things seemed, or were imagined to be more secure and full of promise and possibilities, revealing, in this way, a utopian anxiety.

It is therefore clear that nostalgia has a utopian dimension. Ultimately, utopia is nostalgia for the perfect future much in the same way as nostalgia is utopia of the past, a longing for an idealized past that has never actually

existed. “Nostalgic longing was defined by loss of the original object of desire”, remarks Boym. “At first glance it is a longing for a place, but actually it is a yearning for a different time. (...) In a broader sense, nostalgia is rebellion against the modern idea of time, the time of history and progress” (xv).

But here I will refrain from discussing different notions or theories of nostalgia; neither will I refer to Frederic Jameson’s analysis of postmodern aesthetics or his and other authors’ discussions of it or of the relationship between film and nostalgia. What I propose to do here is to focus on two very recent films as case studies in order to explore how, by inducing or eliciting a sense of nostalgia in the public, Hollywood reproduces hegemonic American views and values. Thus, it greatly contributes to giving voice to a dominant (and, I would daresay, American) utopian impulse, which has not only perpetuated the mythic national conception of itself, but also reaffirms the forward-looking nature of America.

The central theme of *Midnight in Paris* is nostalgia. *Lincoln*, on the other hand, elicits nostalgia in the viewer. However, in my view both films reassert America’s ability to continue dreaming about the future with longing and hope. Thus, whilst Allen’s film seems to suggest that hope is the cure for nostalgia, Spielberg’s work produces nostalgia about the future rather than about the past. Indeed, as Boym claims, “nostalgia is not always retrospective; it can be prospective as well. The fantasies of the past, determined by needs of the present, have a direct impact on the realities of the future” (xvi).

In my view, it is not a mere coincidence that *Midnight in Paris* and *Lincoln* were directed in 2011 and 2012 respectively. At a historical moment of accelerated rhythms and crisis in the United States, the American middle class, who used to dream about the future, declares that it wants to recover the comforting security and self-confidence of the past, while the majority announces that they haven’t yet recovered from the Great Recession. Americans have begun looking backwards while at the same time longing for a meaning-oriented future. Furthermore, there is a widespread notion, especially among the Afro-Americans, that movements like the Tea Party prove that there is no reason for believing in a truly post-racial America. The Pew Research Center declared on the other hand 2000-2010 a “lost decade of the middle class” and in 2011, the organization also emphasized

that forty-two percent of the middle class say they are: “less financially secure” than ten years ago, feel anxious about unemployment and their future, and are disappointed with the first Obama administration, which has not lived up to the “yes we can” promise made in 2008.

Within the context of this nation-wide feeling of disillusionment, in 2011 Woody Allen brought to the screen a story focused on nostalgia, a symptom of our difficult age, while in 2012 Spielberg directed a film which seems designed to evoke nostalgia in an audience who is experiencing hard times in the United States.

In *Midnight in Paris*, Gil Pender (Owen Wilson), who curiously lives obsessed with the idea of finishing his novel, which is meaningfully also about nostalgia, suddenly starts to be pervaded by it and, through him, the film itself becomes dominated by that sentiment. He is caught up in a romanticized version of Paris in the 1920s, an era he longs for as his Golden Age, since he feels displaced and out of sync in his present world. Gil thus seizes the opportunity to go back to his idealized time and spends each of the next few nights in the past having conversations with his artistic heroes. But Adriana (Marion Cotillard), with whom he falls in love, dreams even further back in the past. The Belle Époque is Adriana’s own good old days. Thus, Gil finds out that Adriana disdains her present as much as he disdains his own. With a sequence of fantasies, the film unfolds till the moment Gil has an insight — “I’m having an insight right now [Gil states]. It’s a minor one, but I’m having it. The present is unsatisfying because life is unsatisfying. But this, this isn’t real, it doesn’t work”. Gil reaches a conclusion about his fixation on the past: the problem is not which era you happen to be part of, it’s just that the fantasies of another time and place always seem better than the reality of our present existence. Gil quotes Faulkner, realizing that the past imagined by nostalgia is not even past. Ultimately he also discovers what Woody Allen himself is trying to say in *Midnight in Paris*: it is better to reflect carefully about our need to yearn for the past to avoid being trapped, like Adriana, in her emotional decision to stay in the Belle Époque.

Going back to a significant moment in the American past — the Lost Generation living in Paris — Allen brings to the screen what Boym terms “reflective” nostalgia, the one she says that “can be ironic and humorous [and] reveals that longing and critical thinking are not opposed

to one another, as affective memories do not absolve one from compassion, judgment or critical reflection” (49-50). Boym distinguishes what she considers to be two main types of nostalgia: the restorative, the one which “characterizes national and nationalist revivals all over the world, which engage in the antimodern myth-making of history by means of a return to national symbols and myths” (41), and the reflective, more concerned with the meditation on history and imperfect process of remembrance. This distinction provides a theoretical framework to assert that the rhetoric of *Midnight in Paris* is one of reflective nostalgia.

At the beginning of the film, Gil yearns for a lost past that, indeed, has never existed, but he ends up realizing that there is a gap between identity and resemblance and decides to take control of his modern-day life. By doing this, Gil does not deny the importance of his longing but he also discovers the need to understand the true nature of this longing, just as the film suggests that the audience should do.

With the last shot of Gil, Gabrielle (Léa Seydoux) and the Alexander Bridge in the rain, Woody Allen gives the viewer the assurance that everything is perfect. A tidy happy ending, rare in Allen’s films, brings us a romantically framed scene of Gil and Gabrielle taking a walk in the rain at midnight along a lovely Parisian bridge. And, as Richard Haw argues, “bridges, by their very nature, are utopian because they bring separated parts together and provide order” (46). Thus, in response to the negativity attached to the present, Woody Allen ends his film on a note of longing and hope for the future. Allen’s happy ending in *Midnight in Paris* asserts the same as Boym states about “reflective nostalgia”: “The focus here is not on the recovery of what is perceived to be an absolute truth, but on the meditation on history and the passage of time. To paraphrase Nabokov, these kind of nostalgics are often “amateurs of time, epicures of duration”, who resist the pressure of external efficiency and take sensual delight in the texture of time not measurable by clocks and calendars” (49). The past is not only that which does not exist, claims Boym, but, as Henri Bergson points out, it “might act and will act by inserting itself into a present sensation from which it borrows vitality” (59-60). This is, in my view, what happens also in *Lincoln*, a historical and epic film, which is much more than about the 16<sup>th</sup> president of the United States.

Spielberg's film "plot" depicts Lincoln as a shrewd and exceptionally wise politician. It focuses upon a very limited period of time, that is, between the winter and spring of 1865, when he succeeded in having Congress pass the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment.

The film concentrates on Lincoln's deep-rooted belief that it was urgent to act immediately to pass the 13<sup>th</sup> Amendment for both moral and political reasons. But to convince and control Congress in 1865 was a daunting and dangerous task, one which required skillful negotiation, great power of persuasion as well as wise tactics and great rhetoric. The viewers find all this in the film, but they also find overtones of political interventions and discourses of today, directed at the 44<sup>th</sup> president of the United States and at the two dominant political parties of today. As some critics claim, the film also brings to the screen the Democrats' and Republicans' divided perspectives about the role of the central government in 2012 and questions the limits of presidential powers.

Although there are only a couple of brief but memorable Civil War scenes and a few snippets from Lincoln's speeches, the film is unquestionably a historical record, partially based on Doris Kearns Goodwin's *Team of Rivals*. But it also brings the viewer a fictional composition and arguments which strongly contribute to making the audience reflect on more general and timeless questions such as the role of the United States in the world. Undoubtedly, Spielberg's film reiterates Abraham Lincoln's image not only as a savior, a shrewd politician, a great thinker who showed America the way forward, but also as a kind of American self-taught biblical prophet — and the shot of Lincoln (Daniel Day-Lewis) and his wife (Sally Field) talking about a possible trip to the Holy Land reinforces this image.

Spielberg's film starts by restoring/creating a nostalgic image of the 16<sup>th</sup> US president and his role and ends by inducing nostalgia in the audience. From the beginning of the film, the operations of focalization are in fact crucial to the creation of a crescendo toward a certain emotional sentiment. *Lincoln* is dominated by the technique of chiaroscuro (as the scene in which Lincoln, illuminated by a beam of sunlight in the otherwise dimly lit room, is standing, head down, apprehensively waiting for the Congress's decision on the 13<sup>th</sup> amendment) and by a lovely architecture of sound as well as by Daniel Day-Lewis's tranquilizing tone of voice. Spielberg tries to construct a kind of cinematic antidote to contemporary

times characterized by controversial questions (such as the American current financial situation, its military interventions, Guantanamo, healthcare or same-sex marriage): an antidote full of nostalgia which undoubtedly seems to seek “a direct impact on the realities of the future”. Thus, besides reviving the myth of Abraham Lincoln, the film offers a kind of lesson to Barack Obama on how to wield political power at times of crisis. Thus, it also offers a representation of how to face the American future.

The closing scene is an intensely dramatic shot. Lincoln is standing on a podium and, when the camera zooms out showing the crowd within which he almost disappears, he starts delivering his second inaugural address. About twenty seconds into the speech the camera zooms in on the president, who emerges from the crowd as he continues his address, ending with his arms wide open as if welcoming the future. Indeed, Spielberg’s film seems to have “stopped” rather than “ended”. The plot is left open onto the future in a frankly prospective nostalgic tone, which reinforces the idea of America as a utopia still to be achieved. At the end of the film the viewer is left with a strong feeling of nostalgia reinforced by Day-Lewis’s powerful presence and amazing voice proclaiming America’s ability to keep pursuing the “shining city on the hill”.

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### **Filmography**

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Spielberg, Steven. (dir.) *Lincoln*, Dreamworks, running time: 150 minutes, DVD, 2012.



**ABSTRACT**

Hollywood movies are key cultural artifacts that very often open windows upon America's shifting historical and social events and moments of crises or disillusionment. Opening these windows, as Svetlana Boym notes, discussing "Hollywood's technonostalgia" in her book *The Future of Nostalgia*, "popular culture made in Hollywood, the vessel for national myths that America exports abroad, often induces nostalgia and offers a tranquilizer" (33). In this historical moment of accelerated rhythms, conflicts and crisis, Hollywood, focusing and revisiting specific times, events and moments in American history, goes back to the past to reassert alternative ways of being in the world and thus continue dreaming about the future in longing and hope.

**KEYWORDS**

Hollywood; nostalgia; reflective nostalgia; restorative nostalgia; utopia

**RESUMO**

Hollywood produz com frequência filmes que se apresentam como verdadeiros artefactos que abrem janelas sobre a história e a vida social americana ou então sobre momentos críticos ou carregados de desilusão. Ao abrir essas janelas, e como Svetlana Boym refere ao discutir o que denomina de "Hollywood's technonostalgia" no seu livro *The Future of Nostalgia*, "popular culture made in Hollywood, the vessel for national myths that America exports abroad, often induces nostalgia and offers a tranquilizer" (33). Tendo *Midnight in Paris* e *Lincoln* como estudos de caso, esta reflexão procura acentuar como, muitas vezes e sobretudo em momentos de mais crise e desânimo, Hollywood reafirma a possibilidade de continuar a sonhar com um futuro carregado de esperança.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Hollywood; nostalgia; relective nostalgia; restorative nostalgia; utopia

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# Centring the Margins: The Play of Identity in the Work of Tim Burton

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## Centring the Margins: The Play of Identity in the Work of Tim Burton

The work of Tim Burton can be placed simultaneously at the centre and on the margins of Hollywood production. Indeed, the name and what can now be termed “brand” Tim Burton have become synonymous with freedom within the industry, since this American director is widely and justifiably taken to be one of the infrequent contemporary instances of an *auteur* working within the studio system.

This duality reflects what can be said to be the main theme of Tim Burton’s filmic, literary and pictorial narratives: the acceptance of difference or the centrality of the Other. From the brilliant inception of his work, with the Poe-esque visual and verbal poem *Vincent* (1982), a six minute black and white gothic masterpiece, to *Alice in Wonderland* (2010), where the famously strong female character gets even more empowered by Burton’s affirmation of her non-conformity to preconceived social and familial expectations, to *Dark Shadows* (2012), whose protagonist is a vampire who travels centuries in time to be accepted by (and integrated in) an apparently conventional seventies family and community, to *Frankeeweenie* (2012), a stop-motion remake of Tim Burton’s own story about an isolated, sensitive and intellectually gifted teenager whose best friend is a dog — the director has defined the question of the perception or *misperception* of the identity of the Other as the central subject and concern of his work. And he has achieved this by creating and redefining characters consistently living on the fringes of society, only to underscore their inherent but unrecognized centrality.

This essay proposes to analyse the way the spatial metaphor of the centre and the margins can be applied to Burton’s representation of the question of identity. In fact, I will argue that Tim Burton’s main symbolic gesture is that of bringing the margins to the centre. Furthermore, I will

try to show the way he goes about doing this, through his representation of the Other as Self and of the Self as Other, an apparent contradiction underlined by Burton himself, in an interview for *The New York Times*. When talking about his own feelings of exclusion, he said: “I just feel like a foreigner. Feeling that weird foreign quality just makes you feel more, strangely, at home” (Itzkoff 16).

The first indication of this strategy of representation is given by the very titles of his different texts, be they filmic or literary. If one considers, as I firmly believe we should, *The Nightmare Before Christmas* (1993) to be one of Burton’s films, even though the credit for directing it has been given to Henry Selick, and if we include *The World of Stainboy* (2000), created specifically for the internet, in this tallying, and exclude the two works he created for television outside of Disney, which were framed by a very specific context, and the more recent *Dark Shadows* (2012), which retains the title of the fifties TV series it adapts — of the twenty titles that make up the body of his cinematic work, fifteen carry the name of the central character or characters and the other five a spatial or temporal designation directly related to them. During the course of each of these films, the viewer will discover that every one of these main characters is an outcast in some form or another, which turns this underlining of the presence of the protagonists in the titles into a path to their centralization.

The second step in this gesture of making the margins central is the way Burton portrays his protagonists. Let us briefly enumerate and characterize them: the young boy named Vincent, who wants to be just like Vincent Price, dreaming of dipping his aunt in wax for his wax museum; the Asian Hansel and Gretel who defeat a transvestite witch; the quiet, intelligent and shy boy Victor Frankenstein, who decides to bring his beloved dog back to life after it is run over by a car; Pee Wee, the highly ambiguous TV character that Burton adapted to the cinema in a story of a solitary, childlike adult’s obsession with his bike; the freelance bio-exorcist Betelgeuse, who himself ends up being exorcised as a result of his opportunism; the depressed and tormented cape crusader, who cannot feel integrated in the world without his mask; the lonely Edward Scissorhands, who is afraid and incapable of communicating with others without hurting them or being hurt by them; the Grinch-like Jack Skellington, a metaphorical king in a land of outcasts and a leader who lacks the capacity to read and

interpret his own feeling of emptiness; the worst film director of all times, Ed Wood, and his gang of misfits; the maladjusted teenager Richie Norris, who saves the Earth from a Martian invasion; the effeminate, squeamish and pale constable Ichabod Crane, who challenges custom and convention and who refuses to believe in magic; the unexpected and unconventional super-hero Stainboy, condemned to eliminate other outcasts like himself; Captain Leo Davidson, an outsider caught between two worlds, in a place and time where a major change of identities has occurred; the apparent tall-tale-teller Edward Bloom, rejected by his son who deems him a liar; the anti-social and also childlike Willy Wonka, with his impish and unfiltered impulses and enthusiasm; the beautifully macabre corpse bride Emily, obsessively pursuing her own vision of other-worldly happiness; the bloody murderous Sweeny Todd, seeking revenge at all cost; the also pale and non-conforming Alice, forced to run away to find strength and self-confidence enough to go against the grain of social expectations; and, finally, the simultaneously blood thirsty and sensitive vampire, Barnabas Collins, who ends up rescuing his misfit family.

All these characters, and a fair number of the secondary characters that surround, help and frame them, are presented as marginal creatures, if not monsters or freaks, who, despite some negative traits, end up revealing their basic humanity, sweetness, kindness and understandable motivations, which justify their new-found centrality. Borrowing the words of Dave Izkoff for *The New York Times*: “[Burton’s] style is strongly visual, darkly comic and morbidly fixated, but it is rooted just as much in his affection for monsters and misfits (which in his movies often turn out to be same thing)” (3). And as Tim Burton himself puts it in an interview for *Les Cahiers du Cinéma*, prompted by the release of *The Nightmare Before Christmas*:

A character may be perceived as scary, but is he really? For me, this film is structured around a major theme: a fundamentally good character is in search of something positive, but others perceive it as negative. In fact, this is the classic story for me since Frankenstein: how we perceive people and things. ...Personally, I grew up with this problematic which unquestionably seeps into everything that I have done (Thierry Jousse 225).

This reference to the influence of Mary Shelley's text points to the way Burton's work has integrated a Gothic sensibility which reveals itself not only in the more obvious and often cited (dark) visual terms, but, more significantly, in the juxtaposition of the positive and negative tones of his texts and in the ambiguity of his protagonists, who are brought to the fore of the narrative. Catherine Spooner, in her book *Contemporary Gothic*, describes this gesture as follows:

In what I am calling the 'Gothic-Carnavalesque, the sinister is continually shading into the comic and vice-versa. The film director Tim Burton works repeatedly in this mode.... However, these texts exhibit a crucial difference from both the Carnival tradition as Bakhtin describes it, and from much of the Gothic tradition too. Combining a wholly modern notion of the individual subject with the openness to the other found within the carnivalesque, one of the most prominent features of the new 'Gothic-Carnavalesque' is sympathy for the monster.

...

[A] recurrent feature of contemporary Gothic is [this] sympathy for the monster: those conventionally represented as 'other' are placed at the centre of the narrative and made a point of identification for the reader or viewer. (69, 103)

This new possibility of identification resulting from the gesture of bringing the monster, the marginal, the Other, to the centre, thus making him occupy the place reserved for the Self, turns him *into the Self*, that is, into the source of identification for the reader and viewer of the text. The more conventional characters are now devoid of that possibility of identification, and thus transported or moved to the margins of the narrative. This movement also mirrors one of the main characteristics of nineteenth and twentieth century fairy tales, another one of Tim Burton's major influences. Jack Zipes describes this defining trait in his introduction to the *Oxford Companion to Fairy Tales* (2000):

In contrast to most folk tales or fairy tales that have strong roots in folklore and propose the possibility of integration of the hero into society, the fairy tales of the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>



centuries tend to pit the individual against society or to use the protagonist in a way to mirror the foibles and contradictions of society. (xxv)

To conclude this analysis of Burton's symbolic gesture of moving the Other from the margins to the centre, we have to consider yet a third way in which his work accomplishes this. Burton's narratives are also defined by the juxtaposition of two levels of meaning and analysis, the literal and the figurative ones, the reading of which is dependent on a multi-directional game between the realist and the fantastic discourses or registers. In order to understand how this takes place, I will briefly discuss several texts by Tim Burton that exemplify this kind of juxtaposition in a particularly significant way and which illustrate the three main areas his work has touched upon: film, literature and painting.

In *Edward Scissorhands* (1990), the main character's loneliness and isolation are transmitted in visual terms by the metaphor of his monstrous Frankenstein-like nature. Even more interestingly, though, his incapacity to communicate with others, to touch them, is conveyed through the visual metaphor provided by the fact that Edward (Johnny Depp) has scissors for hands. This literalization of his emotional and psychological flaw or fragility is highly productive in conveying the protagonist's otherness.

In the *Batman* films (1989 and 1992), the hero (played by Michael Keaton), a wealthy white male, has to wear a costume to underline his marginal character and the superficial nature of Bruce Wayne's centrality, so that he can be both marginal and central. The mask and the costume, the secret identity, become, then, the instruments for the literalization of Batman's outcast nature. To use Joseph Sartelle's reading of "Dreams and Nightmares in the Hollywood Blockbuster":

the [Batman] films ... showed a deep ambivalence about ... Batman himself. As the Penguin tells Batman in *Batman Returns*, 'You're just jealous because I'm a real freak, and you have to wear a costume'. If the criminals in the Batman films were cartoon minorities ... then Batman's costumed identity was a kind of minority drag, a way of identifying with or occupying the position of the margins while still preserving his privilege as a wealthy white male. (520-521)

Describing the protagonist of *Sleepy Hollow* (1999), once again played by Johnny Depp, for the DVD special feature entitled “Behind the Legend”, Burton states that “Ichabod is a character who lives basically inside his head versus a character with no head”. This metaphorical literalization of the solution for Ichabod’s main problem, not acknowledging the power of imagination and fantasy, as will happen with William Bloom in *Big Fish*, is a powerful way to underline the protagonist’s simultaneously marginal and central nature.

*Big Fish* (2003) is entirely built upon this literalization of metaphors, starting with the one present in the idiom that gives the film its title: “to be a big fish in a small pond”. This literalization reaches its climax when, at the end of the film, Edward Bloom (Albert Finney) turns into the big fish that he had repeatedly told people he had caught, leading his son, William (Billy Crudup), who for most of his life was unable to accept his father’s otherness, to close the film with the statement: “That was my father’s final joke, I guess. A man tells his stories so many times that he becomes the stories”. To give another example, when Edward says “they say when you meet the love of your life time stops, and that’s true”, in the following shots we can see Edward moving alone towards the woman he just fell in love with at first sight, in the middle of a large group of acrobats and artists in a circus arena all completely still. Tim Burton addresses this game between the registers of reality and fantasy in the audio commentary to the film:

Will is a very literal character, searching for literal answers and some things in life aren’t literal, things aren’t just black and white. There can be some things that are both real and unreal at the same time. I think that that’s the thing that I liked about it ... the fact that it ... put images to feelings that are hard to express verbally.

... [B]ecause the story is about that sort of blending and the melding and the mutating of what’s real and not real, it was important to ... have that represented in the visual quality of the film. So even though ... there’s reality and fantasy, I tried to ... blur the lines a bit because that’s, again, what the story is about.

... I’m always amazed at some literal-minded people.... That’s what I like about folktales and fairytales. It’s like you can find more reality in those if it speaks to you on an emotional

level.... I've always thought that life was obviously a mixture of those things together. And that's what attracted me to this story.

For the *Corpse Bride* (2005), Tim Burton created two opposing worlds, the world of the living and the world of the dead, whose characterization reveals yet another instance of the literalization of metaphor. To underscore the fact that the world of the living is metaphorically more dead than the underworld, with its rigidity and sterile formality, Burton turned it visually into an almost black and white picture, contrasting with the organic, openness of the underworld, with its lively literally colourful tone. The traditional spatial metaphor of "upstairs and downstairs", applied to the two worlds confronting each other in the film, is then undermined by the metaphorical treatment of the image, another highly effective means of conveying the centrality of the other, in this case represented by the living-dead characters.

One of the last examples taken from Burton's films is from the scene in *Alice in Wonderland* where we can see Alice (Mia Wasikowska) falling down the rabbit hole. Her descent only stops when she lands violently on what seems to be the floor of a hall, only to fall again when the ground beneath her shifts brusquely to reveal itself instead to be the hall's ceiling. This new literalization of a non-verbal metaphor effectively underlines the upside-down nature of the world Alice has just entered and the way it becomes Alice, another one of Burton's central misfit characters.

In closing, I will discuss two more examples taken from Burton's latest films, *Dark Shadows* (2012) and *Frankenweenie* (2012).

In his adaptation of the cult 1950s TV series, Burton explicitly represents the central theme of all of his narratives, the curse of being an outcast, in the life story of Victoria Winters (Bella Heathcote), as she describes it to Barnabas (Johnny Depp):

The people I love haven't always loved me back. My own family sent me away. Swept me under the rug because it was easier than having a daughter who was different. Who was cursed. But as hard as they were, I never lost my will, the need to feel the sun on my face again.

Victoria does eventually find her place in a family of outcasts like herself, who have discovered a way to overcome their own marginality. And, together, they manage to vanquish both the prejudices of society (by

literally revealing their own monstrosity to the world and being accepted for who they are) and their arch-rival, Angelique (Eva Green), driven by her love for Barnabas. And it is precisely this character who provides yet another instance of the literalization of metaphors when, right before her death, after her skin has already literally cracked open to show her emotionally broken nature, she offers Barnabas her heart, by ripping it out of her chest and handing it to him.

In *Frankenweenie*, when Sparky dies, Victor's sadness is conveyed not only by the more clichéd changing weather conditions (with the rain that follows the sunshine), but mainly, and more significantly, by the heavy raindrops falling outside as these are reflected onto the interior walls of Victor's house. As Victor (voice by Charlie Tahan) is tucked into bed by his parents, the cinematography of the scene underlines the way the walls, the furniture, the objects and even the people inside the house mirror the falling rain outside, creating an eloquent visual rhyme to Victor's tears, which literalises the despair of Victor's world after he loses his only friend, just as the whiteness and clarity of the sky and of the outside walls of Victor's house will follow Sparky's resurrection, in a literal rendering of Victor's interior happiness and lightness of being in the world that surrounds him.

One of Burton's literary texts, *The Melancholic Death of Oyster Boy and Other Stories* (1997), is composed of several narrative poems about different centralized creatures, monsters and freaks, and one of the defining traits of these small narratives is, once again, the literalization of metaphors, through which Tim Burton describes the feelings of rejection, incommunicability, and loneliness that define adolescence. In the poem "Stick Boy and Match Girl in Love", the author literalizes the metaphor of fire as applied to the theme of romantic love, in what becomes a meta-rhetorical gesture:

Stick Boy liked Match Girl,  
He liked her a lot.  
He liked her cute figure,  
he thought *she was hot*.

*But could a flame ever burn  
for a match and a stick?*

*It did quite literally;*  
 he burned up pretty quick. [My emphasis] (1-3)

Regarding “The Melancholy Death of Oyster Boy”, a well-known idiom relating to the theme of shyness is literalized as a way to underline the boy’s otherness, the same happening to the metaphorical expression that conveys strangeness and suspicion:

Everyone wondered, but no one could tell,  
*When would young Oyster Boy come out of his shell?*  
 .....  
 “Really, sweetheart,” she said,  
 “I don’t mean to make fun,  
 but *something smells fishy*  
 and I think it’s our son”. [My emphasis] (37, 41)

As for “Junk Girl”, the verbal play involves recognizing a physical location appropriate to a state of dejection:

There once was a girl  
 who was made up of junk.  
 She looked really dirty,  
 and she smelled like a skunk.

She was always *unhappy*,  
 or in one of her slumps — perhaps *‘cause she spent*  
*so much time down in the dumps*. [My emphasis] (89)

In the last two examples, from “Staring Girl” and “Anchor Baby”, the literalization process analysed here depends directly upon the interplay between words and illustrations, anticipating a tendency that will become even more meaningful in some of Burton’s later visual work, which will be considered below. In the first of these poems, “Staring Girl”, Burton draws a girl who’s eyes have been removed from their sockets to rest on a small pond, after the need for this rest has been described as follows:

She’d stare at the ground,  
 she’d stare at the sky.  
 She’d stare at you for hours,  
 and you’d never know why.  
 But after winning the local staring contest,

*she finally gave her eyes  
a well-deserved rest. [My emphasis] (19-21)*

As for “Anchor Baby”, not only is the protagonist of the poem depicted with the shape of a heavy rock, but the text closes with a drawing of the mother sinking in the bottom of the ocean, dragged down by her literal anchor baby:

.....  
Nothing could join them,  
except maybe one thing,  
just maybe...  
*something to anchor their spirits....*  
They had a baby.

.....  
And she was alone  
with *her gray baby anchor,*  
*who got so oppressive*  
*that eventually sank her.*

*As she went to the bottom,*  
not fulfilling her wish,  
it was her, and her baby...  
and a few scattered fish. [My emphasis] (107, 111)

To realize the continuity and far-reaching scope of this form of literalization of metaphor throughout all of Burton’s work, one also has to consider some of his pictorial work, namely certain pieces that were shown for the first time in the exhibit of his work at MoMA, in New York, and in the recent anthology *The Art of Tim Burton* (2009). They include: *A Tongue Twister* (206), *Sue and John like to hold hands* (207), *Chuck offers Cindy a piece of gum* (207), *Brenda is the kind of person that grows on you* (207), *Two people enjoying each other* (207), *Asshole* (209), *Man undressing woman with his eyes* (210), *Curtis is giving his eyes a rest* (210), *Blind man with permanent seeing eye dogs* (211), *Persecution complex* (221), *Bird of prey* (222), *Dick Tater* (222), *Little frozen chicken boy talking to some chicks in a bar* (227), *Whipping a cow for whipped cream* (239), *Mouth sewn shut* (324), *Head over heels* (325), and *Betelgeuse has an upset stomach*

(395). What distinguishes these works is mainly the use of idioms which are literalized visually, but also the literalization of simple metaphorical expressions, complete with a caption in which the expression is reproduced. We can also find examples of linguistic puns, some of which, as in the case of the sketches for *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, were also used in the finished films. More than actual statements on the question of reality and fantasy or the centrality of the Other, these drawings and paintings seem to be rehearsals or preparatory studies for the larger metaphors and/or allegories of the author's films, quoted here because of the way they illustrate the pervasiveness of this mechanism or technique in Burton's corpus.

The examples could be extended to all of Burton's works, but the ones that have been mentioned here illustrate the literalization of the figurative that takes place in the work of Tim Burton in a way that allows us to grasp the vital importance of metaphor, spatial or otherwise, for this American *auteur*. By literalizing metaphors (in themselves attempts to convey an *other* meaning by going beyond the immediate and literal associations of words and concepts), Tim Burton establishes a productive and powerful way of drawing attention to the original metaphorical meaning set in motion in his narratives, all of which try to enact the centrality of the Other.

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## Filmography

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**ABSTRACT**

The work of Tim Burton can be placed simultaneously at the centre and on the margins of Hollywood production. This duality reflects the main theme of his filmic, literary and pictorial narratives: the centrality of the other. Burton's main symbolic gesture is that of bringing the margins to the centre, through his representation of the other as self and of the self as other. This essay proposes to analyze Burton's representation of the question of identity and the way this is accomplished in Burton's narratives through the juxtaposition of two levels of meaning and analysis, the literal and the figurative ones, the reading of which is dependent on a multi-directional game between the realist and the fantastic registers. To do so, we will look at different Burton films and at some of his pictorial work, all of which illustrate the literalization of the figurative characteristic of this American auteur.

**KEYWORDS**

Tim Burton; Identity; Otherness; Contemporary Cinema; Metaphor

**RESUMO**

A obra de Tim Burton pode ser colocada simultaneamente no centro e nas margens da produção de Hollywood. Esta dualidade reflecte o tema central das narrativas fílmicas, literárias e pictóricas burtonianas: a centralidade do Outro. Este ensaio tem como objectivo analisar a representação da questão da identidade na obra de Burton e a forma como esta representação é efectivada nas narrativas burtonianas por meio da justaposição de dois níveis de significado e análise, o literal e o figurativo, cuja leitura se encontra dependente de um jogo multi-direccional entre os registos fantástico e realista. Neste ensaio, iremos olhar para diferentes filmes de Burton e para algumas das suas obras pictóricas, todas elas ilustrações do processo de literalização do figurativo característico deste autor americano.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Tim Burton; Identidade; Alteridade; Cinema Contemporâneo; Metáfora

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Re-engendering “Cinderella” on Screen:  
Andy Tennant’s *Ever After:*  
*A Cinderella Story*

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## Re-engendering “Cinderella” on Screen: Andy Tennant’s *Ever After: A Cinderella Story*

The enchanted realm of the wonder tale has been gazed upon quite often by novelists, short-story authors and even poets, who have imaginatively translated into their creations their own personal wanderings in wonderland. In the particular case of “Cinderella”, the wonder tale I want to focus on, Anne Sexton, Roald Dahl and Emma Donoghue can be counted among the contemporary authors who have reread Charles Perrault’s and the Grimms’ versions by rewriting them in poems and short stories. In so doing, “they have also stretched the tales, giving them a modern, feminist appearance by reversing or highlighting many of the perverse misogynistic views with which the source texts were imbued” (Bobby 31). The wonder tale realm has also been inhabited by literary scholars and folklorists who continue to find fresh meanings in new readings of old tales and have, more often than not, brought critical attention to neglected or forgotten tales by first making them available for the public in general, thus opening more doors into Wonderland. A case in point is Jack Zipes’s collection *The Great Fairy Tale Tradition: From Straparola and Basile to the Brothers Grimm* (2001), which gathers together the four different versions of “Cinderella” which I will presently bring into discussion. In fact, alongside the well-known Perrault’s “Cinderella; or, the Glass Slipper” (1697) and the Grimms’ “Cinderella” (1857), Zipes has also collected two former, and relatively unknown, versions: Giambattista Basile’s “The Cat Cinderella” (which was posthumously published in 1634) and Marie-Cathérine d’Aulnoy’s “Finette Cendron” (1697). Finally, different generations of readers worldwide keep on breathing “the wilder air of the marvellous” (Warner 3) which breaks free from the renewed wonder of every page filled with familiar motifs that feel nonetheless new. Thus is the old legacy of wonder(ful) tales far from exhausted.

The particular looking glass of literary retelling has therefore brought to attention an interwoven path of mingled directions which converge in a moment and go their separate ways immediately thereafter through different literary paths which depart from an old version of a tale, itself adapted and rewritten from several others. Thus, stories which are quite different and cannot be imitated (because they recall each other but are always another story) are further complicated when transposed into yet another medium, that of cinema. Bearing in mind that, unlike written tales, “film powerfully realizes the transcendence over reality with which magical narrative is intrinsically concerned” (Tiffin 181), I will read four very different wonder tale versions of “Cinderella”, on a par with Tennant’s *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998). Following up the argument that “the magical paradigm of fairy tale finds echoes in the magic of the film experience even without special effects, in film’s ability to create the apparent three-dimensionality of the real on a flat, unmoving screen, through the trickery of light and image” (Tiffin 181), I will focus on the gendered differences between written wonder tale versions and film, as well as on their distinctive narrative techniques. I argue that this feminist revision of “Cinderella” (co-authored by Tennant and a female screenwriter, Susannah Grant) re-engenders identities by being closer to the only version written by a woman author (Marie-Cathérine d’Aulnoy), both in narrative style and in substance, than to any of the male versions — including the alleged Grimm tale it follows.

Tennant’s *Ever After* opens with a frame narrative which firmly writes Cinderella’s story out of the wonder tale realm and into the province of the historical narrative. Tennant does that by changing the supposed timeless quality of the wonder tale into a definite time and place, that of Renaissance France (complete with historical characters such as Leonardo da Vinci, who actually lived in France for the last three years of his life at the service of Francis I). Interestingly enough, Tennant thus chooses the narrative technique of embedding Cinderella’s tale in a frame story, a device the male authors — save for Basile — did not endorse but which was favoured by the *conteuses*. In fact, the aristocratic women storytellers who gave birth to the literary fairy tale in the *salons* in late 17<sup>th</sup> century France excelled in the art of drawing narrative pleasure in the often self-reflexive, playful interaction between embedded tale and frame story. For the purpose

of this essay, I would like to draw attention to the *salonnière* widely acclaimed as the Queen of Fairies, Marie-Cathérine d'Aulnoy herself, who also coined the term "fairy tales" to describe her narratives.

If "the frames always locate the telling of the stories in a particular time and place, implicitly suggesting connections between the twice-told tales and the particular situation in which they are told", the fact that the time and place of the frame story is Restoration France is not accidental: this was a time marked by the political upheaval which followed the end of the First Empire under Napoleon in 1814 and the restoration of the House of Bourbon under Louis XVIII until 1830. In fact, it both enhances and is enhanced by the Cinderella story through the tension established between the realistic frame story and the embedded wonder tale which is, after all, a true story, in that they both depict strong-willed women. Napoleon would indeed praise the courage of the frame story's narrator, the future Madame la Dauphine de France Marie-Thérèse Charlotte, a daughter of Louis XVI and Marie-Antoinette: she remained in Bordeaux despite Napoleon's orders for her to be arrested when his army arrived, which led him to remark she was the "only man in her family" ("Marie Thérèse of France"). If "the embedded tales and the frame that joins them are always symbiotic, drawing life and sustenance even from their friction" (Harries 107), it is only befitting that such a brave woman should tell the story of the Cinderella of the title (although she is never addressed or referred to as such in the film).

In the frame story of Tenant's film, which takes place after the Grimms had published their *Kinder und Hausmärchen* in 1812 but before 1830, Marie-Thérèse Charlotte de France (Jeanne Moreau) summons the Brothers Grimm to set the record straight on a particular wonder tale: despite claiming she finds their "collection of folk tales quite brilliant actually", she confesses she had been quite disturbed when she read their version of "The Little Cinder Girl". Assuming that Madame Royale de France favours Perrault's version over their own, the Grimms shed some light on the differences: Jacob (Andy Henderson) argues that "[t]here are those who swear Perrault's telling, with its fairy godmother and magic pumpkins, would be closer to the truth," whereas Wilhelm (Joerg Stadler) adds that "[s]ome claim the shoe was made of fur. Others insist it was glass. Well, I guess we'll never know."

In fact, as Jacob makes clear, the Grimms' "Cinderella" does not sport a Fairy Godmother or magic pumpkins; it has instead a little white bird which grants Cinderella whatever she requests. The bird, which nestled in a tree planted by the girl on her mother's grave from the twig of a hazel bush which her father had given her on her request and had been watered by Cinderella's tears three times every day, is a manifestation of her late mother. As such, it will help the girl by lavishly providing her with the rich apparel she wears to three different balls where she dances with the Prince. The Grimms have thus retained Basile's magic tree whereas Perrault favours Basile's fairy as Cinderella's magical helper instead. Wilhelm's mention in *Ever After* of the glass or fur slipper also illuminates a significant variant in the Cinderella story:

It was Perrault, in 1697, who first introduced glass into the Cinderella story. Up to this point the slippers were not glass, though they could be gold. So the collector of the 345 variants of the Cinderella story has established. 'Verre', glass, was a mistranslation of 'vair', fur.' But ... this was no accident. 'There is no doubt [Perrault] himself intended that the shoe should be glass (Armstrong 205).

Thus, Basile's Cenerentola sports "a slipper that was the most beautiful and valuable shoe that had ever been seen" (Basile 448), although the material which it is made of is not specified, whereas d'Aulnoy's Finette Cendron wears a slipper "which was made of red velvet and embroidered with pearls" (D'Aulnoy 465) and the Grimms' Cinderella's slipper "was made of pure gold" (Grimm 471).

Tennant's Cinderella's slipper notably combines qualities of its written counterpart in all the versions except for the Grimms': it is an embroidered silver satin slipper profusely decorated with pearls, whose ornate heel has the sheer translucence of tinted glass. It makes its first appearance in the frame story: Jacob remarks on a painting portraying a young woman whose expression remarkably resembles Mona Lisa's (because, as the viewer will later learn, it was also painted by Leonardo da Vinci). Madame Royale then informs him that "[h]er name was Danielle de Barbarac" (*Ever After*) while she opens a jewelled casket containing the slipper. To the utter astonishment of the Grimms, who thus realise that a true story was turned into a wonder tale, Marie-Thérèse de France then



pronounces it to be Danielle de Barbarac's glass slipper, and starts narrating her story with the wonder tale opening formula "Once upon a time".

Her next words — "there lived a girl who loved her father very much" — mark the transition from frame story to embedded narrative but will also retell a core element in three wonder tale versions, Cinderella's relationship with her father, quite differently in Tennant's film. A quick overview of the written versions will suffice to establish the difference between the markedly unnatural father/ daughter relationship portrayed in all the male versions as well as the passive role assumed by the father in d'Aulnoy's tale and the way Tennant chooses to visually translate it. Thus, Basile's version starts with a prince "who was a widower, and he had a daughter who was so dear to him that he saw the world through only her eyes" (Basile 445) only to "let his daughter fall out of his heart" (Basile 446) shortly after he gets married to his daughter's teacher. This woman has, unbeknownst to him, tricked Zezolla, the Cinderella of this tale, into convincing her father to take her as his wife. The ingratitude of both father and stepmother is such they trample upon Zezolla and favour the new stepmother's six daughters instead. In Perrault's version, Cinderella's father is a gentleman "who would have only scolded her since he was totally under the control of his new wife" (Perrault 450) should she complain of her stepmother. D'Aulnoy chooses to have a passive, down-on-his-luck king who is unable to stop his royal spouse from deliberately trying to harm their three daughters. She thus interestingly twists Basile's and Perrault's neglectful father into a weak father who, although he loves his daughters, is unable to protect them from their own mother, another significant deflection from the usual trope of the wicked stepmother. As for the Grimms', Cinderella's father is positively heinous in their version: not only does he favour his stepdaughters but he also viciously tries to hinder his own daughter from trying on the slipper by disclaiming Cinderella as his daughter and loading her with inexistent physical defects. Thus, to the Prince's question "Don't you have any other daughters?" (Grimm 472) this despicable father replies "No... There's only Cinderella, my dead wife's daughter, who's deformed, but she can't possibly be the bride" (Grimm 472).

However, the father who neglects his child from the moment he gets married to favour his stepdaughters in the male-authored written versions is metamorphosed, in Tennant's film, into a loving father before and after

he is newly married. Unlike the written versions, however, he dies shortly after his marriage, in a gendered twist of the traditional fate reserved for mothers in wonder tales: in fact, it is mothers, not fathers, who are either dead when their child is very young, like Snow White's or Cinderella's mother in the four versions I'm discussing, or else they are rendered totally helpless to protect their child from harm, like Sleeping Beauty's mother. As for the daughter (played by Drew Barrymore in the film), in Tennant's film she has also undergone a marked change from the soul of gentleness, domestic virtue and enduring patience which Perrault and the Grimms encumbered her with to retain the distinctively active resourcefulness that characterises both Basile's *Zezolla* and d'Aulnoy's *Finette*. The first encounter between Danielle and her father, Auguste (Jeroen Krabbé), is quite expressive of this double metamorphosis: on arriving home with his new wife, Baroness Rodmilla de Ghent (Anjelica Houston), and her two daughters, Marguerite (Megan Dodds) and Jacqueline (Melanie Lynskey), Auguste tenderly embraces his tomboyish eight-year-old daughter before he presents her to her new family. Danielle's clothes are utterly soiled because she has bested her best friend Gustave in the mud after he dismissively proffered her to look like a girl in those clothes, but her father does not mind that in the least: while Auguste laughingly remarks he had expected to present a little lady but she would have to do, Danielle eagerly steps forward to meet her new stepmother. Notwithstanding her childish excitement — "It feels just like Christmas! I get a mother and sisters all in one day!", she has delightedly told her servant — the Baroness coldly surveys her and icily expresses her pleasure in meeting her at last, adding that "[y]our father speaks of nothing else" (*Ever After*).

Alas, Danielle's wish that her stepmother would like her is not to be fulfilled: besides being too unkempt for the Baroness's stylish outlook, Danielle keeps her place in her father's heart too noticeably for the jealous stepmother's liking. As he reminds his daughter when he is putting her to bed, he is a husband now "but a father first and for ever" (*Ever After*). Not only does this scene emphasise that nothing has changed between father and daughter notwithstanding the new wife but it is also paramount in revealing a unique feature in this Cinderella: unlike the one in all the written versions, she is a reader — and not just any reader at that. In fact, she is actually a very precocious reader of serious literature as the gift her father

brings her — Thomas Moore's *Utopia* — makes quite clear. Moreover, her father's care in nurturing her mind will bear ample fruit, as Perrault's and the Grimms' patiently domestic Cinderella is metamorphosed into a noble girl forced into servitude who has a thinking mind of her own, which she uses to strike out against blatant injustice and to argue finer social points. I would like to emphasise that this subtle twist in Tennant's Cinderella quite remarkably recaptures a recurring trope in d'Aulnoy's tales: despite Finette not being a reader, many of d'Aulnoy's tales glorify female intellect by upholding the heroines' reading and writing against their devotion to domestic chores, much as the *conteuses* did in the *salons*. (This particular trope mirrors d'Aulnoy's as well as the *conteuses*' willingness to criticise and reform social customs by reclaiming the right to be treated more consistently as intellectuals by their male peers.) In a dialogue with Prince Henry (Dougray Scott), Crown Prince of France (on the run from his court duties including marrying the foreign Princess that his father has chosen for him so as to further state interests), she quotes from *Utopia* to argue a social point: it is the lack of education and poverty which the lower classes are reduced to by royal decree that makes for criminals who should thus not be punished as they were driven into it in the first place by those who mean to punish them.

In fact, it is Danielle's intellect and passion for books which draw the Prince's attention in the first place, rather than her beauty. Later on in the film, he offers to take her to visit a Franciscan monastery which boasts a remarkable library and while they peruse the volumes, he confesses that in all his years of study no tutor ever demonstrated the passion that she has shown him in just two days. This will even make him announce to his parents at a later moment in the film that he wishes to found a University where everyone is welcome to learn. The vitality and resourcefulness Danielle exudes — which cause her stepmother to malevolently remark those are indeed masculine traits — thus prove irresistible for the Prince at the same time that expected gender roles are skilfully subverted in this valiant Cinderella. She evinces her nobility even under rags at the same time that she refuses the traditional but socially accepted status of the submissive Cinderella Perrault had created in his 1697 *Contes du Temps Passé*. Incidentally, so had Marie-Catherine d'Aulnoy as well: she forged a new identity in the tales she told in which metamorphosis equalled magic,

the creative power to change both her and her heroines' lives by overcoming great odds. Therefore, Perrault's Cinderella, a passive object to another's will who waited patiently for her release at the hands of Prince Charming, did not fit in d'Aulnoy's definition of femininity since she had nothing to do with sweet, lachrymose, domestic(ated) heroines, either in her life or in her tales.

Neither does Danielle fit that description: the Prince is clearly not used to having a woman knock him down by hitting him with a well-aimed stone because she has taken him for a common thief, nor is he used to listening to a woman speak her mind so frankly as to rebuke him. Even most significant is the fact that the Prince is not used to being saved by a woman, the way Danielle saves him from a fight with gypsies by outwitting their leader into carrying with her what she could and then bodily carrying him for that matter. Other characters who oppose Danielle do not expect her to overstep the passivity traditionally attributed to women either. Thus, the wicked stepmother who intended to wear Danielle's own mother's ball gown and slippers for the ball is taken by surprise when she is punched in the eye (punches being traditionally exchanged by two opposing males in a fight, whereas women usually use more "feminine" ways of fighting such as slapping each other's faces or pulling the hair of their opponent); on the other hand, the would-be molester whom her stepmother sold her to is positively dismayed when his own sword is used against him by a very resolute damsel in not as much distress as he finds himself to be.

This leads me to another trope favoured by d'Aulnoy which is also portrayed in Tennant's *Ever After*, the fact that unhappy lovers will only be together after they have proved their nobility and tender feelings for each other through great tribulations, not because their relationship had been arranged. In fact, herself the victim of an unhappy arranged marriage, Madame d'Aulnoy was highly critical of forced marriages, so much so that her tales seriously commented on love, courtship and marriage in the characteristic witty style of the *conteuses*. As a matter of fact, Tennant's film also expatiates on this point in two occasions: the first is when Baroness Rodmilla reduces Danielle to the commodity of servant and exchanges her for all the valuables she has sold to Danielle's future owner, a lecherous wealthy older man who has made several innuendoes as to what capacity he expects to be served in. (This situation, incidentally, somewhat mimics

d'Aulnoy's own predicament when she was sixteen, as she was abducted from a convent by a wealthy man thirty years her senior with the connivance of her own father. Unlike d'Aulnoy, however, who was not able to legally disengage herself from her husband, Danielle manages to save herself from the unwanted advances of her master before Prince Henry comes to rescue her.) The second situation which comments on arranged marriages is when Prince Henry, out of spite for believing he had been duped by Danielle, is on the verge of marrying the sobbing Spanish Princess his father had arranged for him to marry. This princess, who is in love with someone else, wails while she walks up the aisle and begs him not to marry her. As he perfectly understands her feelings, he calls off the wedding and leaves the palace in search of his soul mate, his perfect match in every way, as he declares Danielle to be. And so the lovers are reunited at last, the Prince having become a wiser man in the process, and the villains dutifully punished by becoming servants in their turn. This is quite a Disneyesque outcome, since it is Disney's *Cinderella* (1950) which prefigures this ending rather than any of the four written versions I have discussed.

The story ends with Madame Royale's words: "My great-great-grandmother's portrait hung in the University up until the revolution. By then, the truth of the romance had been reduced to a simple fairy tale. And while Cinderella and her Prince did live happily ever after, the point, gentlemen, is that they lived" (*Ever After*). These words, which reveal her own relationship with Danielle de Barbarac, further emphasise the dichotomy between wonder tale and true fact which the frame story has sought to establish from the start. These final words could well be spoken with regard to Marie-Cathérine d'Aulnoy, the *conteuse* who wrote wonder tales — but who, despite not having a happily-ever-after ending of her own and being now quite forgotten, actually lived.

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## Filmography

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**ABSTRACT**

The enchanted realm of the wonder tale has been gazed upon quite often by novelists, short-story authors and even poets, who have imaginatively translated into their creations their own personal wanderings in wonderland. I will thus read four very different wonder tale versions of "Cinderella", on a par with Andy Tennant's *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998). I will focus on the gendered differences between wonder tale versions and film, as well as on their distinctive narrative techniques. I argue that this feminist revision of "Cinderella" re-engenders identities by being closer to the only version written by a woman author, both in narrative style and in substance, than to any of the male versions — including the alleged Grimm tale it follows.

**KEYWORDS**

Cinderella; Basile; Madame d'Aulnoy; Perrault; Brothers Grimm

**RESUMO**

O reino encantado do conto maravilhoso tem sido muitas vezes contemplado por romancistas, autores de contos e mesmo poetas, que têm traduzido os seus próprios passeios pelo mundo encantado nas suas criações artísticas por meio da imaginação. Irei, deste modo, analisar quatro versões muito diferentes do conto "Cinderela, ou a Gata Borralheira" a par do filme *Ever After: A Cinderella Story* (1998), co-escrito e realizado por Tennant. Irei focar a minha análise nas diferenças de género entre as versões escritas do conto e o filme, bem como nas suas técnicas narrativas distintas. Defendo que esta revisão feminista do conto "Cinderela" constrói novas identidades sexuais ao aproximar-se mais da única versão escrita por uma mulher, quer a nível estilístico quer a nível temático, do que a qualquer das versões masculinas em análise — incluindo o conto dos irmãos Grimm que, alegadamente, segue.

**PALAVRAS CHAVE**

Cinderela; Basile; Madame d'Aulnoy; Perrault; Irmãos Grimm

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# LITERATURE AND ADAPTATION



It is a Truth Universally Adapted:  
Two Cinematic Approaches  
to the Opening of Jane Austen's  
*Pride and Prejudice*

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## It is a Truth Universally Adapted: Two Cinematic Approaches to the Opening of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice*

*"It is a truth universally acknowledged that a single man in possession of a good fortune must be in want of a wife."*

The opening words of Jane Austen's beloved novel *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) have become as famous as the work itself and seem to encapsulate not only the essence of the novel in its entirety, but Austen's ironic and satirical tone as well. Indeed, the opening lines are exceptionally indicative of what will later unfold and serve as an impressive framing mechanism, helping readers situate themselves in Austen's world of courtship, financial prospects and marriage plots.

*Pride and Prejudice* is perhaps Austen's most popular novel with numerous adaptations, parodies and pop-culture references attributed to its name. Jocelyn Harris argues that a successful cinematic version of a novel cannot be a translation but must be an imitation that "copies the essence of the text but at a distance" (44). It is the difference, rather than the sameness, between the source and the "remake" that needs to be highlighted. Indeed, while examining the two most recent high-profile cinematic adaptations of *Pride & Prejudice* I found that although they are both what one may call "Period Pieces" or "Costume Films", they take very different approaches in the telling of Austen's tale. Thinking about how accurately the opening lines of the novel encompass the atmosphere of the work as a whole, I was fascinated by the idea of comparing the opening lines to the opening shots in these cinematic adaptations. I was curious to see if there was a similar correlation between the opening scene as it is presented to viewers and the development of the film's plot, themes and ambiance. What I found in this closer examination of films that I have

watched repeatedly over the past couple of years — surprised me. Not only are the opening scenes in the 1995 and 2005 versions radically different, they were also exceptionally symbolic and highly indicative of what was to follow. Both opening scenes captured the makers' take on the novel and the message their film would ultimately convey. Watching the films with this in mind, I found myself re-analyzing these productions only to discover that my earlier opinions on both were not as cemented as I had believed them to be.

Let us then begin with a description of these opening scenes whose significance to the films' message and overall impression I will later discuss in depth. The 1995 Andrew Davies BBC mini-series — which is credited with starting the Jane Austen craze in Hollywood — became globally successful and is remembered mostly (but not only) for its dashing version of Mr. Darcy, portrayed by the equally appealing Colin Firth. The first shot of the series is unmistakably masculine in tone with royal sounding trumpets ringing in our ears and two distinguished looking gentlemen, riding horses that are fiercely galloping through the muddy country grounds. We watch the two as they overlook Netherfield Hall which Mr. Bingley, played by Crispin Bonham-Carter, aptly refers to as “a fair prospect” only to be countered by Darcy who is quick to warn him about the “savage” nature of the society in these parts. This short exchange helps us understand quite quickly the differences in these men's personalities and attitudes. It also sets the stage for the story about to unfold. As they ride off, the viewer catches sight of Elizabeth Bennet, portrayed by Jennifer Ehle, who is looking down on the men from a hilltop without being able to hear their conversation. Elizabeth, out on one of her cherished outdoor walks, seems happy and content as she smiles, skips and picks fresh flowers. It is only when she approaches Longbourn that we are privy to the chaotic household that she is a part of. Her father is held up in his library, rolling his eyes at his younger daughters' foolish arguments while her mother complains about her nerves as she repeatedly fails to properly educate her silly daughters, leaving Lizzy and Jane in the role of the responsible “adults”. This is not a stable domestic environment and Elizabeth, we gather, has quite an improper female role model for a mother. The “savage” society Darcy was referring to just moments earlier is displayed to us with our first sneak pick into the Bennet household.

The 2005 adaptation, directed by Joe Wright, presents us with a vastly different opening, and although it is the beginning of the same story, this opening scene situates us in another realm and puts us in quite a different state of mind. The film opens with a picturesque view of a green and lush country landscape. Birds are chirping as beautiful piano music cuts through. Behind the trees a single ray of sunlight slowly rises and illuminates the screen. The camera cuts to Elizabeth, played by the very recognizable Keira Knightley. She is simply clad, fresh faced and walking through the grounds while reading a book she seems very much engaged in. The next shot informs us that she has reached the last page and as she closes the book, having finished it, she holds it close to her chest, smiles and releases a small sigh. We see her approaching Longbourn which appears to be a stately farmhouse with ducks, chickens and pigs running through the white linen. Along with Elizabeth, we sneak up from the back door as the camera starts roaming the halls and rooms of the house. It is almost as if we were a fly on the wall. Laughter and commotion (alongside a little bit of messiness) are all around as we watch Elizabeth on the outside looking in on her parents having a heated conversation about the new tenant at Netherfield Hall. Next, we see all four Bennet girls — except Mary — eavesdropping on their parents, sharing a laugh. We get an image of domestic bliss with all the girls excited about meeting Mr. Bingley as they frolic and dance around their drawing room. Still, amused as she may seem, Elizabeth does not join in on the dancing, running and fussing round and again, is quite pleased with being an onlooker. The scene ends with a shot of Longbourn's front entrance and as the camera takes its distance the girlish laughter is drowned in music. It is a snapshot of a simple yet loving home with an overbearing yet comical mother and a blasé but affectionate father filled with sisterly love: not quite the image we get in 1995's version or in the original novel.

If Austen's opening words were so successful in capturing the essence of the novel, how do these opening scenes encapsulate the tone and atmosphere of the adaptations they introduce us to? It is no secret that image changes the emphasis and highlights what producers or directors choose to put forward. Indeed, visual choices in an adaptation can remold the moral and the message of the novel. The 1995 BBC mini-series received worldwide acclaim and popularity for two cardinal reasons that actually seem to contradict each other. The apparent fidelity of the adaptation to

Austen's text won over critics and Austen purists alike. However, at the same time it was the "Extra Darcy", that is, the additional and purposeful emphasis placed on his character, that had female viewers around the world swooning. The BBC's sexy Mr. Darcy is quite different from his literary ancestor and moreover, our access to his thoughts and feelings far exceeds anything we might find in the novel. Jen Camden (par. 4) and Lisa Hopkins have commented on the process of eroticizing and fetishizing Darcy's body in this adaptation with Hopkins asserting that his character is being offered up to the female gaze (112). Cheryl L. Nixon also comments on Darcy's excess of emotions in this adaptation and views his character's multiple physical activities as an outlet through which he channels these overwhelming feelings he cannot express (31). It is important to note that none of these physical activities appear in the novel and they are all part of what many have already called "the new Darcy". This combination between the display of Darcy as a physically active sexual object and the unprecedented emphasis placed on his character's inner processes and perspective complicates and challenges our reading of both the cinematic text and that of the original novel.

The issue of "the gaze" is of great significance here, particularly if we go back to the opening scene. Since it was coined by Laura Mulvey in the 1970's, the trope of the "male gaze" has been prevalent in practically every aspect of visual art. Indeed, placing the audience or viewers within the perspective of the heterosexual male, seems, to this day, to be the norm in mainstream Hollywood; so when critics like Lisa Hopkins identify the emergence of the female gaze (112) in such a distinguished high profile production, one cannot help but revel in this tipping of the scale. However, taking a closer look at the opening scene and freeing oneself from the infatuation with this version of Darcy, might uncover a different point of view entirely.

As I have mentioned, the opening scene is packed with masculine energy and sets the viewer in a very particular mood. The decision to portray Bingley and Darcy in the opening, immediately places them in the "driver's seat": They are at the helm of this narrative and they are the ones who leave a lasting first impression and will probably push the storyline further. Furthermore, if it is the gaze that we are discussing here, consider for a moment the significance of the fact that Bingley and Darcy are the ones



holding the gaze in the opening shot, as they survey the country and overlook Netherfield. Also, Bingley's comment regarding Netherfield being a "fair prospect" is an interesting one since it, again, gives the power back to the male. If in Austen's opening lines it was the single man who was considered the "prospect", now it is the other way around: The estate, along with the potentially eligible women of the region, are all fair prospects in the eye of this male beholder.

The significance of the opening scene does not end there and in fact, it is my contention that it is indicative of a problematic aspect of this adaptation which many fans will probably disagree with — or simply refuse to admit. I find Narelle Campbell's argument about the conservative nature of this production to be quite illuminating on this matter. Campbell argues that this adaptation works to recreate and defend notions of masculine objectification of women, hence making it surprisingly less liberal than the original novel that subtly resisted patriarchal paradigms (150). How, then, does this opinion coincide with arguments regarding Darcy's transformation into a sexual object offered to the female gaze? Indeed, the opening scene sets the stage for a narrative that is no longer predominantly female. It is a scene packed with speed, force and masculine presence that promises that these two men are not only pivotal to the plot, but that their presence generates the energy that pushes it forward. Darcy's inner world is introduced to us right from the start: He has the reigns — most literally — in his hands from the beginning and it is therefore no surprise that his process of learning and yearning becomes just as important and as pivotal to the plot of this adaptation as Elizabeth's does.

Darcy is portrayed in a much more physical, sensual way, but I find myself disagreeing with Hopkins regarding his status as a sexualized body ready for the female gaze's consumption. Instead, I believe that the emphasis on Darcy's sexual and emotional frustrations and his eventual inner growth causes audiences to identify with him thus taking on his perspective as well as Elizabeth's. If the novel is the story of Elizabeth Bennet, the BBC's production is a story of two equally engaging protagonists. Going back to the opening scene, Bingley and Darcy seem to be masters of all they survey and although the audience gets their share of "sexy Darcy", it seems that the female gaze is somewhat skewed here. I argue that in the end, as in the beginning, it is Darcy who holds the gaze since

the predominantly female audience members simultaneously sympathize with his character and identify with Elizabeth as the object of his affection. Women want Darcy (the new and improved one) to look at them the way he looks at Elizabeth. So in the end, he retains his control of the gaze as was given to him in the opening scene. This, as Campbell asserts, leads to an adaptation that ends up being more traditional than Austen's original novel and actually hinders some of her subtle efforts to subvert traditional patriarchal expectations (150). Furthermore, I also find Elizabeth's appearance in the opening scene to support my argument. I feel that I must disagree with Lisa Hopkins who argues that Elizabeth's location in the scene (on a hilltop overlooking the men), is symbolic of her elevated and privileged point of view (112). Taking into consideration my arguments thus far, this statement by Hopkins is also quite debatable. Indeed, it seems that Lizzy sees "the whole picture" since geographically at least she is placed on higher grounds. However, is her point of view really privileged in this adaptation? If anything, as I have attempted to argue here, it has fierce competition from Darcy's point of view that comes into play in this adaptation. Also, if one wished to find symbolism in the positioning of the characters in this opening scene, I believe Lizzy's location leaves her at a disadvantage since she might be "elevated" both physically and spiritually, but the men on the ground are the ones running the show and she, remote and removed from their conversation, unable to hear their exchange, will ultimately find herself playing by their rules.

Joe Wright's 2005 big screen adaptation of *Pride and Prejudice* takes on an entirely different form than that of the BBC's production, and again, the opening scene, I believe, is highly symbolic and indicative of things to come. The soft music and pastoral landscape set a much gentler tone than the BBC's galloping horses and the single ray of sunshine that pierces through the trees not only illuminates the screen but also suggests another sort of illumination, an emotional and sexual one, which Elizabeth is set to undergo throughout the film. This time, there are no horses or dashing gentleman and the first face we encounter is Elizabeth's (as played by Knightley). She is put back in focus and almost immediately we get the impression that she will be our guide through this film. Unlike the 1995 Elizabeth, this Elizabeth is not picking flowers and skipping joyfully, she is slowly pacing through the countryside while thoroughly enjoying her

book. Critics like Camden (par. 3) and Catherine Stewart-Beer (par. 2) have identified the shift in focus in this adaptation which now returns to the heroine. The film starts with Elizabeth and stays with her as we get to share her perspective as she makes her way through the rustic scenery and her overrun home.

I wish to return for a moment and discuss the significance of the book Elizabeth is reading when we first meet her. Indeed, as Carol Dole notes, this film was produced and marketed in order to have a crossover appeal and this certainly explains the casting of Knightly as the lead as well as some of the other choices that I will later address (par. 8). As I see it, there is something quite relatable and also a bit commonplace in modern films geared at a younger audience about a pretty yet unkempt heroine who is brainy, bookish, a little geeky and at times too smart for her own good. This is the type of character that usually ends up entangled in a love-hate relationship with the coolest, wealthiest most popular boy in class. Eventually, the two have to grow, understand where the other person is coming from and figure out how to be together in spite of society's disapproval of their relationship. Speaking in the most generic notions, this archetypal teen movie plot sounds remarkably similar to that of *Pride and Prejudice* and with an opening scene that introduces us to the stunningly beautiful Knightly looking very plain and focusing on her book reading, we can almost see a makeover of both body and soul waiting just around the corner. Knightley, as Beer puts it, "has an air of a current day tomboy" (par. 14) and is there anything we enjoy more than seeing a tomboy turn into a lady?

Maureen Sabine also brings up an interesting point in relation to the book we see Elizabeth reading. As the camera leaves Knightley's face to focus on the book's pages we can see the words "The End" and realize she has reached the conclusion of the story. Sabine finds symbolism in this moment and notes that Elizabeth is probably reading "a tale that she will now get to live" (2). Indeed, the closing of the book may be significant since Elizabeth is done living in the realm of make-believe and in the story about to unfold she will be the heroine. Still, when readers first encounter Elizabeth in the novel she is not reading. More importantly, when she is shown reading in the novel she takes part in a highly significant and unmistakably critical conversation about women's education. It seems

that while Elizabeth's reading in the novel serves Austen's social critique purposes, in the 2005 movie version, the book-reading almost seems like a cliché trope used in formulaic teen movies. Showing the heroine reading a book, much like having her wear glasses, is a predictable and trite way to indicate to viewers that she has "a mind".

Critics have commented on the choice to cast Knightley as Elizabeth claiming that her fame and beauty often work as a double-edged sword. There is no doubt that the choice to cast her was made in an effort to capitalize on her looks and celebrity status, but at the same time the focus given to Knightley also leads to her character being at the center of this adaptation — unlike the BBC production. Whether this is a positive aspect of this adaptation depends on personal taste but it seems that Austen purists are not overjoyed with having Elizabeth's character in focus again since many believe this adaptation turns the novel into a generic fairytale that lacks the social criticism and the comedy Austen achieved in her writing. Still, one must consider the massive promotion this movie received and take into account the fact that it was not designed to please Austen purists. Critics are correct when they detect a strong sexual undertone in the film since it is — primarily — a coming of age story about a young woman coping with her emotional and sexual feelings. Elizabeth is on the cusp of womanhood and girls just like her served as the clear target audience of this film. These are the kind of girls who would identify with the brainy and bookish character we encounter in the opening scene, and like her, grapple with issues of sexuality, self-esteem and beauty. As the opening scene progresses we continue to see the ways in which Elizabeth is framed and characterized. We are with her, accompanying her as she observes and looks on, always from the outside. It is interesting to note that the Bennet family home in this adaptation is portrayed as chaotic but happy so it seems that Elizabeth's aloofness and isolation — as they are hinted at in the opening and later portrayed — do not stem from the dysfunctional nature of her household and family. For comparison's sake, if we go back to the BBC'S opening, we immediately see that Elizabeth, along with Jane, is the responsible adult around the house since both her mother and father are completely incapable (or unwilling) to maintain any sense of order or serve as any sort of moral role model. In the 2005 production, we do not get a sense of a worrisome parental situation and thus Elizabeth, like many

other girls of her age, feels isolated since she is starting a process of inner progression. She loves her family but she is presented to us as someone who is on the outside looking in simply because she has outgrown them — like a true heroine often does. Again, this is a notion that many contemporary young women are able to identify with since often, at a certain age, they start to feel somewhat estranged from their families. This does not happen as a result of abuse or neglect but ultimately because they are growing up. If indeed this film was designed to target young, intelligent girls on the verge of womanhood, this opening scene served that endeavor quite successfully and captured this intended audience's eye and mind almost instantly with a leading young lady who could easily be transported into their hormonal world.

To conclude, it is clear that the discussion over the representation of Austen on screen is an ongoing one and that any adaptation of her works is bound to expose the tension between the novel as a literary masterpiece of social critique and its conception in film, an industry that often balances artistic integrity with showbiz expectations. In this paper I have attempted to comment on the power of opening shots that I believe carry as much impact as opening lines — particularly where Austen is concerned. In the opening of *Pride and Prejudice*, Austen's ironic tone and sharp pen immediately invite us into the social and historical atmosphere we are set to encounter as we read her novel. With few words she captures the essence of what will soon unfold and does not forget — of course — to insert her own sense of critical mockery into the mix. An examination of the opening scenes from two prominent cinematic adaptations of the novel reveals a similar tendency as it appears that the visual and textual choices made by producers in these opening shots serve to illuminate these cinematic works in their entirety. Questions regarding the films' fidelity to the novel remain in constant circulation and it seems that no adaptation is able to please critics, Austen purists and younger audiences alike. However, one must remember that these films, precisely because they differ in the ways they choose to interpret Austen's notions of class, romance and human behavior, complicate and enrich readings of the original novel — they do not replace them.

It has been my aim throughout this paper to comment on the tension between the traditional masculine energy presented in the opening

of the 1995 BBC production and the female, almost modernized atmosphere, created in the opening shot of the 2005 adaptation. Regardless of my personal opinion of either of the films it is my contention that they are both effective in delivering opening scenes that successfully frame the “bigger picture” and place the audience in a very particular state of mind. Whether it is the hopelessly romantic female audience pining over Colin Firth’s Darcy, or the younger current audience looking at a heroine who can easily be their contemporary, these films, much like the novel itself, are proof that sometimes what you see is most definitely what you are about to get.

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### **Filmography**

- Langton, Simon. (dir) *Pride and Prejudice*, BBC/A&E, running time: 330 minutes, DVD, 1995.
- Wright, Joe. (dir) *Pride & Prejudice*, Focus Features, running time: 129 minutes, DVD, 2005.

### ABSTRACT

The opening lines of Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* have become renowned for encapsulating the author's ironic point of view on the relationships between the sexes within the marriage plot. However, two cinematic adaptations of the novel chose distinctly different approaches for their versions of the opening scene. The BBC's 1995 miniseries opens with a scene featuring the two male leads and is packed with masculine energy. The opening of the 2005 film adaptation, however, introduces us to our heroine in pastoral and serene surroundings. It seems that the BBC version was interested in privileging Darcy's character, and while many critics view this as a radical move, I believe the end result is a production more traditional than the original novel. Hollywood, however, was interested in drawing a young female audience to identify with a free spirited heroine. The choices made in the opening scene have a tremendous effect on the cinematic work as a whole and also raise important questions regarding the manipulation of a literary masterpiece for the sake of commercial success.

### KEYWORDS

Jane Austen; *Pride and Prejudice*; Film; Adaptation; Opening Scene

### RESUMO

As primeiras linhas do romance *Pride and Prejudice* tornaram-se famosas por conterem o ponto de vista irônico da autora relativamente às relações entre os sexos que compõem o enredo do casamento. Contudo, duas adaptações cinematográficas da obra optaram por diferentes abordagens na sua versão da cena de abertura. A mini-série da BBC, de 1995, abre com os dois protagonistas masculinos e está carregada de energia masculina. A cena de abertura da adaptação de 2005, por seu lado, apresenta a heroína num ambiente pastoral e sereno. A versão da BBC tinha um maior interesse em focar-se na personagem de Darcy e, embora muitos críticos tenham considerado esta visão um movimento radical, considero que o resultado final é uma produção mais tradicional do que a obra original. Hollywood,



contudo, tinha um maior interesse em cativar a audiência feminina, ao fazer com que se identificassem com uma heroína de espírito livre. As escolhas feitas na cena de abertura têm um efeito considerável no trabalho cinematográfico no seu todo, ao mesmo tempo que levantam questões importantes quanto à manipulação de uma obra prima para atingir o sucesso comercial.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Jane Austen; *Orgulho e Preconceito*; Filme; Adaptação; Cena de Abertura

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# Faithful to a Fault? Joseph Strick's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

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## Faithful to a Fault?

### Joseph Strick's *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*

Although his name may not, perhaps, ring many bells with today's film enthusiasts, there can have been few more outstandingly independent figures in the cinematic world than Joseph Strick; and even fewer who were more eclectic. His work in the short documentary field, for example, ranged from *Muscle Beach* (1948) on South Californian bodybuilders; to *The Savage Eye* (1960), a pseudo-documentary charting the life of a recently divorced woman; and the Oscar winning *Interviews With My Lai Veterans* (1971)<sup>1</sup>, in which five U.S. soldiers give their accounts of a massacre, covered up at the time by the authorities, at a Vietnamese village in 1968.

Strick is probably best known, however, for his literary adaptations. His 1963 adaptation of Jean Genet's *The Balcony*, was followed by a version of Henry Miller's *Tropic of Cancer* in 1970. It was X-rated but, as a typically unrepentant Strick responded, "If you're going to do Miller, you have to do Miller" (Bergan, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jun/17/joseph-strick-obituary>). His association with one particular author is, however, especially close: James Joyce.

Joyce loved films. In 1909, he even returned briefly from his self-imposed exile in Italy to open Dublin's first (and short-lived) cinema, the Volta. As his eyesight grew worse, Joyce used the idea of cinema, the "cinematograph" as it was then called, to describe what he saw with his mind's eye. In 1924, he wrote to his patron, Harriet Shaw Weaver, that "whenever I am obliged to lie with my eyes closed, I see a cinematograph going on and on and it brings back to my memory things I had almost forgotten" (Joyce, *Letters I* 216). Later in the same year, he attributed part

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<sup>1</sup> Pronounced "me lie", with the irony being lost on no-one.

of his delayed recovery from an eye operation to “prolonged cinema nights” (Joyce, *Letters III* 112).

Joyce’s friend, Daniel Hummel, told biographer and critic Richard Ellmann that Joyce “At first [...] had thought that [*Ulysses*] could not be translated into another language, but might be translated into another medium, that of film” (561). In fact, Joyce “talked with Eisenstein about it” (Ellmann 654) when the two met in Paris in late 1929. There was mutual admiration between them<sup>2</sup> but Sylvia Beach, who arranged the meeting at her bookshop, Shakespeare & Company, later wrote that Eisenstein had told her that “he would have liked to make a film from *Ulysses*, but he had too much respect for the text [...] to sacrifice it for the sake of the picture” (Beach 109). Warner Brothers made approaches about filming the novel in the early 1930s but negotiations ended when Joyce, unhappy with the general Hollywood approach, declared (according to Paul Léon) that he opposed “the filming [of *Ulysses*] as irrealisable” (Joyce, *Letters III* 262-63).

“Irrealisable” or not, Strick had, since the early 1960s, been interested in getting the film rights to *Ulysses* (Joyce’s transposition of the epic grandeur of Homer’s *Odyssey* to the everyday humanity of early 20<sup>th</sup> century Dublin, in all its complexity). Like Leopold Bloom, Joyce’s modern Ulysses, Strick had a Jewish immigrant father. This “controversialist”, as Strick described him, smuggled in a copy of *Ulysses* from France in 1929, when it was banned in America, and later gave his son some wonderfully down-to-earth advice about the novel: “It’s about life and people — you and me and all the rest” (Watts 11).

*Ulysses*, said Strick, “was around the house as a holy cultural artifact. People would come over and argue about it, not having read it.” Strick read it at 16: “I didn’t understand it but was fascinated” he told the *New York Times* in 1966. “It’s written like a movie. I still maintain it’s a screenplay” (Watts 11). When filming the novel, Strick felt that “Our obligation is to make a film good enough for people who have read the

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<sup>2</sup> “[Joyce] seems interested in the experiments with film language that I am carrying out (just as I am interested in his literary experiments of a similar nature” (quoted in Werner 496).

book. Our opportunity is to create an entirely new experience for those who have not" (Dwyer 6). In any event, Strick and his co-writer Fred Haines received an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay. "I just made it from the text," said Strick. "There are no new words. Who's going to rewrite Joyce? I know nobody that good" (Dwyer 6). His main work on the screenplay was, apparently then, that of selection and "it hurt to cut so much" (Watts 11). (They didn't win the award. The 1967 Oscar for Best Screenplay went to *In the Heat of the Night*, written by Sterling Silliphant).

Dismissing the idea of textual "sacrifice" envisaged by Eisenstein, Strick's original aim had been to make an 18  $\frac{3}{4}$  hour *Ulysses*: faithful to the duration of the action and to every word. Failing that, he'd make a trilogy. Both ideas, unsurprisingly, were non-starters: no-one would finance such projects. When the final 2 hour version was completed in 1967, however, it fell foul of censorship. Strick was amazed. Since Judge Woolsey in America had ruled, in 1933, that *Ulysses* was not obscene, Strick had been confident he would have no such problems and complained, "Can the position be that what is all right in a book is not all right in a film?" (Watts 11).

In Britain, according to Strick, Lady Dartmouth (later Lady Spencer, Princess Diana's stepmother) denounced the film as immoral to the London City Council, although it seems she hadn't actually seen any of it or read *Ulysses*. She claimed that if the film were released, there would be "public lovemaking in Piccadilly Circus". Strick replied that "the film was pretty good, but not that good."<sup>3</sup>

The British Board of Film Censors' concern focused on Molly Bloom's final soliloquy and asked for 29 sexual references to be cut. Strick's riposte was to replace all of the problematic footage with a blank screen and a high-pitched shrieking sound, which would make it impossible to release. After Strick had sent off this version, the Board's Secretary, John Trevelyan apparently phoned to complain "What have you done to your beautiful film?" The Censors relented on the cuts and passed it, but with an X certificate.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Strick in an email to Margot Norris, 3<sup>rd</sup> March 2003 (Norris 25-6).

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*

*Ulysses* did have considerable success on the art house circuit — a year at the Academy Theatre, in London, for example, covered the entire production costs (Norris 26) — but the critical reception was mixed. Richard Ellmann’s less than enthusiastic review for the *New York Times* complained, in referring to Bloom’s sexual act on the beach, that “Masturbation is in, cogitation is out” (<http://www.nybooks.com/articles/archives/1967/jun/15/bloomovie>). The reviewer for the *Detroit Free Press*, however, claimed it would be seen as “one of the great motion pictures” and would “stand alongside *Les Enfants du Paradis* and *La Grande Illusion*”.<sup>5</sup>

Nevertheless, Strick’s *Ulysses* is generally seen as “a noble failure” (Bergan, <http://www.theguardian.com/film/2010/jun/17/joseph-strick-obituary>). It was too simple for Joyceans like Ellmann; insufficiently cinematic for cinephiles, and just too complicated for the general public. Undaunted, however, and ten years after releasing *Ulysses*, Strick would return to Joyce, in 1977, to make *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Joyce’s first novel, in dealing with the coming-of-age of an artistic temperament, tells the story of Stephen Dedalus’s struggles against the economic and social decline of his family, as well as what he considers oppressive religion and the stifling parochialism and nationalism of Ireland at the time. Towards the end of the novel, Stephen tells his religious, parochial and nationalist friend, Davin, “When the soul of a man is born in this country there are nets flung at it to hold it back from flight. You talk to me of nationality, language, religion. I shall try to fly by those nets” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 184). Although Strick’s second Joyce film had no problems with the censors of 1977, it seems to have had less success in ‘flying by’ the ‘nets’ of time.

Various films have been made about Joyce and his writings; some more familiar to cinema-goers than others. For example, there is obviously Strick’s *Ulysses*; John Huston’s much praised *The Dead* from 1987; *Nora*, Pat Murphy’s 2000 biopic, on the early years of Joyce’s relationship with Nora Barnacle; and Sean Walsh’s *Bloom*, released in 2004. So what happened to Strick’s *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*, a film which

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<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Norris 71.



seems to have been comparatively forgotten?<sup>6</sup> Unlike *Ulysses*, *The Dead* and *Nora*, *A Portrait* did not, for instance, feature in Cork University Press's Ireland into Film series, which was published between 2001 and 2007. Although Strick's *Ulysses* is mentioned in *Roll Away the Reel World*, a collection of essays on Joyce and cinema edited by John McCourt, the volume is silent on his *A Portrait*. The film can be seen on YouTube — as “Rare Irish Stuff” (my italics) — and is available to buy from various sites (such as Amazon.co.uk: 53,384<sup>th</sup> in the bestsellers' rank (Strick's *Ulysses* is 7,075<sup>th</sup> at the time of writing<sup>7</sup>), but it is perhaps revealing that you can't find *A Portrait* on, for example, Pirate Bay: *A Portrait* doesn't seem to be considered worth pirating.

The opening title of Strick's first Joycean enterprise — “*Ulysses* by James Joyce” — imitating the covers of early editions, stressed the link between Joyce's novel and the film. In Strick's second Joyce film, “*A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* from the novel by James Joyce”, the opening title might seem to suggest a greater distance from the original, implying less fidelity. Joyce's work presents us with the changing times and personality of Stephen Dedalus. The style of the novel shifts as it progresses, with Stephen's growing maturity presented in language which develops in parallel with his own literacy and intellect. The opening title is, in fact, slightly deceptive, the film is very much “from the novel” (the “from”, in fact, emphasising source rather than distance) and represents what might be described as a remarkable abstention from the demands of artistic ego: *A Portrait* — like his *Ulysses* — was intended to be more about James Joyce than Joseph Strick. Not unlike a later adaptation, “Fidelity, a most unJoycean value, became a requirement of the film's legitimacy even before the cameras began to roll” (Barry 31).

Morris Beja has asked “What relationship should a film have to the original source? Should it be “faithful”? Can it be? To what?” (80). Strick's reply would probably have been “Yes, to the word”. A fidelity, without —

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<sup>6</sup> The same question might be asked about Mary Ellen Bute's *Finnegans Wake* (1966).

<sup>7</sup> This is not, of course, to confuse high sales' figures with proof of quality. It does, however, give some indication of how Strick's *A Portrait* has been rather left on the shelf.

as had been the case with *Ulysses* — the necessity, or sacrifice, of reducing and compressing; or adapting to the cinematic medium at the expense of the literary. Strick's approach was more in line with Geoffrey Wagner's idea of "transposition" than "adaptation", "in which a novel is given directly on the screen with a minimum of apparent interference" (222).

As Linda Hutcheon has noted, however, a common argument is that "film can show us characters experiencing and thinking, but can never reveal their experiences or thoughts" (58); and a criticism levelled at Strick's *A Portrait* is that it doesn't represent Stephen's development cinematically. In 1968 Pauline Kael, for example, complained that "the movie is an act of homage in the form of readings from the book plus illustrated slides" (170). Was Strick however, as Kael suggests, being faithful to a fault?

Siegfried Kracauer has argued that, when faced with cinematically challenging literary sources,<sup>8</sup> "the 'solutions' at which [film makers] arrive are mostly adaptations in a theatrical vein" (242), with the appearance of this alien genre obviously seen as an intrusion. Whilst Kael's criticism implicitly acknowledges Strick's continued avowed aim with Joyce — fidelity to language and structure —, it does not take into consideration the power of the performances Strick got from his actors on the screen, which never fall into the uncinematic theatricality Kracauer criticises, and are certainly more dynamic than "illustrated slides".

Near the beginning of the story, young Stephen (Luke Johnston<sup>9</sup>) witnesses the verbal battle at the Christmas dinner table between Mr Dedalus (T.P. McKenna) and his friend John Casey (Des Perry) on the one side, and Mrs Riordan (Maureen Potter) on the other; as Mrs Dedalus (Rosaleen Linehan), literally and metaphorically in the middle, struggles to keep the festive peace. Stephen's father and Casey are still in mourning for the dead Irish leader, Charles Stewart Parnell, whilst Mrs Riordan firmly supports the Catholic Church, which condemned Parnell for his relationship with Kitty O'Shea: a married woman though separated from her

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<sup>8</sup> Kracauer actually says "a cinematically unmanageable universe", which I feel would be rather overstating the case with *A Portrait*.

<sup>9</sup> The director's son, Terence, played Stephen as an even younger man (about 3 years old) in the film.

husband. As the battle reaches its climax, and Mr Casey's agonises, "Parnell, my dead king", the dramatic tension is enhanced by the simplicity and linguistic focus of Strick's filming. Young Stephen is fascinated: not by the ideas, many of which he surely can't understand, but by the emotion and, above all, the language: the words these adults are hurling at each other. He appears in brief close ups as the dinner (and the argument) begins; initially proud to be included in this adult world. Strick then concentrates on the protagonists, until finally bringing our attention back to the almost forgotten young boy, who now fills the final frame of the scene, silently trying to make sense of what these adults have just played out before him.

There is no other such ensemble set piece in either the book or film of *A Portrait*, and moments of passionate discussion are rare — despite the major changes in fortune suffered by Stephen's family, and Ireland itself, as he grows up. In *A Portrait*, Bosco Hogan's performance is perfectly in keeping with this approach. His Stephen is far less demonstrative and more distant than Maurice Roëves' in Strick's *Ulysses*. It may actually be closer, more faithful (to introduce a moot point, especially as we are dealing with two very different novels) to the Dedalus expected by some readers. As in *A Portrait*, there are moments when Hogan's Stephen does actually smile... but not many.

In a second sequence, the distinguished British actor, John Gielgud, briefly but significantly appears as Father Arnall, the priest who fills Stephen with visions of torment and eternal damnation through the words of his Hellfire sermon. The presence of this major actor in a cast that, at the time, was relatively unknown internationally might well be considered distracting, in that it possibly shifts attention from the effect of the sermon on Stephen to the character delivering it. The scene, however, not only clearly conveys Stephen's wrapt attention and reaction, but also makes us share his fearful focus on the words of the sermon. The camera, in fact, keeps a near-relentless focus on Dedalus, as he suffers under the fire and brimstone of Arnall's words. We shift from the priest to Stephen, as the rest of the congregation is forgotten and the public sermon becomes a private torment for Dedalus, almost squirming within the tightly framed close-ups in which Father Arnall's words seem to have bound him.

Near the close of the book a student friend, Mulrennan, tells Stephen

about a conversation he has recently had with an old Irish speaker. Strick makes a composite character of Mulrennan and Davin — the latter being the friend Dedalus talked to earlier in the novel about “flying by” the “nets” of Irish religion, nationalism and parochialism. This character receives Davin’s name (played by Niall Buggy), and his story is yet another event Stephen experiences at second hand, through words rather than deeds. Strick enhances this by actually removing Stephen from view. He only exists here as a voiceover, through the words of his own diary recounting the story he has been told. It is Davin we see, as he walks along part of the rugged Irish coastline; alone and seemingly free of Dublin and all its nets. Like most of Stephen’s truly significant experiences — sexual awakening importantly aside — this has been essentially verbal; and what he makes of Davin’s tale combines with the charge of those previous verbal encounters to galvanise him, finally, into action.

For Linda Hutcheon, “it is true that the novel’s emphasis on language — Stephen’s obsession with words, written and oral [...] is sacrificed to the visual in the film adaptation” (57). Is it true? I would argue that Stephen’s disembodied voice here is indicative not only of his future absence but also, in fact, of the power of language and, crucially, his becoming through it the artist of his own conception who “like the God of creation, remains within or behind or beyond or above his handiwork, invisible, refined out of existence” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 194).

Brian McFarlane has pointed out that “a film-maker who admires a novel may legitimately feel challenged to represent in audio-visual images as close a correspondence as he can to his own personal response to what the novel has created in purely verbal terms” (194). Strick’s “personal response” was, as we have seen, to Joyce’s language and so his fidelity was primarily to the word, the essence of the novel for him: he was filming the book rather than turning the book into a film and wished “to preserve intact [the original’s] essential contents and emphases” (Kracauer 239).

In *A Portrait*, as in all Joyce, this essence does not lie primarily in events and actions. In this sense, the film does parallel the young artist’s progress, with its language becoming not only more assured and detached but also self-conscious. Despite Stephen’s protracted conversations with fellow students over aesthetics and religion, for example, genuine debate is increasingly internalised in *A Portrait*. It is something carried out more

often with oneself than with others and “the fact that a novel involves inner-life processes does not by itself alone mark it as an unadaptable narrative” (Kracauer 242).

Creating a visual puzzle, the implicit replaces the explicit, with Strick's direction placing the emphasis firmly on this fundamentally internal discourse rather than the dramatic or even photogenic. It is the pursuit of a personal language that provokes the questioning hero into deciding to abandon what Hugh Leonard called the four great “Fs” of Ireland — family, friends, fatherland and faith (Leonard 5) — for the life of the exile and the artist. The difficulty for some viewers may well be that hearing ideas and arguments on religion and aesthetics — when we are only given one chance to absorb their meaning — is significantly different from reading and re-reading them. On this point, however, Strick is demanding and makes no concessions: what is difficult for the artist, should be difficult for the artist's audience.

Both Stephen and his creator were driven by language, and Strick wanted to present that even within the primarily visual medium of the cinema. In working out his fascination for Joyce, he wanted to create literary cinema, a cinema of words. In taking on this challenge, he was as determined as Stephen who, in *Ulysses*, claimed that “a man of genius makes no mistakes. His errors are volitional and are the portals of discovery” (Joyce, *Ulysses* 243). Although Strick never claimed to be “a man of genius” he was, like Stephen in *A Portrait*, “not afraid to make a mistake, even a great mistake, a lifelong mistake, and perhaps as long as eternity too” (Joyce, *A Portrait* 223) in pursuing what he believed in:

To those who say Joyce can't be filmed I just say, “Don't be ridiculous!” Perhaps someone else will do it better some day but if Joyce worked on film versions who are these bone-heads to say it can't be done? I think I got some of it right. All my movies look full of mistakes to me but every now and then there are moments which I believe are worthy of attention and will be seen for a long time (Bennett, <http://www.filmthreat.com/interviews/137/>).

Like Joyce, Strick demanded that his art — “full of mistakes” or not — be taken seriously on its own terms: that it be taken, quite literally, at its word.

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### ABSTRACT

There can have been few more independent figures in the cinematic world than Joseph Strick (1923-2010); and even fewer who were more eclectic. His work in the short documentary field, for example, ranged from *Muscle Beach* (1948) on South Californian bodybuilders to the Oscar winning *Interviews With My Lai Veterans* (1971), in which five U.S. soldiers give their accounts of a massacre at a Vietnamese village.

Strick, however, is probably best known for his literary adaptations, and of James Joyce's work in particular. In 1967 he adapted *Ulysses*, receiving an Oscar nomination for Best Screenplay. Despite having considerable success on the art house circuit, Strick's *Ulysses* is generally spoken of as "a noble failure": too simple for Joyceans and too complicated for the general public. Ten years after *Ulysses*, in 1977, Strick would return to Joyce to make *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Narrower in scope and more directly character-centred, *A Portrait* might appear a more easily accomplished cinematic project than *Ulysses*. This paper examines Strick's ideas of fidelity and independence in terms of both his subject and medium, as he approaches performance and identity in his second and considerably less well-known Joycean undertaking.

### KEYWORDS

James Joyce; Joseph Strick; *Ulysses*; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; Cinema and Literature

### RESUMO

No mundo do cinema, há poucas figuras mais independentes do que Joseph Strick (1923-2010) e ainda menos igualmente ecléticas. Contudo, Strick é mais conhecido pelas adaptações literárias e de obras de James Joyce em particular. Em 1967, adaptou *Ulysses* ao cinema, obra nomeada para o Óscar para o melhor argumento.



Apesar de algum sucesso no circuito do cinema alternativo, o *Ulysses* de Strick é geralmente considerado como “um nobre falhanço”: excessivamente simples para os joyceanos e excessivamente complicado para o público em geral. Em 1977, Strick regressou a Joyce com *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*.

Mais objetivo e centrado nas personagens, *A Portrait* pode parecer um projeto cinematográfico mais fácil do que *Ulysses*. Este artigo examina as ideias de fidelidade e independência de Strick, em termos de tema e *medium*, na abordagem da *performance* e identidade, nesta segunda e muito menos conhecida aventura joyceana.

#### PALAVRAS CHAVE

James Joyce; Joseph Strick; *Ulysses*; *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*; Cinema e Literatura

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Shaping Visual Identities in Art:  
*The French Lieutenant's Woman*  
in Literature and Film

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## Shaping Visual Identities in Art: *The French Lieutenant's Woman* in Literature and Film

The 1981 film *The French Lieutenant's Woman* by Karel Reisz opens with a striking image of a woman standing on a long, deserted quay. The woman is shown in the distance curiously staring at the horizon while the details of her face and clothes are almost deliberately hidden from view.

The film is based upon the eponymous novel by John Fowles. The image of a woman which is crucial to both novel and film originates in Fowles's autobiographical moment. In the essay "Notes on an Unfinished Novel" Fowles reveals:

It started as a visual image... The image rose in my mind one morning when I was still in bed half asleep... A woman stands at the end of a deserted quay and stares out to sea. I ignored this image, but it recurred... The woman obstinately refused to stare out of the window of an airport lounge; it had to be this ancient quay... The woman had no face, no particular degree of sexuality. But she was Victorian, and since I always saw her in the same static long shot, with her back turned, she represented a reproach on the Victorian age. An outcast (Fowles, "Unfinished" 13-14).

Not only did Fowles's dream give birth to Sarah Woodruff, the female protagonist of his subsequent novel, but it defined the principals upon which the fictional universe of the novel would be built. Thus, the narrative which was written along the axis of Fowles's dream encodes that dream experience. As the dream itself, it turned out distinctly scopic, dualistic and unclosed. My intention in this paper is to show how the novelist and the film producers, respectively, shaped the identity of the heroine creating in different media.

Before I turn to the visual and textual outcomes of Fowles's dream, I want to introduce a few arguments of the poststructuralist philosophers, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan, both of whom show interest in dualism — splitting and doubling — although from different perspectives: Derrida's is more textual and spatial, while Lacan's is rather visual.

In much of his writing Jacques Derrida attacked the binary system of signification. In his deconstructionist reading of Plato's *Pharmakon*, Derrida shows how opposite poles merge in a single word. The *pharmakon*, claims Derrida, means both remedy and poison and so already introduces itself into the body of the discourse as an ambiguous concept which shows that the words can be both one and the other (81). Derrida implies that *pharmakon* "constitutes the medium in which opposites are opposed". So the ambivalent word becomes the site of "the movement and the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other (soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.)" The *pharmakon* as the movement, the locus and the play "holds in reserve, in its undecided shadow and vigil, the opposite signification" (127).

While Derrida strives to conceptually overcome the binary vision of reality by opening up the space of interpretation, Jacques Lacan's main interest is in the split vision — a deficient view of reality as a resulting psychic projection. Lacan claims: "I see only from one point, but in my existence I am looked at from all sides" (72). The Lacanian split between the eye and the gaze describes the individual as being both the subject and the object of the act of seeing.

The "split" between the eye and the gaze—that is, the difference in their visual powers—produces what he calls "the scopical drive", a relentless desire to see more (182). Jacques Lacan insists on the preexistence of the gaze which is a psychic projection. Thus the gaze carries along the imagined reality, which is projected on the object.

In Fowles's dream the woman is both the subject and object of the gaze. As she is obviously "seeing" her own vision staring out into the blankness of time simultaneously she presents a screen on which whoever is watching projects her or his values. Thus, she is both the seer and the seen. Fowles deems that she is "Victorian" although she is *seen* "with her back turned". In horror? In fear? Out of repulsion? We do not know.

Despite the scopic quality of the text many directors found the novel unfilmable. Fowles reveals that after a decade-long negotiations with various directors Karel Reisz accepted to direct the film on condition that he “persuades Harold to write the script” (Fowles, *Filming* 36). However, he was reluctant to take up the job. Fowles was also happy with the choice of the leading actress and actor, Meryl Streep and Jeremy Irons. “My ... approval went to the casting of the American actress in the title role... [for] the metaphorical leap that such casting implies... The principal freedom that the heroine seeks is associated much more in my mind with nineteenth-century America than with Victorian Britain. I suggested as much in the original novel” (Fowles, “*Filming*” 39).

The novel’s major difficulty was “its stereoscopic vision: the fact that it is written from both the mid-Victorian and modern viewpoint” (Fowles, *Filming* 37). In the book, the narrator is a twentieth century man narrating in the Victorian style of omniscience. At the beginning the narrator intimates:

If I have pretended until now to know my characters minds and innermost thoughts, it is because I am writing in ... a convention universally accepted at the time of my story: that the novelist stands next to God. He may not know all, yet he tries to pretend that he does. But I live in the age of Alain Robbe-Grillet and Roland Barthes (Fowles, *FLW* 85).

By exposing the narrator’s dual perspective Fowles challenges the illusion of omniscient narration. In Fowles’s narrative the narrator is both inside and outside the story, “someone who could both join the action from within and stand back and comment on it” (Fowles, “*Filming*” 38). Thus, he “superimposes his modern perspective over the Victorian convention” (Klein 145).

In an interview the director Karel Reisz discloses that Pinter and himself “tried to find a filmed, not an equivalent — you can’t find an equivalent — but a filmed *notion* that would give us this double view (Kennedy). So, the modern viewpoint which is featured by the overt narrator in the book was included by framing the Victorian story within the story that the movie develops. Thus, apart from the Victorian lovers, Sarah and Charles, the film features another pair of illicit lovers, Mike and Anna. They are the actors who play the roles of the Victorian couple in a

film being shot. The film retrospectively presents the production of the film that we are actually seeing. The actors inhabiting double roles — Meryl Streep as Sarah and Anna, and Jeremy Irons as Charles and Mike — visually emphasize the continuity of ideas in the universe of the work, as the actors' love affair mirrors, in all major aspects the affair of the Victorian couple. As Karel Reisz explains: "In our film, the feelings from the Victorian story carry over into the modern, the modern into the Victorian" (Kennedy).

The stereoscopic component of the Fowles' novel has thus been retained by Pinter's ingenious intervention which secures that which "every component of the film exists simultaneously in two "realities"; temporal double vision presides over our perceptions of character, plot, and setting" (Klein 147). In his essay Fowles writes, "I think of the present script not as a mere "version" of my novel, but as the blueprint... of a brilliant metaphor for it..." (Fowles, "Filming" 39).

The strong visual quality of the text of the novel causes the descriptions to float freely between the narrative and screen. The film begins with the scenes which parallels closely the introductory descriptions in the book. So, at the onset of both novel and film we "see" Sarah in that "static long shot". What we see is a woman dressed in black, whose clothes conceal her profession, while her status and age present the "enigma" which the book and the film alike promise to disclose. We hold on to that promise, looking for the clues which will provide an insight into that silent image. Like the inhabitants of the small provincial town of Lyme, we are eager to see more in that enigma which Sara embodies. For her part, she is pictured as the reflection of another enigma which she is seeing out there in the distance. As her own looks epitomize what Victorians see in her, she is seeing the "other" of Victorianism. The dynamism of the seeing and the seen are exhibited in her clothing and posture.

The story-within-the-story is staged in the Victorian arena where a model Victorian couple is strolling along the coast of Lyme. The male protagonist, Charles, and his fiancé Ernestina are passing near that quay where Sarah is standing. Fowles describes her as follows:

The young lady was dressed in the height of fashion ... The eye in the telescope might have glimpsed a magenta skirt of an almost daring narrowness — and shortness, since two



white ankles could be seen beneath the rich green coat and above the black boots that delicately trod the revetment, and perched over the netted chignon, one of the impertinent flat 'pork-pie' hats... (Fowles, *FLW* 8).

While Sarah is described in this manner:

But where the telescopist would have been at sea himself was with the other figure on that somber, curving mole... Its clothes were black. The wind moved them, but the figure stands motionless, staring, staring out at sea, more like a living memorial to the drowned... (Fowles, *FLW* 9).

The juxtaposed images imply two Victorian female stereotypes — a model lady, and a fallen woman. It is suggested by many things in their attire and behavior — in colours (bright/dark), in clothing (fashionable/ageless), and in their demeanor (joyful/cold). In the scope of Victorianism, Sarah's personality presents a contrast to the type of femininity which was favoured in her time. Good femininity was supposed to be decent, elegant and innocent, as opposed to the bad femininity of hysterical lunatics and prostitutes.

The sharp separation between the images and concepts points to the way that the Victorians conceived the world — in terms of binary oppositions.

A little further Fowles adds to the description of Sarah: "She ... was a stranger to crinoline.... Her hair was pulled tight back inside the collar of the black coat — which was bizarre, more like a man's riding coat than any woman's coat that had been in fashion..." (Fowles, *FLW* 13) Charles's own Victorianism was most afflicted by her own look as "[a]gain and again, afterwards, Charles thought of that look as a lance", knowing that "[t]he favoured feminine look was the demure, the obedient, the shy" (Fowles, *FLW* 13).

The contrast between Sarah and Ernestina gained much critical attention. For John Neary, Ernestina is associated with "legitimate pleasures of married life", while Sarah is the 'instrument of destruction' of the very conventionality that Ernestina embodies" (168-9). In the same vein, Katherine Tarbox claims that, "[o]ne is the fair lady, the other the dark lady" (65). For Margaret Bozenna Goscilo, Ernestina is "a virginal 'Angel

in the House' who contrasts with the apparent whore Sarah Woodruff' (Goscilo, <http://www.questia.com/read/1G1-14334501/john-fowles-s-pre-raphaelite-woman-interart-strategies>).

Both Ernestina and Sarah are portrayed as the object of the Victorian gaze. Sarah is an outcast and a sad victim of an illicit love affair. She is also considered to be mentally deranged. In the view of the society, both literally and metaphorically, her uncanny presence conveys allusions to instability, marginality and danger. Above all, she is in every way, marginal to the domestic, kind, fashionable, feminine, as opposed to the pretty lady in the vicinity.

The need of the Victorian public to marginalize her is inscribed on Sarah's body, especially in that "stance" which Fowles describes. Her black, shapeless and unflattering shroud is the visual projection of the Victorian gaze and Sarah's defiance of the accepted traditions in clothes. Yet Sarah's "look as a lance" de-centers the binary world holding the trace of a new age when timidity is no longer the prescribed behavior for women.

The indication of gender indecisiveness in Sarah's clothes underlines her determination to be a stranger to the desirable. Her sexless cloak suggests a complete lack of appeal, femininity, smile, coquettishness and any desire to communicate. Her attire is accompanied by her unbecoming behavior — her manly ways, her independence and directness of speech and look.

Such manliness should be considered in view of her aim — the goal of freedom. By the masculine look she evades the social manifestations of femininity, shyness, indirectness of look. Grasping the idea of masculinization, she creates a space in which she can be free in an age when men enjoyed greater freedom in society.

In order to achieve freedom, Sarah is obliged to play within the conventional social pattern, pretending to accept the views of her society. That is why she invents a script for her role that encourages people to label her as Poor Tragedy and the French Lieutenant's Woman. Those scripts at once voice the Victorian gaze and secretly convey the fact that these are the scripts that she herself encouraged, exhibiting the idea of being beyond the ethics and the aesthetics of the age.

As Fowles claims, in the film we can see what novel shows in "words". The manifestations of the Victorian public eye are in the film

presented in Sarah's self-portraits. What she sees in the mirror is what the Victorians see in her own image. Drawing her own image she is trying to capture in art the Victorian gaze, or whatever version of the uncanny she is has been allotted by the reproachful Victorian eye. The drawings show a mediated view of Victorian values and readings of Sarah's personality — her awareness of the gaze. The drawings show Sarah's face marked by sadness, suffering and a deep vision. As Sarah draws what she sees in the mirror, the drawings present her own scarred soul in the Victorian environment. The female face on them is ugly, fearful, deranged, spiteful and tragic. She is presented as a "read subject" and the "female product of readings" (Hutcheon 161).

In his forward to the published screenplay Fowles comments on the difference between the media of fiction and film, saying that there are "visual things the word can never capture (think, for instance, of the appalling paucity of vocabulary to define the endless nuances of facial expression), and word things the camera will never photograph nor actors ever speak" (Fowles, *FLW* 36).

The scene on a local farm — the Dairy — presents Sarah as an outcast in an almost iconic way. The portrait of the farm in the text of the novel rises as if from one of John Constable's paintings. It shows coachmen, field workers, craftsmen and a couple of pensioners "allowed to live there" — an order that stems from centuries-old organization. Charles felt an almost irresistible sense of belonging there:

It was the great immutable rural peace that was so delicious to re-enter... It was symbolic, that stable clock, though nothing — despite the telegram — was ever really urgent ... green todays float into green tomorrows, the only real hours were the solar hours, ... [it looked] benevolent and divine (Fowles, *FLW* 171).

The idyllic image of life on a dairy farm stands a background of rural warmth and normality. Suddenly, the "benevolent and divine" qualities of that life are violated by the intrusion of Sarah. Fowles writes: "She emerged in full view of the two women at the cottage door (Fowles, *FLW* 172)." Fowles's comment on the difference of media of words and film is material here. Namely, in the film the scene shows two pairs of disapproving eyes

when “Sarah’s dark figure came into view” (Fowles, *FLW* 172). In them one can read a silent reproach and contempt along with a range of Victorian attitudes and values on women and sexuality. Holding to the devices which are available to a novelist, Fowles actually alludes upon the same issue of the “imagined reality” of the gaze as inscribed in the comment of a local man: “She been’t no lady. She be the French Loot’n’nt’s Hoer” (Fowles, *FLW* 77).

Her own sexuality presents the greatest challenge to Charles’s Victorian senses of duty and chastity. At first, Charles sees what the Victorian eye sees — the lack of conventional femininity. However, Sarah is “leading the way into another green tunnel” as a promise to show him a path to knowledge — to symbolically make him “see more”.

Paradoxically it is Sarah’s unconsciousness that makes the greatest impact on Charles, teasing his gaze, luring him to reveal her sexuality.

The girl lay in the complete abandonment of deep sleep, on her back. Her coat had fallen open, over her indigo dress, unrelieved in its calico severity except by a small white collar at the throat... There was something intensely sexual yet tender in the way she lay (Fowles, *FLW* 65).

In the text the image of sleeping Sarah raises associations to various Victorian cultural markers. Above all, Rossetti’s poem “Jenny” in which the poet expresses his feelings for a prostitute.

She lay curled up like a small girl under her old coat, her feet drawn up from the night’s cold ... In that stillness her light, even breathing was both visible and audible; and for a moment that she should be sleeping there so peacefully seemed to him as wicked a crime as any Charles had expected (Fowles, *FLW* 214).

Further, the reference to the poet Dante Gabriel Rossetti is material here as his attitude towards women was radically different within the scope of Victorianism. The allusion to a more modern perspective conveys the meaning of the new-age tendency to expose binary thinking with its biased attitude towards women. In the film sequence based on this passage, the fascination, mixed with fear and hope on the face of Jeremy Irons suggests that Charles is finally ready to transgress the limits of his world.

The unfathomable mystery of the main heroine is epitomized in the novel's several endings. The first ending is a conventional Victorian "happy end" in which Charles abandons Sarah and marries Ernestina. This is right away dismissed as Charles's "imagination", or "what might have happened" (Fowles, *FLW* 295). The second two endings which one after another "close" the text of the novel, feature two plausible outcomes — the one in which Sarah and Charles stay together and the one in which they fall apart. Rejecting the possibility of the first ending as a closure of the story John Neary rightly remarks: "What the two endings do together, . . . , is resonate with each other. . . . Charles is neither the man who wins Sarah, nor the man who loses her; he exists forever in the gap of difference between those two substantive propositions" (175). This leaves the hero in a vacuum, staring, like Sarah, into the blankness of time. Thus, the unclosed text asserts the novel's resonance of the Sartrean concept of freedom as one of the main concerns of both novel and movie. In the movie's final scene, Mike is, like Charles, "in the vacuum" of the unresolved issues staring through the window.

Karel Reisz contends: "I hope that by the end of the film the two stories are sliding through smoothly and that the audience doesn't really separate the two sequences" (Kennedy, [http://www.americancinemapapers.com/files/FRENCH\\_LIEUTENANT.htm](http://www.americancinemapapers.com/files/FRENCH_LIEUTENANT.htm)). By providing multiple endings Fowles deliberately denies the comfort of final closure of the story. In the modern story, Anna steps out of the period clothes and her wig for the role of the Victorian heroine. Symbolically, she abandons the script and thus enters a new land. Klein justly remarks that Pinter "endangers suspense by making the choice of an ending for the script a matter of dispute" (Klein 156).

The novel's two endings make the story forever linger in the "no man's land" between the opposing perspectives, yielding many interpretations. The last scene in the film shows Anna peering into her reflection in the mirror. Putting the wig of her role of Sarah Woodruff aside, she is left to her own dilemma of her unresolved relationship with Mike, and trapped in the numerous readings of herself that she sees in the mirror. The camera view shows her as unable to finish the story or to decide about her own version of reality, and as still wanting to know more, and to "see more".

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### ABSTRACT

The character of Sarah Woodruff from John Fowles's novel *The French Lieutenant's Woman* emerged from a daydream of its author. Her image embodies the world of Victorian England in which the plot is set.

In both novel and film she is presented as an effigy which is enshrouded in a mysterious veil. Her robe reflects the Victorian views and social behavior. On the other hand, Sarah's visual appearance epitomizes narrations of Modernity expressed in the alternative aspect of her double voiced character structure.

The hybrid identity of the imagined female inspired the hybrid narrative, and subsequently produced a double voiced film script. The hybridity of the character provides the channel through which the authors in their respective media approach the conflicting worlds of Victorianism and Modernity. The aim of this paper is to show how different media, literature and film, shaped that hybrid identity of Sarah Woodruff.

### KEYWORDS

Image; identity; Victorianism; Modernity; hybridity

### ABRÉGÉ

Le personnage de Sarah Woodruff de la nouvelle *Sarah et le Lieutenant français* de John Fowles émerge des fantasmes de l'auteur. Son image incarne le monde de l'Angleterre victorienne dans lequel se déroule l'histoire.

Dans la nouvelle ainsi que dans le film Sara est présentée comme une figure chimérique sous un voile mysthérique. Ses vêtements reflètent les moeurs et le comportement social de la société victorienne. Par ailleurs, l'apparence visuelle de Sara incarne l'époque moderne exprimée comme une voix alternative dans la structure diphonique de son personnage.

L'identité hybride de la femme imaginaire a inspiré le texte hybride qui a, par la suite, engendré le scénario du film constitué de la narration à deux voix. L'ambiguïté comme caractéristique d'un personnage littéraire fournit un canal par

lequel les auteurs de deux médias différents, littérature et film, conçoivent deux mondes opposés, celui de l'époque victorienne et celui de la modernité. L'objectif de cet essai est de montrer comment les différents médias, littérature et film, présentent l'identité hybride de Sarah Woodruff.

MOTS CLÉS

Image; identité; époque victorienne; modernité; ambiguïté

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# LANDSCAPES AND THE UNCONSCIOUS



# Social Order and Subconscious Disorder: The Gothic Aesthetic of David Lynch

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## Social Order and Subconscious Disorder: The Gothic Aesthetic of David Lynch

From its inception, the Gothic mode is structurally and thematically associated with the irrational, the ambiguous, the chaotic, and the hidden; its fiction is populated by monstrous figures, by hybrids and other imaginary dwellers of the dark side; it is an aesthetic rooted in the intuition of a paranormal and supernatural realm, of a world that transcends human reason and therefore contests anthropocentric reality.

As Fred Botting has indicated, US director David Lynch's filmic oeuvre may be viewed as aesthetically Gothic (114). Characteristics of Lynch's cinematic work that allow me to place it within the Gothic legacy include: the choice of eerie settings; the typically obscure atmospheric context (dark-toned photography and brooding sound design); the element of "the secret" that is central to all his plots; an obsession with taboo topics such as incest and sexual perversion; a fascination for extreme emotional states; a circular rendering of space and time (and the consequential co-existence of the dead and the living); the exploration of hyper-subjectivity, whereby images become "psychic" or reflective of the characters' interior life; an intensive animism endowing non-human materials with agency; and a frequent use of the motif of the "double" in settings, plot, theme and characterization. In this article, I focus on a single Gothic aspect of his work, namely that of doubling — as expressed in *Eraserhead* (1977), *Twin Peaks* (1989-91), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) — so as to reveal how such aesthetic doubleness becomes political by highlighting the existing tension between social surfaces and subconscious individual drives in contemporary western culture.

In *Screening the Gothic*, Lisa Hopkins asserts that "the classic genre marker of the Gothic in film is doubleness, for it is the dualities typically created by the Gothic that invest it with its uncanny ability to hold its darkly shadowed mirror up to its own age" (xi). In effect, the motif of the

double is also found in Expressionist and Surrealist film but this is most likely due to a shared fascination by both avant-garde movements with the preceding Gothic-Romantic imageries, ideas, narratives and techniques.<sup>1</sup> Significantly, Lynch's filmic work is recurrently associated to all three aesthetic legacies, which although theoretically distinctive are nonetheless interconnected.<sup>2</sup>

The motif of the double points to the powerful contrast between normative morality and non-normative desire, played not only within the individual psyche but also in social and familial contexts. At the psychic level, doubleness suggests that individuals have a bifurcated existence, experiencing at a surface level the "reality" of concrete events, and at a hidden level inexplicable emotions and perceptions, of which they are normally unaware. At the latter subconscious level, however, there are moments of deep perception that direct the self toward knowledge, and which are often far more valuable than the "factual" experience of events. Doubleness is related to Otherness, to the idea that there may exist an alternative being within the self, distinct from the perceived self. At the social level, doubleness is indicative of a dark underside of normative reality; it refers to the non-normative, the oppositional or the "lesser" one, in terms of gender, class, and ethnicity.

Gothic doubleness in Lynch's cinematic work is most apparent in *Mulholland Drive* (2001). Center stage we have Betty (Naomi Watts), an angelic blonde just arrived in Hollywood, and Rita (Laura Harring), a dark-haired femme fatale recovering from a car accident. Halfway through the film Rita is disguised as a luminous blonde identical to Betty; soon after their sexual involvement, the cheerful and talented actress Betty turns out to be a bitter homicidal "loser" by the name of Diane Seldwig, and the

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<sup>1</sup> Although the motif of the double became popular in late eighteenth century Gothic literature, the concept can already be found in ancient Eastern and Western cultural traditions.

<sup>2</sup> For a discussion on the relationship between Gothic and Expressionism in film see Misha Kavka, "Gothic on Screen," in Jerrold Hogle ed., *The Cambridge Companion to Gothic Fiction* (New York: Cambridge University Press 2002), 209-228. See Mary Ann Caws ed., *Surrealism* (New York: Phaidon, 2004) for the crucial affinity of the movement with the Gothic mode.

amnesiac mysterious Rita becomes Camilla Rhodes, a ruthless and successful movie star. The two end up dead, the latter murdered, and the former through suicide. These two characters are evidently reversed images of one another, each an apparition of the other, an inverted double or *doppelgänger*.<sup>3</sup>

The motif of the double may very well be the most central structural element at work in *Mulholland Drive*. Most critics assume that the film displays a dual plot, whereby three quarters of the narrative represents the “fantasy” played out in Diane’s mind (in which she imagines herself as Betty), and the last quarter expresses her true harsher “reality”. Such diegetic explanation is reductive not only of the film’s complexity, but also of its power to evoke richer ideas in cinematic form.<sup>4</sup> Conversely, I consider that the effect of doubleness in *Mulholland Drive* is multiple and endless — in plot, settings and characterization — resulting in an infinite reduplication of mirror images or *mise-en-abîme*. The doubling effect is so extensive that there are two Bettys (the Canadian actress-to-be and the charming waitress), two Ritas (the amnesiac femme fatale and Rita Hayworth as Gilda), two Dianes (the failed actress and the unattractive waitress), two Camilla Rhodes (a blonde one, associated with the mafia; and a brunette one, involved with a director), two Cocos, two Adams, two boxes, two keys, two telephones, and so on.

This infinite reduplication suggests that personal identities are unstable;<sup>5</sup> that so-called “real life” is a theatre of simulated performances;

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<sup>3</sup> The motif of the double is characteristic of Gothic English fiction, and is notably found in Mathew Gregory Lewis’s *The Monk* (1796), in Edgar Allan Poe’s *William Wilson* (1837), and in Louis Stevenson’s *Doctor Jekyll and Mr. Hyde*. The *doppelgänger* (or infernal negative) of Betty/Rita is reinforced when the pair decides to call the house of someone by the name of Diane Seldwig. “It’s weird to be calling myself”, states Rita when she dials the telephone. “Hi, it’s me”, we hear the voice of Betty/Diane immediately afterward, on the answering machine.

<sup>4</sup> As Robert Sinnerbrink suggests, Lynch “can be regarded as a cinematic philosopher-artist, presenting thought through sound and image (“ideas”, to use Lynch’s term)”. Available at: <http://www.film-philosophy.com/vol9-2005/n34sinnerbrink>. [Last accessed 6/05/2013].

<sup>5</sup> As Martha Nochimson points out, throughout the film both Rita and Betty “fan out into multiple images of themselves” (42).

that there is a horribly corrupt and obscure underside to Hollywood's fabricated archetypes of moral goodness and unspoiled beauty;<sup>6</sup> and that there are no clear-cut frontiers between the world of dream and fantasy and the world of conscious reality. As Shakespeare phrased it four centuries ago in *The Tempest*, "we are such stuff as dreams are made on".

The motif of the double in Gothic fiction allows for the blurring of the boundaries between imaginary and real worlds. As Fred Botting notes, in Gothic aesthetics,

Reality and fiction are not clearly separated, but are tortuously entwined [...]. The horrific is absorbed into the banal and everyday world [...]. We are not allowed to break the spell that binds to the world of horrors, and recover the soothing realities and comforts of ordinary life. (70-1)

Such persistent interplay between dual opposites (good and evil, light and dark, real and imaginary) generates what Sigmund Freud termed "the uncanny", a sensation of dread and creeping horror that is aroused when something familiar suddenly becomes strange, or when something unfamiliar is invested with a haunting familiarity. According to Freud, whose own theories have been deemed aesthetically Gothic,<sup>7</sup> the uncanny is something that has been estranged in the mind through a process of repression; it is something unconsciously hidden, which is suddenly brought to consciousness.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> When asked to discuss the film in the New York Film Festival 2001 press conference, Lynch repeatedly referred to the "human putrefaction" at the core of Hollywood's factory of toxic clichés and illusions. See Martha Nochimson, "Mulholland Drive", 39.

<sup>7</sup> According to Lisa Hopkins, "It was to Gothic literature that Freud turned for some of his key ideas and phrases" (xiii). Maurice Lévy argues that the greatest Gothic writer of the twentieth century was Sigmund Freud. According to him, psychoanalysis as a system "can be read as a universal Gothic mechanism, inside which *women* and *men* [his italics] have been struggling since time immemorial: the villain is the super-ego, the victim is the ego entrapped in the psyche—an enclosed, nocturnal place, which has the dimensions and haunting quality of a castle. A very gothic castle, peopled with the ghosts of past traumatic experiences and the suppressed thoughts or desires that swarm about the subterranean shadowy regions of the unconscious" (33).

<sup>8</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The Uncanny" (1919), 368, 394.



In *Twin Peaks* (1989-91), Lynch's "highly Gothic television series" (Hogle xxv), such an uncanny proximity of good and evil is shown to exist within the boundaries of community life and at the very heart of the family home. In typical Gothic-Lynchian fashion, the objects in *Twin Peaks* take on a life of their own and have the power to invoke mental associations. The archetypal object of the series is Laura's portrait: the clichéd photograph of an idealized all-American girl (Sheryl Lee) whose frozen smile hides unsuspected vicious secrets. This picture epitomizes the problematic relationship between angelic beauty on the surface and inner satanic desires at the core, a conflict that is not only psychologically played within the character of Laura, but moreover structures all social relationships.

All the characters in *Twin Peaks* have something to hide: adulterous affairs, incestuous desires, devious acts, criminal activities and troubled pasts. Suitably, the motif of the double can be detected not only in the names of narrative locations — such as the "Double R" diner, and the "Bang-Bang" bar — but also markedly in the characters' construction. Indeed, not only the characters seem to be possessed by a sort of Jekyll and Hyde syndrome, but they can also be grouped in pairs exhibiting similar physical and psychological traits. While duality seems to be the standard mode for most characters, there is also a bizarre incidence of mutilated locations and characters: the brothel named "One-Eyed Jack's", the one-eyed Nadine who uses an eye patch, the "One-Armed Man" who sells one-foot shoes.

The motif of the double in *Twin Peaks* seems to indicate the powerful play between surfaces and what lies deep inside, both in the human psyche and in society. Lynch expresses this intensely in an interview: "The inside/outside thing is... I've never really said that to anyone, but that's sort of what life and movies are all about to me" (Rodley 169). Lynch names the frontier place between these two worlds that actually intersect — the rational and the non-rational, the outside and the inside, the surface and the core — the "subconscious",<sup>9</sup> a space that in *Twin Peaks* is best

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<sup>9</sup> Differently from the psychoanalytical notion of the unconscious (which consists of repressed material unacceptable to the conscious mind), the subconscious (the term in English was introduced by Thomas De Quincey in 1832) corresponds to emotional and extra-rational perceptions beneath normative awareness but that may be accessed and rise into the light of one's consciousness.

represented by the Red Room, a theatrical chamber surrounded on all sides by red drapes, and inside which the actors move and talk in reverse.

*Twin Peaks* is a story about the duplicity of small-town America — about its apparently naïve way of life and underlying moral sickness — that targets the very center of the American Dream: the idealized happy family. This is performed in two ways: by showing home not to be a safe haven but instead a cradle of horror; and by disclosing Laura's father — the respectful attorney Leland Palmer (Ray Wise) — as the perpetrator of an incestuous relationship that started when she was twelve. Contrarily to the Freudian Oedipal model, whereby the female child innately desires the father figure but is compelled to repress her libido, in *Twin Peaks* it is a parent that lusts for the child and uses his moral authority to maintain an incestuous relationship. The cycle of violence does not end here, however, since Killer Bob (Frank Silva), or the abstraction of violence in human form, is in effect perceived by different characters and takes possession of other people in the town of Twin Peaks. This clearly suggests, in Diane Stevenson's words, that "not just an individual but a whole society has been formed in an incestuous cradle" (77).

A recurrent stock shot punctuates the series of *Twin Peaks*: the image of a set of traffic lights swinging on a wire and repeatedly turning to red. An identical set of traffic lights recurs in Lynch's latest film, *Inland Empire* (2006), where it once again expresses a sense of extreme desolation through an absurdly unstoppable mechanism that is oblivious to human existence. As the title indicates, the film is set in the inland district of Southern California (which includes a part of the Greater Los Angeles area), a region notorious for being a center of methamphetamine production, with a crime rate over twice that of the U.S. national average. Within the Gothic aesthetic to which the film belongs, however, what the title suggests is that we are probing into the central core of "Empire" and uncovering *the city of angels'* innermost inner soul. What we find in the subconscious of this "dream factory" (as Hollywood is so often named) is but the never-ending interior of a film studio, with divisions, corridors, and whole buildings seemingly made of cardboard, where everything resembles the somber scenery of a theatre stage or movie set.

The film's protagonist (a movie star played by Laura Dern) traverses the various locations — her luxurious home, the studio, the set, the movie

theater, the offstage offices, a stage where rabbit-headed humans are performing a sitcom, and finally the street — as if they were contiguous rooms, within an uninterrupted *mise-en-abîme*. These consecutive boxes inside boxes give rise to a pattern of dreamlike connectivity and continuously unfolding doubleness; as a result, Hollywood celebrities seem intimately linked to the financial mafia and to sex traffickers, as well as to the homeless prostitutes, pimps, drug addicts and criminals lying about in Hollywood's walk of fame. It is upon this sidewalk, on the intersection of Hollywood Boulevard and Vine Street, upon this iconographic location embedded with celebrities' names set in golden stars, that the protagonist gets stabbed with a screwdriver, falls down, and finally confronts the surface of the city face to face. While dying in a pool of her own blood she is comforted by a black homeless woman who insanely prattles about the impossibility of ever getting away from the endlessly sprawling city.

Monstrous hobos or disfigured homeless figures play prominent roles in Lynch's films, namely in *Twin Peaks*, *Inland Empire*, and *Mulholland Drive*.<sup>10</sup> Monsters in Gothic fiction often stand for psychological repressed material that is reshaped into nightmarish imagery and hysterical symptoms. However, as I have argued elsewhere, the Gothic mode is not just psychic but also political;<sup>11</sup> consequently, such apparitions of monstrous hobos in Lynch's films express the fear of marginalized existences that have been forcefully driven away from our deceitfully appeased social consciousness.

In *Eraserhead* (1977), Lynch's first full-length picture, the horrific similarly stalks both outside and inside the door of every ordinary home. The film plays on a man's (the ordinary clerk Henry Spencer, played by

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<sup>10</sup> In *Twin Peaks: Fire Walk With Me* (1992), a filthy and old homeless woman walks into Teresa Banks' trailer and peers at the FBI detective, without speaking a word. In *Mulholland Drive* there is a monstrous hobo hiding behind the diner's dumpster, with matted hair and face covered with dirt. This character is associated with death, since he provokes the sudden demise of a man who dreamt about him, and is seen turning over the mysterious blue box associated both with the murder of Rita/Camilla and the suicide of Betty/Diane.

<sup>11</sup> See Graça P. Corrêa, "Gothic-Romantic Ecocentric Landscapes in Lars von Trier's *Melancholia*", 197.

Jack Nance) fears of divine law (Man in the Planet covered with epidermic blisters while mechanically puling levers), sexuality (Mary X and The Beautiful Girl Across the Hall), marriage (social contract with Mary X and her family), and parenthood (The Baby), perhaps because they seem so oddly inseparable in our contemporary (both western and eastern) culture.

In unsettling dream-like imagery, *Eraserhead*'s interior and exterior landscapes suggest the existence of a machine-like surround that converts all figures and events into components or instances of its all-inclusive mechanism. Correspondingly, the spaces its characters inhabit are squalid and airless, with windows looking out onto filthy brick walls. Outside landscape has become as ugly, lifeless and wasted as the abandoned factories and derelict houses of the human industrial world; in effect what remains of non-human nature are rough mounds of mud and straw, such as the one positioned over the apartment's dresser. All of the film's characters — the Granny, the Mother, the Father, Mary X, Henry Spencer, the Lady in the Radiator, the Man in the Planet, and the femme fatale next door — are depicted as emotionless beings that behave like automatons.

The heterosexual act is associated with the carving of an undersized "man-made chicken," resulting in the release of a blood bubble from a hole between its legs. Sperm and fetuses float everywhere, and are occasionally crushed with delight. Fertilization of the female Mary X produces a Baby that consists of a calf's head and a torso tightly wrapped in bandages.<sup>12</sup> This hideous mummified infant, however, is apparently not only the offspring but also the duplication of the man who fathered him; further, he is perhaps the embodiment of every human, of an electrified world of people whose heads have been effaced, their torsos topped by pencil-top erasers instead of heads.

In Gothic fashion, *Eraserhead* holds a darkly shadowed mirror up to our civilization, revealing a nightmarish image of the human condition. Such a gloomy depiction of the humans and the earth they inhabit makes

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<sup>12</sup> Steven Jay Schneider notes that "By fashioning Henry's baby skinless, boneless and poised to spill its guts out all over the place, Lynch forces Daddy and audience alike to contemplate a living, breathing (temporarily, at least) transgression of the deeply-entrenched cultural opposition, inside vs. outside" (13).

the film a powerful political and ecocritical critique of a world in which organic nature and living creatures are reduced to the status of things and numbers — things that proliferate and apathetically breed yet other things, within an abyssal effect of dreadfulness passed on from generation to generation. Through the motif of the double, in this and his other films discussed above, Lynch exposes the hidden and often terrifying core beneath the gloss of normative surfaces.

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**ABSTRACT**

US film director David Lynch states that films should have “the power of good and the power of darkness, so you can get some thrills and shake things up a bit”. In this article I argue that a most distinctive characteristic of Lynch’s oeuvre — particularly apparent in *Eraserhead* (1977), *Twin Peaks* (1989-91), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) and *Inland Empire* (2006) — is its Gothic aesthetic quality, evident in the use of the motif of the “double” in settings, theme, plot and characterization. Through the interplay between dual opposites and reduplication of mirroring effects, Lynch’s works not only engender uncanny sensory landscapes, but also highlight the existing tension between normative social surfaces and subconscious individual desires, thus performing a political and ecocritical critique of contemporary western culture.

**KEYWORDS**

Gothic aesthetics; David Lynch; Doubles in Film; Political aesthetics; Ecocritical aesthetics

**RESUMO**

O realizador norte-americano David Lynch afirma que os filmes deveriam dispor “do poder do bem e do poder das trevas, de forma a suscitar emoções fortes e a agitar um pouco as coisas.” Neste artigo proponho que uma das características mais marcantes da obra de Lynch, particularmente evidente em *Eraserhead* (1977), *Twin Peaks* (1989-1991), *Mulholland Drive* (2001) e *Inland Empire* (2006), é a sua estética gótica, manifesta na utilização do motivo do “duplo” ou Doppelgänger nas personagens, espaços, temas e intriga. Através da interação entre opostos e da duplicação de imagens e reflexos, os filmes de Lynch sublinham a tensão existente entre as superfícies sociais normativas e os subconscientes desejos individuais, sugerindo uma crítica política e ecocrítica da cultura ocidental contemporânea.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Estética gótica; David Lynch; Duplo; Estética política; Estética ecocrítica

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Darkness, Ashes and Snow:  
Deadly Female Landscapes in  
John Hillcoat's *The Road* and  
Sylvia Plath's Poetry

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## Darkness, Ashes and Snow: Deadly Female Landscapes in John Hillcoat's *The Road* and Sylvia Plath's Poetry

“It is a world of snow now”

(Sylvia Plath – *The Collected Poems*, 178)

At first glance, any resemblance between John Hillcoat's *The Road* (2009) and Sylvia Plath's poetry could be deemed rather far-fetched.

However, those who are acquainted with the poet's poems about maternity issues, promptly realize that this dialogue between the word and the cinematic image is liable to take place because the scenes which appear on the screen will almost certainly strike a chord. As a matter of fact, both registers embrace a dystopian view of humanity. Indeed, the ashes, the snow and the darkness that tarnish the landscapes of the film are replicated in many of Plath's stanzas, specially the ones that deal with motherhood, particularly with the topic concerning female infertility.

Therefore, this paper will not focus upon the aspects related to the film's production nor the way whereby it is narrated or edited.

With regard to language, for instance, Plath's discourse is more emphatic, intricate and complex. In *The Road* the dialogues are scarce, short, basic, raw and rather straightforward. In this matter in particular both film and poetry diverge substantially. What is interesting is that they intersect each other when it comes to the images they evoke. Indeed, the dialogue established between the visual aspect and the word can be said to take place mainly within a metaphorical field. Indeed, we can say that Plath's language encapsulates Hillcoat's images, and in turn, the director's cinematic construction of the landscape is liable to be translated into the poet's stanzas. It is important to stress that this dystopian landscape that haunts the film plays a very important role, since we can say that it is up to it to fill in the gaps left by the intermittent dialogue that unfolds between

father and son. It speaks of an absent mother and brings forward the calamitous decay of nature apparently caused by men's actions upon our planet.

Hillcoat's film, based on Cormac McCarthy's novel, revolves around the journey of a father and a son towards the south, after a horrible cataclysmic event has struck the world. The hypothesis of a nuclear calamity is suggested as we are informed that "The clocks stopped at 1:17. A long shear of light and then a series of low concussions." (McCarthy 54).

Soon, the world as we used to know it falls apart. Cities can be seen burning at a distance. The sun becomes clouded by gray skies. The trees shriek and crack while they fall to the ground. The scarcity of goods and the general destruction trigger the return of men to their basic instincts. Plunderers, rapists and cannibals roam the land. In the film, they are referred to as 'the bad guys'. Before such a dismal future, mother and father sit down to discuss what they should do as a family. They both fear for their child who was born right after the incident. In this respect, the assessment that the mother does concerning their fragile situation is adamant. In a world where all the known traces of civilization are being eroded and all the taboos are allowed to be broken, she is willing to die and to take her son with her. Hence, her words are blunt and ominous,

Sooner or later — no listen — they will catch up with us and they will kill us. They will rape me. And they will rape him. They are going to rape us and kill us and eat us and you won't face it. You rather wait for it to happen. (*The Road* 2009)

Although the mother commits suicide, the father, imbued with hope, still feels that he is able to protect the child and promises to take good care of him. Propelled by a survival instinct, the father engages in a journey towards the south in search of a better life.

This suggestion about the occurrence of a nuclear war which emanates from *The Road* is also implicit in Plath's imagery namely in the poem "Three Women" since the barren lands that appear in the poem are infused with a "chalk light" (*The Collected Poems* 181).<sup>1</sup> In fact, in that

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<sup>1</sup> Further references to this work will henceforth appear in this paper parenthetically as CP.

same poem the feminine voice describes a post-apocalyptic landscape similar to the one depicted in the film, when she says: "The trees wither in the street. The rain is corrosive. / I taste it on my tongue, and the workable horrors, / The horrors that stand and idle" (CP 157). In another poem, this time "Walking in Winter" this imagery repeats itself, as the woman confesses,

I can taste the tin of the sky- the real thing  
 Winter dawn is the color of metal,  
 The trees stiffen into place like burnt nerves.  
 All night I have dreamed of destructions, annihilations-  
 An assembly line of cut throats. (CP 151)

Likewise, all the emptiness and devastation that both son and father come across in the course of their journey is replicated by the female who can't have children in "Three Women". She is walking in a landscape devoid of life, rife with dead corpses. Like the mother in the film, she also experiences the end of times, as her words show,

...the windows of empty offices  
 Empty schoolrooms, empty churches. O so much emptiness!  
 There is this cessation. This terrible cessation of everything.  
 These bodies mounded around me now, these polar sleepers-  
 What blue, moony ray ices their dreams? (CP 181)

Curiously, the association between the female body and its capacity of generating life is also alluded to in the film. In a flashback that brings to the father's memory recollections of his son's birth, we see the mother in labor. Intercut with this memory, we see the image of a tunnel, which works in the film as a metaphor for the birth canal. From this tunnel, a hoard of men presumably the 'bad guys' (cannibals), emerge carrying guns with their faces covered by masks. This association between such different images tend to show that this baby will be born to darkness, a kind of post-apocalyptic 'dark ages'. Indeed, in *The Road*, all traces of civilization seem to have been eroded, since now human beings are essentially guided by their basic instincts. Thus, it is as if now, the body of the world itself is busy reproducing death and evil. If we bear this context in mind, we can say that the bleak landscape from *The Road* works here as a mirror for the sterile female body that haunts some of Plath's poems which deal with issues that revolve around the questions surrounding the topic of motherhood.

In the film, the father and the son wander through a land scarred with signs of death. It is precisely this hostile and empty landscape that can be said to emulate the sterile female body that intervenes in some of Plath's stanzas. Actually, one of the female speaking subjects in "Three Women" feeling barren and hollow asserts, "I too create corpses." (CP 182)

Therefore, in order to survive, *The Road's* protagonists try to avoid cannibal parties and any human contact. Hillcoat conveys this raw image of a world where an individual cannot trust anyone. The snowy landscape where ash falls constantly to the ground offers no safe shelter to these souls who abhor violence, but who are also on the verge of committing violent actions if they come under threat.

In the poem "Words" the white skull that the woman encounters down the road signals the end of words corresponding to silence and death. According to the persona of the poem, these words are "dry and riderless" (CP 270) and one can perceive an impending sense of doom. Muteness is ingrained in the post-apocalyptic landscape and it can be felt with intensity both in some of Plath's poems and in Hillcoat's setting. Likewise in *The Road* words — a symbol of civilization- are scarce. The scorched landscape speaks for itself. In truth, the skull that the woman in Plath's poem discovers while walking down a road, symbolically replicates the line of skulls impaled on sticks that both father and son glimpse while they journey towards the south. In fact, images of implied violence permeate the film as they also find a niche in Sylvia Plath's text. For instance, in the poem "Berk-Plage" the persona comes across a landscape which is filled with "limbs, images and shrieks" (CP 197) that is quite similar to the one that haunts the two survivors who walk towards the south in search of a glimpse of civilization, guided by the hope of finding food and water in abundance. Likewise, in "Getting There" the persona, in the course of her journey, is confronted with a dismal view as she sees "Legs, [and] arms piled outside." (CP 248)

The idea of domesticity which appears fraught with flaws and fragile in Plath's poetry also seems handicapped in Hillcoat's *The Road*. Although father and son find some brief comfort inside an abandoned house they come across with on one of their ramblings, the act of entering houses means facing danger, because many cannibal parties take shelter there, making them their safe refuge. In one of the most striking scenes in the

film, the father opens the door of a basement of one of these houses, and becomes appalled to find people being stored up like food. Although the image that appears on screen is quite dark and diffuse, one realizes that some of these people are already half eaten. In shock, the father immediately shuts the door and runs upstairs, eager to protect his son from such an unimaginable vision.

Therefore, reminiscent of what happens with Sylvia's female persona, both the child and his father are forced to cope with a domesticity that is flawed: they hide under bridges, in caves, in drainage pipes, truck cabs or bunkers. The idea that the film hints at is that domesticity and familial union are at stake, on the verge of disintegration. Indeed, the domestic spaces that the film showcases seem to be phantasmagorical, dirty and infectious. In a similar manner, in Sylvia Plath's poetry, there seems to be a disturbance that undermines the expected bliss usually associated with the domestic space. For instance, in "The Tour" the persona describes a scenario of havoc featuring domestic appliances going out of control, while in "Lesbos" the interior of the house is portrayed as an infectious lair permeated by a "stink of fat and baby crap." (CP 228) In other dark-toned poems, such as "Poem for a Birthday", "Wintering" or "Nick and the Candlestick", caves, cellars and crumbling houses encapsulate ghostly spaces that allow no room for familial happiness. In "Wintering", for instance, the persona finds herself in a derelict room fret with detritus. She feels herself "Wintering in a dark without a window /.../ Next to the last tenant's rancid jam / And the bottles of empty glitters." (CP 218)

In an essay entitled "Mothers of Desertion, Cannibalism and Murder: A Familial Reading-Response to Cormac McCarthy's *The Road*" (2012), Magdalena Louise Hirt embraces a feminist reading of the novel. According to her point of view, it exhibits a rather unfair portrayal of women which is then transposed to the screen adaptation. In her essay, Hirt particularly focuses her attention on the absence of the female presence throughout the literary narrative, and claims that the feminine depiction can be inscribed in several categories: deserter, murderer, cannibal and inadequate survivalist. The author asserts,

McCarthy's male-governed society blames the mother for the father's and son's bleak, grey, and painful existence just as Judaism, Christianity and Islam blame Eve for being expelled

from the Garden of Eden. The exclusion and portrayal of mothers in *The Road* leave them without a survivalist role — mothers must grip a lamp from deep within the darkness to become part of the critical discourse. (14)

Indeed, at first glance, the figure of the mother appears to be marked by the scarlet letter of exclusion: she abandons the family by committing suicide and she lacks maternal instinct that would give her the necessary strength to protect her child; to make matters worse, she is even willing to kill him. Thus, for Hirt, the absence of the mother as a positive strength is conspicuous both in the novel and in its cinematic adaptation, a fact that, in her perspective, translates itself into a misogynistic view of women. Notwithstanding, according to my interpretation, instead of dismissing both Hillcoat's film and McCarthy's novel as misogynistic, one should concentrate instead on the B side of the narrative, the same narrative that talks back to Plath's maternity poems. The truth is that McCarthy's approach has to be read through metaphorical lenses. Like in Plath's bleak landscapes, the naked sets and the derelict homes, the misguided human beings that wander the woods and the roads constitute the vivid landmarks that result from the absence of the mother. In the film, the spectator can only have access to glimpses of the maternal presence that are presented in the form of flashbacks, memories and dreams that spring up in the father's mind. Interestingly, Hillcoat explores the contrast between the scenes where the mother appears, establishing a clear boundary between those which precede the catastrophe and the ones which occur after it. Thus, before the cataclysmic event, the mother appears strongly associated with nature, wearing flowery dresses, smiling and laying down on the grass while enjoying the sunlight. Intentionally, the director seems to be hinting at the *cliché* of a blissful mother, strongly connected to nature and here featured in perfect communion with a peaceful landscape. However, after the mysterious cataclysmic event, the images on screen lose its brightness and there is an opacity which can be tied in with the mother's sadness. This is a mother that has lost her hope. Like the earth, she has been wounded and joy has abandoned her. In this way, it is legitimate to conclude that she works both in the film and also in the novel as a fleshy embodiment of nature. Nature, like the nurturing mother in Plath's imagery, is falling apart and this tragic event is replicated upon the bleak scenarios, reflecting back



the growing lack of humanity that emanates from the film characters. In *The Road* there appears to be no home sweet home and legions of humans have now somehow become orphans.

In this sense, the presence of the cannibal mother in the film represents the pinnacle of de-humanization. In one of the scenes, both father and son see at a distance a party of cannibals, dirty and all dressed in rags. Among them is a pregnant woman. In the film, Hillcoat appeals to the spectator's morbid imagination, challenging him to imagine what the future of a newborn would be like in a world infected with evil. Conversely, in the novel this episode concerning the encounter of the father with this group of cannibals becomes the object of a shocking development. Both father and son, in one of their expeditions across the forest, come across a fading campfire. In a spit lie the remains of a small newborn, "a charred human infant headless and gutted" (McCarthy 212). Visibly appalled, the father realizes that the pregnant woman that he previously saw had been capable of sacrificing her son for the well-being of the savage group. Even though these events are explicitly told in the novel, Hillcoat's cinematic viewpoint only turns them into something implicit. Curiously, this allusion to cannibal mothers echoes Plath's paradigmatic *Lady Lazarus*, whose terrible anthropophagous threats uttered at the end of the poem still linger in the memory of those who have read them,

Beware.  
 Beware.  
 Out of the ash  
 I rise with my red hair  
 And I eat man like air. (CP 247)

When analysed against a gothic background, one can say that the feminine sublime inhabits the barren landscapes filled with ashes, leftovers and human remains. Traditionally in the gothic genre, expressions of the feminine sublime appear as striking intimidating depictions of womanhood under the guise of metaphors. Indeed, we can sense that behind Hillcoat and Plath's landscapes lurks a terrifying ghostly image of an icy mother that somehow brings echoes of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein, or the Modern Prometheus*. Resembling the mother's absence, the landscape where son and father move into has turned into a desert filled with ash and spoils, a kind of wasteland. Deprived of the mother's presence, this

landscape becomes a mirror for Plath's poetry: the land is barren, cold and hostile. In this way, perhaps we shouldn't consider Hillcoat's approach as encompassing a misogynistic view. Contrary to Hirt's pessimistic view regarding women's role, I contend that the director's intention (and McCarthy's as well) is to show us instead that a world unattended by nurturing mothers resembles indeed a world that has been struck by the apocalypse. In this sense, the presence of the cannibal mother in the film works as a kind of beacon that signals the end of a sophisticated and civilized world, given the fact that a mother who feasts on her child seems to have definitely lost all traces of humanity.

In a manner similar to what happens to the mother in the film (played by Charlize Theron), Sylvia Plath's persona is afflicted by a kind of asphyxia that seems to pervade the whole world. It is as if a wave of carbon monoxide had suddenly been released into the atmosphere preventing both of them from breathing. The crumbling of nature and of the earth as we know it becomes directly mirrored in Plath's female persona's body in "Three Women", as she claims, "I am breaking apart like the world. There is this blackness.../ The air is thick." (CP 180) Another female intervenient in the same poem declares at some point, "It is a love of death that sickens everything / A dead sun stains the newsprint." (CP 181) According to the female speaking subjects in "Three Women", this post-apocalyptic landscape is the direct result of the violence that has been inflicted upon the feminine principle which, from an essentialist point of view, usually appears associated with nature. In this fashion, they envision earth's revenge upon men, who appear in this context as agents of destruction, "Old winter face, old barren one, old time bomb. / They have used her meanly. She will eat them. / Eat them, eat them, eat them in the end." (CP 181) As a matter of fact, while reflecting upon the cinematic version of Cormac McCarthy's novel, one is under the impression that the planet is indeed exerting some kind of revenge upon mankind.

The feeling of impotence that strikes the mother in *The Road* is also replicated in Plath's poem "The Edge". Both mothers sense that they have reached a point in which there is no exit for them. They seem to be endowed with a sixth sense that whispers to them that there are certain sorts of evil with which they cannot cope with. In Plath's poem "The Edge", the mother appears to have reached the limits of personal exhaustion.

Having no food to give to her children, she first kills them, and then, she commits suicide.

The woman is perfected  
 Her dead  
 Body wears the smile of accomplishment,  
 ...  
 Her bare  
 Feet seem to be saying:  
 We have come so far, it is over. (CP 272)

Hence it appears that Plath and Hillcoat embrace a feminist approach to the extent that both of them seem to deconstruct the essentialist image surrounding the blissful and nurturing mother figure. Contradicting this stereotype, the suicidal mother or the murderous mother seem to offer a 'way out' for that traditional role naturally ascribed to women by society, thus opening a new alternative emotional space where all the tensions that revolve around maternity issues are acknowledged and ultimately expressed.

A feeling of despair that echoes the female subject of "The Edge" strikes the mother in the film when, in one of the father's flashbacks, she vents out, "What kind of life is this?" (*The Road* 2009). As we have seen, the father is persistent and poised to fight for his life to the end, so that he can protect his son. So, regardless of the consequences, he is willing to head south, despite the fact that he will eventually die in the end, victim of a pulmonary disease. Conversely, and following in the footsteps of the film's mother, Plath's female poetic voice announces, "I shall move north. I shall move into a long blackness." (CP 182)<sup>2</sup> Although this statement is highly allusive to death, it also mirrors the colour of the world once it becomes deprived of caring mother figures, a world devoid of hope, where sadness takes the place of joy and the grey of the ashes has wiped out all the original vividness of nature.

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<sup>2</sup> Mimicking Sylvia Plath's persona, the mother in the novel bluntly informs her husband, "As for me my only hope is for eternal nothingness." (McCarthy, 59)

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### ABSTRACT

This paper intends to examine the significance of the feminine presence/absence both in John Hillcoat's *The Road* and in Sylvia Plath's poetry. Indeed, both of them seem to reverse the role traditionally ascribed to women as bearers of hope, comfort and unconditional love. In the film, the mother cannot stand to raise her son in such a catastrophic scenario and therefore she is the first member of the family to lose hope, eventually committing suicide. She appears to be strongly depressed and, in this sense, she works as a mirror for the post-apocalyptic landscape where nothing can thrive. Like the hostile nature that surrounds the father and the son in their blind journey, the mother has nothing else to offer. Throughout the paper I will then try to show how the female sterile body depicted by Sylvia Plath, in her motherhood-related poems, evokes a kind of Mother Earth in decay as it appears in the film. The raw feminine portraits presented both by John Hillcoat and Sylvia Plath, heavily parallel women with grim reapers. Both on screen and in poetry, mothers become pure sources of death, eerie totems of flesh in which blood recycles itself endlessly, never producing life.

### KEYWORDS

Plath; Hillcoat; motherhood; landscape; post-apocalyptic; death

### RESUMO

Este artigo pretende examinar a importância da presença/ausência feminina quer no filme *The Road*, de John Hillcoat, quer na poesia de Sylvia Plath. De facto, ambos parecem contradizer o papel tradicional usualmente atribuído à figura materna que, regra geral, surge representada enquanto fonte de esperança, conforto e amor incondicional. No filme, a mãe não suporta a ideia de educar o filho perante um cenário catastrófico e, como tal, é, no seio da família, a primeira pessoa a perder a esperança, acabando por suicidar-se. Esta mãe sofre de uma depressão, e é neste sentido que funciona como se fosse um espelho de uma paisagem pós-apocalíptica de onde nada brota ou prospera. Tal como a natureza hostil que rodeia pai e filho

na sua jornada em direcção ao sul, a mãe parece nada ter para oferecer. Ao longo do artigo tentarei então estabelecer um paralelo entre o corpo estéril que habita os poemas de Plath, nomeadamente aqueles que se debruçam sobre a maternidade, e a “Mãe Natureza” tal como surge retratada no filme de Hillcoat. Na verdade, quer a poetisa, quer o realizador, ambos nos presenteiam com uma figura materna que se aproxima muito da ideia da morte. Tanto na poesia como no ecrã, a mãe assemelha-se a um símbolo da incapacidade de produzir qualquer tipo de vida.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Plath; Hillcoat; maternidade; paisagem; pós-apocalíptica; morte

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# Featuring Cardiff in *Pizzaman*: Representation, Identity and Stereotyping

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# Featuring Cardiff in *Pizzaman*: Representation, Identity and Stereotyping

## Introduction

*Pizzaman* is a 90-minute online Cardiff-based drama series divided in fifteen episodes, each named after an area of Cardiff. It was the brainchild of James Robson and Teilo Trimble and it was filmed over sixteen days in August 2009, in more than forty locations across the city and with around 40 Cardiff-based cast members, some of them amateurs, others with acting experience in series such as *Merlin*, *Dr. Who* and *Casualty*. *Pizzaman* was filmed with a shoestring budget of £2,000 and it was launched online in July 2010 with the support of the News website *WalesOnline*, which aired each of the episodes every Tuesday and Thursday until mid-August.

The plot is centred on two weeks in the life of Taj (Sunny Patel), a third generation Hindu Punjabi young man, born and bred in Cardiff. He is a pizza delivery driver who sees himself entangled in a number of situations he did not choose or which he is unjustly involved in. His girlfriend, Becky (Ruth Gibley), no longer wants to travel with him and is thinking of terminating her pregnancy, although Taj only becomes aware of this in the end of the series. Taj's dodgy boss, Nick (Kevin Welch), has been using the pizza boxes to delivery drugs to so-called VIP customers and blackmails Taj by making him work more hours. This is meant to (allegedly) pay off the insurance debt caused by the damage on his car when he got involved in a car accident with a Welsh Assembly Government minister (Jane Harding) who falsely accuses him of sexual harassment so as to get some publicity for herself.

This paper will examine this online community-based drama series and reflect on the ways in which it problematises issues of representation, identity and stereotyping. Taj's Welsh-Asian identity is frequently subjected to others' stereotyping and shaped simultaneously with Cardiff's cultural

and social identity as a capital city. Cardiff has a long tradition of accommodating different immigration flows which have contributed to the development of the city as the renowned “coal metropolis of the world” by mid-nineteenth century and to the cultural and ethnic diversity that still characterises Cardiff today.

### **Problematising Representation and Identity(-ies)**

Cinema acts as a fertile terrain for the construction and analysis of individual and group visual representations, while simultaneously revealing the complexity of their identity formation. Representations are socially constructed signifying practices (Hall) of interpretation that have the power to make sense of the world and transform individuals’ observation of reality into understandable perception. When depicting individuals or groups, visual representations may also enlighten the viewer about how identities are shaped, how these complex “changing and changeable cultural constructs” (Weedon 154) illustrate “what you have in common with some people and what differentiates you from others” (Weeks in Rutherford 88). Individual identity is dynamic, volatile, and relational (Weedon 19) and today “more contingent, fragile, and incomplete and thus more amenable to reconstitution than was previously thought possible” (du Gay *et al.* 2), especially when each individual has to negotiate a plurality of (sometimes conflicting) identities in the intricate formation of the self.

But if deemed complex when applied to the self, identity becomes even more elusive when applied to the urban environment since the culture, language, ethnicities, values and beliefs, place myths, and urban dwellers’ own individual and collective identities that permeate the city at a given moment contribute to the atmosphere of the place — the city’s *genius loci* and *zeitgeist*. Urban identity is socially and culturally constructed and it constitutes and is formed by these other identities and individual and collective appropriations of the urban environment through individuals’ everyday life practices; it is simultaneously reflexive in the sense that it is “both formed by and forms the landscape” (Knudsen *et al.* 133).

## Representation, Identity and Stereotyping in *Pizzaman*

*Pizzaman* aims at deconstructing dominant stereotypes about ethnicity, nationality and cultural identity, showing that the understanding of these categories is not clear-cut and that they often overlap, producing complex, dynamic and relational individual identities which, in this series, accompany the representation of Cardiff's cultural and social identity. Teilo Trimble, the creator and cinematographer of *Pizzaman*, stated that the idea for the series stemmed from "living on a street in Cardiff where I was in the ethnic and cultural minority — a Welsh White person surrounded by people from various Asian backgrounds, I wanted to interact with this part of the city and felt that it was under-represented in the media and there was a cultural gap emerging" (in Waldram).

Indeed, Cardiff boasts a rich multiethnic background that goes back to the beginning of the nineteenth century and especially to the 1830s, when different docks were built in the city to export the valleys' coal to different parts of the world. Progressively, Cardiff offered an enticing labour pool in docks-related activities, which attracted different immigration flows that proved pivotal to turn this port town into a multicultural and multiethnic city. The Irish were the first to arrive in the 1840s and 1850s seeking refuge from the Great Irish Famine, followed by the English and the Scots, at a first stage, and then by immigrants from different parts of the world (Jordan 59-60).

Between 1801 and 1914, Cardiff experienced exponential growth of its population and its administrative boundaries began to expand considerably (Daunton 6). Many of the immigrants settled down in Butetown, more sensationally known as Tiger Bay, a docklands' neighbourhood where residents shared everyday life working-class practices. It is estimated that in 1950 there were around 6,000 people from fifty-seven different nationalities living in this area, which extended for no more than a mile (Lloyd). However, in the post-Second World War the de-industrialisation process in the city had distressing impacts that led to the progressive decline of the coal exportation, to the abandonment of the docks and resulted in the soaring rise of unemployment and in the downright pauperization of the docklands' communities. The core area of Butetown, Loudoun Square, also called its "coloured heart", was thus the first area in the city to

experience urban renewal in the late 1950s with some of the two-storey houses that characterised the area being replaced by high-tower residential buildings, which eventually caused the disintegration of this community.

In the last decades, other immigration flows especially from Eastern Europe and Asia have also been contributing to the ethnic diversity that underpins Cardiff. Results from the 2011 Census reveal that out of the 346 090 people who resided in Cardiff in 2011, 9% were from Asian origin (out of which 2.3% from India), 2.9% from mixed ethnicity, 2% black, and 2% from other ethnic groups. In total, these groups accounted for 15.3% of the population in Cardiff (2011 Census, ONS), which is quite a meaningful figure when compared to the 8.4% of people of Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) origin identified ten years earlier (2001 Census, ONS). In addition to ethnic diversity, it is also important to consider religious diversity; almost 10% of the people who live in Cardiff have a religion other than Christian (this percentage might actually be greater since 7% of the population chose not to state their religion in the last Census) (2011 Census, ONS). The 2011 Census also collected data on national identity for the first time and this showed that 1.2% of the population living in Cardiff identified as being of Welsh identity combined with another national identity.

*Pizzaman* capitalises on Cardiff's rich diversity by setting the story in some of the most ethnically diverse districts in Cardiff, such as Grangetown (with 38% of BME population), Butetown (34.3% BME population), Riverside (31.9% of BME population), Adamsdown (27.3% BME population) and Cathays (21.4% BME population) (2011 Census, ONS) which, according to the 2011 Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivations Overall Domain Ranks in Cardiff (in Welsh Assembly Government), also host some of the most deprived wards in the Welsh capital, showing that ethnic diversity is still very much associated with conditions of deprivation.

*Pizzaman* actually presents the viewer with an itinerary of Cardiff, since each of fifteen the episodes is set in, named after and represents a specific area of the city (Episode 1 – Riverside; Episode 2 – Cathays; Episode 3 – Ely; Episode 4 – Grangetown; Episode 5 – Millennium Stadium; Episode 6 – Heath; Episode 7 – Cyncoed; Episode 8 – Tiger Bay; Episode 9 – A470; Episode 10 – Canton; Episodes 11 and 12 – Llandaff; Episode 13 – Plasnewydd; Episode 14 – Rumney; Episode 15 – Cardiff

Central). Cardiff acts as the backdrop setting for the series and different landmark locations in the city stand out, such as Cardiff Central, in front of the railway station, which hosts the first and last scenes of the series when Taj and his girlfriend Becky meet; the Millennium Stadium, which is also featured in the first episode when Taj is running along the Fitzhamon Embankment and where Episode 5 is staged; different streets in Cardiff's neighbourhoods; and Cardiff Bay, its 5-star St. David's Hotel & Spa and the *Senedd*, the Welsh debating chamber, where the Welsh Assembly minister enters in Episode 15 after talking to reporters about her false accusations on Taj's sexual harassment.

As a Hindu Punjabi born and bred in Wales and living in a dominant white Welsh environment, Taj is subjected to many different types of stereotyping. In Episode 1, Gethin (Thaer Al-Shayei), his colleague at the pizza delivery shop, tells Taj "So this is it. Last shift before you fly to the motherland?", to what Taj replies "I'm Welsh, this is the motherland." In Episode 4, there is a scene that shows a conversation between Becky, Taj's girlfriend, and her mother who is trying to convince her daughter that Taj is not a good man for her. In this scene, the arguments used by Becky's mother are that if Becky continues her relationship with Taj she would "end up running a corner shop or something" or would be "made to cover her face". Becky then replies Taj is not a Muslim, but a Hindu, though "not a practicing one", and that he is more Welsh than her mother. But although this scene contributes to challenging stereotypes about ethnicity and cultural identity, it does so by reinforcing existing stereotypes about religious beliefs and everyday life practices associated with Muslims, with asylum seekers, who are understood as a burden for the Government (when referring to Taj, Becky's mother also says "They don't have the same minds as us, Becky. They're only here because the Government never dealt with the asylum problem"), and about the Polish, who are usually perceived as hard workers (Becky's mother: "I do like the Polish though, at least they work hard for a living. I do like the Poles").

Two other scenes demonstrate how Taj's ethnicity and national identity are stereotyped. In Episode 2, there is a scene in which Taj is delivering a pizza to Ian, a student in Cathays, a traditional student residential area in Cardiff. When collecting the pizza from the house's front door, Ian addresses Taj by saying: "God, I'd hate to be you! That's why I'm

studying, to do better than you! Do you even speak English? Hey, you can keep the penny. You're going to need it, Pizzaman, because I'll have a degree and a good job". Curiously, later in the series Ian ends up working in the same pizza shop as Taj and having Taj as his trainer, allegedly because Ian's parents could not afford his university tuition fees. Another scene takes place in Llandaff when Taj delivers another pizza to a group of men sitting in a front garden. Llandaff is a traditional middle to high status residential district in Cardiff which hosts a significant number of Welsh speakers (Neil Evans in Mackay 140), where 13% of those aged 3+ can speak, read and write in Welsh when compared to the 8.75% average in the rest of the city (2011 Census, ONS). Steffan (Teilo Trimble), one man in the group, who is talking to his colleagues in Welsh says: "Not got a clue, have you? Yn syth bant or cwch yw hon! (i.e. "He's straight off the boat this one.)", thinking that Taj would not understand the Welsh language. He then asks Taj: "You know when you came to this country, did you ever consider learning the language?" to which Taj replies in Welsh by saying "Y mae amwybodaeth yn olygu yr un peth ym mhob iaith. Wnau cadw y newid, brawd." (i.e. "Ignorance means the same thing in any language. I'll keep the change, brother!"). This scene puts at stake the ambivalence and complementariness of Welsh and Asian identities for Taj and how both can be negotiated in individual identity formation.

Other scenes filmed in certain areas of Cardiff also contribute to generate certain stereotypes, negative and positive ones, about some of the city's neighbourhoods, their family and social relationships. In Episode 4 when Ian, the student who mocks Taj in Episode 2, delivers his first pizza to a sexual pervert who harasses him in Roath; in Episode 6, Taj delivers a pizza to a single mother in Heath whose sexual advances he refuses; and in Episode 12, set in Romilly Road, near Llandaff Road, he meets the only nice and polite family in the series. Arguably, these representations might also contribute to construct certain stereotypes about white people living in certain areas of Cardiff and, in general, to the depiction that most white people are unaware of the practices and beliefs that may characterise members of other ethnic and cultural groups, so it is easier to misjudge and stereotype. On the other hand, there is also the construction of stereotypes about certain professional areas and their code of conduct, such as the Welsh Assembly Government minister who has enforced a law

against people talking on their mobile phones while driving, though she is always doing that herself, and who has accused Taj of sexual abuse and is adopting an African child, just to get some more publicity for herself.

*Pizzaman* thus questions Taj's individual identity and his relationships with others at the same time that the cultural and social identity(-ies) of Cardiff come into play. This examination of a city's identity(-ies) becomes increasingly complex when considering a capital city, which ought to represent a country's manifold individual and collective identities, while simultaneously spearheading a shared, unifying national identity. In the case of Cardiff, its role both as the capital *of* and *for* Wales has endured an enduring identity formation process and, almost like Taj, it has been subjected to stereotyping and prejudice from the rest of Wales. Indeed, Cardiff has always been seen as "a centre for permanent suspicion. It is regarded as too English, too distant, too flash, too fast, too large and far too anti-Welsh for many" (Finch, "Culture and the City" 19), hence the so-called "ABC syndrome" – *Anywhere But Cardiff* (Davies in Gonçalves). However, since it became the seat of national government after Wales became a devolved nation in the late 1990s, it seems that Cardiff has become "the place that elected to be Welsh", in the same way that many of its residents have chosen to be Welsh, "no matter what their actual origins" are (Finch, *Real Cardiff* 72). Here Hetherington's (1998) notion of so-called "elective identities" is particularly relevant, since nationality or cultural and ethnic background are not equivalents of national cultural identity, as Taj's character epitomises. For him, being Welsh coexists and converges with the fact of being a third generation of a minority group composed of people who have chosen Cardiff as their place of residence and have elected to be Welsh, allowing a plurality of identities to come together in the constitution of the self. Cardiff's culture and society are increasingly characterised by individual and collective narratives and identities that are complex, malleable and shaped in a mutual and reciprocal relationship with the city's own cultural identity formation.

### **Conclusion: Democratising Representation through Online Cinema**

Digital technology allows viewers to watch films online or to download them for free and this leads to a reconsideration of our understanding

of cinema and films, and ultimately, of cultural consumption. With this low-budget series, produced with no grants and no subsidies and where everyone worked voluntarily, James Robson and Teilo Trimble have managed to cut out the middleman in the broadcast process and produce an electronic narrative with local actors that is available to a wide audience, thus contributing to question the understanding of film production, dissemination, reception and viewing practices in contemporary society.

*Pizzaman* thereby embodies the contemporary democratisation of representation in cinema and film-making under the auspices of the internet, whose wide dissemination constitutes a powerful and influential social media resource for under-represented communities, subjected to discrimination and prejudice, that seek to challenge and deconstruct dominant cultural and ethnic representations and stereotypes about them and to gain a voice in the ways in which they are imagined and understood by others.

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### ABSTRACT

This paper focuses on *Pizzaman*, an online 90-minute, £2,000 community-based drama series set in Cardiff, the capital city of Wales, which tells the story of Taj, a Welsh-Asian pizza delivery young man who sees himself entangled in a story of unexpected parenthood, drug dealing, and sexual harassment accusation. *Pizzaman* problematises questions of representation, identity and stereotyping. As each of the fifteen episodes that compose this series is filmed in a specific district of Cardiff and named after that area, presenting an itinerary of the city, this paper also analyses how *Pizzaman* represents the Welsh capital, its landscapes, and the complexity of its cultural and social spheres. On the other hand, it examines how Taj's identity is constantly brought into question and subjected to others' stereotyping, in an unceasing and intricate ambivalence between Welshness and Asianess, which seems to be shaped in tandem with the cultural and social identity of Cardiff.

### KEYWORDS

Cardiff; Representation; Identity; Stereotyping; Online Cinema

### RESUMO

Este artigo tem como objecto de estudo *Pizzaman*, uma série de 90 minutos, de origem comunitária, que custou £2000, e cujo enredo tem lugar em Cardiff, a capital do País de Gales. Esta série relata diferentes episódios na vida de Taj, um jovem de origem Galesa e Asiática que entrega pizzas e que se vê envolvido numa sucessão de episódios imprevistos ou falsos: paternidade, tráfico de droga e assédio sexual. *Pizzaman* problematiza questões de representação, identidade e estereótipos. Sendo que cada um dos quinze episódios que compõem esta série é filmado numa área geográfica específica de Cardiff e intitulado a partir dessa área, apresentando um itinerário da cidade, este artigo procurará analisar a forma como *Pizzaman* representa a capital Galesa, as suas paisagens e a complexidade das suas esferas sociais e culturais. Por outro lado, proceder-se-á a uma reflexão sobre o

modo como a identidade de Taj é reiteradamente questionada e sujeita à criação de estereótipos por parte de outras pessoas, numa constante e complexa ambivalência que resulta do facto de Taj se considerar simultaneamente Galês e Asiático, condição que se estrutura a par da construção da identidade sócio-cultural de Cardiff.

PALAVRAS CHAVE

Cardiff; Representação; Identidade; Estereótipo; Cinema *Online*

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Viva Las Vegas!  
City, Stage and City-Stage  
in Francis Ford Coppola's  
*One From the Heart*

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## Viva Las Vegas! City, Stage and City-Stage in Francis Ford Coppola's *One From the Heart*

When, in 1982, Francis Ford Coppola's film *One from the Heart* was first released, both the public and the critics were unprepared for its visual extravagance and Broadway musical narrative style. In fact, *One from the Heart*'s poor performance at the box-office was responsible for the financial collapse of Coppola's Zoetrope studio and became "one of the biggest flops in motion picture history" (Schumacher 314). Nevertheless, in recent times this film has gained special significance amongst those who see it as a groundbreaking cinematic exercise which allows the audience to undergo an exquisite aesthetic and conceptual experience.

*One from the Heart* has also been regarded as a Hollywood prognosis of the money and image-driven society that the Reagan administration was to inaugurate and instigate in the United States during the 1980s. In other words, Coppola captured the signs of an America undergoing change from an anxiety-ridden society, trying hard to exorcise the ghost of the Vietnam War and of the economic effects of a severe oil crisis, to the consumerist and new technology-wired society that took over in 1983 with the help of several media and corporate finance entrepreneurs grounded in highly sophisticated marketing techniques (Troy 117-120). This explains Coppola's embrace of electronic cinema's<sup>1</sup> technological inspired imagery

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<sup>1</sup> The definition of electronic cinema used here refers to an innovative technique that started to be developed in the late 1970s and early 1980s and that consisted of the combination of traditional filmmaking techniques with a sophisticated video-assisted editing system. This new interface not only allowed for the exploitation and application of video practices to film production and post-production processes, while simultaneously saving time and money, but also favored the exercise of new aesthetic possibilities, as demonstrated in *One from the Heart* (Prince 112).

(Millard 151) as well as his choice to change *One from the Heart*'s original screenplay setting from Chicago to Las Vegas (Schumacher 279), since Coppola considered the latter to be "a metaphor of America itself" (Schumacher 279) in the sense that it symbolizes the triumph of capitalism and the pursuit of wealth above all else. Moreover, Las Vegas is evidence of a change of paradigm in American society since "in Las Vegas the ethic of hard work, which is at the root of the American Dream, can be replaced by gambling as a way of acquiring instant riches" (Dika 172).<sup>2</sup> However, in gambling there are no certainties. It is all a matter of chance. This, according to Coppola, bears resemblance to love. Therefore, in *One from the Heart*, Las Vegas "is [also] a metaphor for the state of love itself" (Phillips 60).

Based on this premise, Coppola went on to direct a film about a couple of Las Vegas residents, Hank (Frederic Forrest) and Frannie (Teri Garr), reaching middle-age, who break up on the 4<sup>th</sup> of July as they come to the conclusion that they can't live together anymore. Therefore, as observed by Vera Dika, they both achieve their independence (172). While separated they both have affairs only to come to the conclusion that they can't live apart after all.<sup>3</sup> This apparently light and simple love story combines several dated movie conventions (for example, the happy-ending, uninventive dialogues, flat characters, amongst several others), along with conventional film genres (such as, the musical, film noir and romantic comedy) only to stress their status as simulacra (Gaggi 79). At the same time, Coppola explores the hyperbolization of Las Vegas *kitsch* and the city's hyperreal aesthetics while simultaneously presenting "America as a place of illusion and broken dreams" (Dika 172), a place characterized by the loss of the real. In this sense, Las Vegas functions as an evocation and reflection of a paradigm of happiness that doesn't really exist. In other

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<sup>2</sup> *The Godfather II* (1974) had already been set in Las Vegas. However, at the time, Coppola used this city as "a metaphor for the destructive effects of American corporate capitalism on the individuals" (Dika 172).

<sup>3</sup> As noted by Francisco Menendez, Coppola's happy-ending goes against Las Vegas myth as a merciless "moral testing ground" for outsiders because "Las Vega's seductive and destructive powers... only work for those who come to Vegas from the outside, not for those who live there and work within its system" (Menendez 48)



words, romantic love only works in the realm of fiction because it is a fictional entity itself.

Planned and built to act as a dream-factory and to trigger a consumer mood amongst those who visit it, Las Vegas knows no architectonic barriers. Furthermore, “[t]he architecture of Las Vegas relies heavily on fantasy material, and it does so by drawing its images and allusions from pictures” (Dika 172), including moving pictures. It’s a limitless simulation process that Louise Pelletier explains in the following manner:

The more one feels, the less one gets bored. . . . [I]n order to create sensations that will fight boredom, one needs to reject all natural passions that can move the soul in an unruly manner, and replace them with artificial ones created by art as imitations of the natural models (194).

One could say the same about Las Vegas — that it is the epitome of hyperreality. The replica of a Venetian or Egyptian site fills a historical as well as emotional gap. As stated by Humberto Eco: “we are giving you the reproduction so you will no longer feel the need for the original” (19). Therefore, the fiction is better and more pleasant than reality itself, thus leading to a *status quo* where the real is one dominated by simulation (Dika 171).<sup>4</sup> In *One from the Heart* Coppola highlights Las Vegas simulacral qualities by refusing to film on location, and by choosing to reinvent and build his “own fantasy of Las Vegas” (Schumacher 279) because “[t]he real Las Vegas wasn’t as good as the Las Vegas of the Mind” (Goodwin and Wise 331). Coppola wanted a super-real Las Vegas, “shinier, brighter, and more aesthetically designed” (Rothman and Davis 49) than the real thing. Having said this, we are invited to consider several layers of representation — the original set (the city itself, which is made up of several replicas of real and imaginary buildings and places from diverse parts of the world) and the film set, which “is a copy of a copy” (Dika 273).

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<sup>4</sup> In Tom Stempel’s opinion, Coppola’s exploration and exploitation of technological innovations in his film was also responsible for the film’s financial failure, since the audiences of the time were not prepared for the film’s, then, excess of technologically generated special visual effects as it contributed to their detachment from the plot (Stempel 147).

The image and concept of a glittering Las Vegas full of neon signs, advertising posters, sounds and movements goes hand in hand with an idyllic view of happiness. According to Jean Baudrillard, happiness — or the search for happiness — propels consumerism. As such, happiness is made measurable and material, meaning that it needs to be displayed, signified, and, ironically, cannot be within everyone's reach. In the post-modern world, happiness depends on signs and stimuli which, in the case of *One from the Heart*, are made manifest in the super glittering neon signs, in the film's original soundtrack<sup>5</sup> in the mentioning of exotic holiday destinations (Bora Bora) and in the many entertainment options available. Las Vegas makes it possible to visit replicas and prototypes of several tourist destinations. Caesar's Palace, the Sahara; the Dunes, the Riviera, the Aladdin, the Paris and the Luxor — with their architectural allusions to the destinations they wish to simulate — are examples of some of Las Vegas Strip casino resorts which propel(led)<sup>6</sup> guests, looking to escape their daily routines, to exotic, though also entirely fictional and provisional, realities. By succumbing to the allure of these fake realities "we not only enjoy a perfect imitation, we also enjoy the conviction that imitation has reached its apex and afterwards reality will always be inferior to it" (Eco 46). The possibility of living in a fantasy world contributes to the negation of the real since, as we can see from Hank and Frannie's relationship, reality is no fun.

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<sup>5</sup> This soundtrack is made up of 12 duet songs, all composed by Tom Waits specifically for this film and all performed by Waits, himself, and Crystal Gayle. The songs' extradiegetic and paratextual quality resembles a musical stream-of-consciousness through which the viewers have access to the characters' feelings and emotions, while simultaneously providing clues to future events. Despite *One from the Heart*'s failure at the box office, its sound track was nominated for an Academy Award for Original Music Score and it is, to this day, considered by several music critics one of the finest soundtrack collaborations in movie history (Jacobs 110-111).

<sup>6</sup> The use of the parenthesis here is justified by the fact that some of these casino hotels no longer exist. Some of them have been imploded to make room for new and even more spectacular recreational constructions, thus providing evidence of Las Vegas as a city that thrives on transformation and reinvention.

Baudrillard attributes this state of affairs to the strong influence that sign-values have in this day and age. Thus, as observed in *The Consumer Society: Myths and Structures*, the loss of spontaneous, symbolic human relations; the gradual replacement of ludic and combinatorial practices with cultural signs for culture as a symbolic system; the accomplishment of communion through technological rather than symbolic means; sexuality as a displayable commodity rather than as an expression of basic human sexual desire; and the substitution of a sense of communal cohesion by individualism (108,144-5), are all symptoms of a change in paradigm.

Both Hank and Frannie attempt to escape from reality in their search for their dream mate, but romance, as bright as it may seem, is but a stage of lights and colors. The immediate and staged happiness that they find with a trapeze artist, in the case of Hank, and with Ray, the piano player, in the case of Frannie, outshines Hank and Frannie's relationship with each other because their relationship is the real thing and as such it cannot compete with the excitement and illusory attractiveness of a love affair. Hence, in *One from the Heart*, Las Vegas is the city of (non)-interpersonal relationships. Night time scenes dominate, thus allowing for the neon signs' glitter to stand out while also stressing Las Vegas stage-like and alluring qualities, as well as a sense of loneliness that is intrinsic to the place.

The experience of a sense of apotheosis vs. a sense of loneliness that pervades the film is also made evident in music videos set in Las Vegas, such as "Viva Las Vegas!" (ZZTop, 1992), which glorifies the city's exuberance, and "I Still Haven't Found What I'm Looking for" (U2, 1987) that displays the city's alienating and dehumanizing effects. Yet, and as far as *One From the Heart* is concerned, even when all of Las Vegas stimuli fail to fill the individual's void, there is always an image of paradise (in the shape of tourism brochures) to where one can escape (Bora Bora). The window of the Travel Agency where Frannie works, invariably summons images of idyllic holiday destinations (a case in point is precisely Bora Bora, which happens to be Frannie's dream destination) and can, likewise, be interpreted as an alternative fake escape destination. Such is the case of Frannie for whom that window provides a space for evasion and escape, since Las Vegas escape options are limited for those who live there.

According to Robert Venturi and Denise Brown, the communicative structures of image rule over Las Vegas landscape. Buildings come second

(12). Images, sounds and texts are Las Vegas background, allowing it to be perceived as a whole. The post-modern city symbols are intrinsically associated with communication. As observed by Humberto Eco:

Las Vegas ... is focused on gambling and entertainment, its architecture is totally artificial, and it has been studied by Robert Venturi as a completely new phenomenon in city planning, a “message” city, entirely made up of signs, not a city like others, which communicate in order to function, but rather a city that functions in order to communicate (40).

In *One from the Heart* Coppola stresses the idea of Las Vegas as the “entertainment-city,” with surplus of images and stimuli, and by transforming the city in a stage where music is an ever present element. A prime example of this is the scene of Leila (Nastassja Kinski), a trapeze artist from a circus family, dancing inside a gigantic cocktail glass, thus decontextualising the object<sup>7</sup>— removing it from its acknowledged utilitarian function as a drinking glass—and presenting it as a stage instead. Another instance of the film’s emphasis on the notion of Las Vegas as a city-stage, is Leila’s trapeze performance over a junkyard while Hank acts as maestro to an orchestra of scrap cars with the city’s neons as background. This anthropomorphic artifice sets the stage (pun intended) for one of the most remarkable “willing suspension of disbelief” moments in the film.

The constant presence of music in the film gives prominence to the idea of communication. For instance, “the disembodied voices of Tom Waits and Crystal Gayle on the soundtrack” work as a kind of inner speech that serves “both to contemplate the actions of the central characters and to advise them on further action” (Dika 184). With this in mind, it is hard to miss the similarities between Waits and Gayle’s songs and a Greek chorus as they are both responsible not only for controlling the atmosphere and the audience’s expectations, but also for establishing a deeper connection

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<sup>7</sup> The decontextualization of objects and/or the hyperbolization of their dimensions is, in fact, one of the most notorious characteristics of Las Vegas. For instance, the massive size of the neon signs in relation to the buildings in which they are installed reflects this tendency. Another case in point is the smallness of the 24h-matrimonial chapels when compared to their neighboring cathedral-sized casinos.

between the characters and the audience. In fact, as established by Aristotle, “the chorus — ... should be considered as one of the actors” (123) and so should *One from the Heart*'s soundtrack, seeing that it is well integrated and is a relevant character in the fabric of the film's narrative. Moreover, one cannot fail to notice the influence of music videos on *One from the Heart*. Besides the fact that the soundtrack seems to “have the effect of making the film sometimes seem more like a series of music videos than a unified narrative” (Gaggi 82), Coppola also seems to be in tune with MTV's influence on American popular culture by favoring visual effects and music videos' specific visual imagery (Collins 167). This particular kind of visual imagery is a highly commercial, digitally manipulated, formula-driven cultural product — mainly targeted at young audiences — that depicts and equates contemporary Western life (meaning an idealized version of the American way of life) with fashion, brands, style, fun, music, marketing, city life and cinema. Furthermore, as American popular culture becomes more inundated with technology its impact becomes more significant and global.

Having said that, it is important to mention that the early 1980s saw the emergence of two major and extremely influential events in America's media context — MTV, and cable TV, and a wider access to technology, including computers across the country. These interconnected events had immediate consequences in American pop culture as they allowed for “the pursuit of all-entertainment all the time” (Troy 128) while, competently, enacting their influential role as shopping-habit propellers and trend-setting prods amongst young people. As observed by Gil Troy “the line between advertising and programming blurred” (129). Adding to this, the establishment of the music video as a central and powerful force in the music industry and a sales boosting apparatus was also in harmony with the “Reagan Rule” that elevated “image over concrete reality” (Werner 2006, 272). This was not strange to Reagan, since he was a former Hollywood actor, a star system product himself and a master in “this changing universe, milking and shaping the cultural changes in general, and the new media realities in particular” (Troy 125). In fact, as pointed out by Jane Feuer, “Reagan was himself an image” (1).

Bearing in mind, one more time, the relationship between image and concrete reality while looking into Ray and Frannie's dancing scene,

this particular sequence stands out as *One from the Heart*'s most striking moments. What starts as an indoor dance just between these two characters, rapidly acquires a dynamics of its own with the two of them coming to the streets and being joined by several other people dancing and celebrating the 4<sup>th</sup> of July. Even though this scene is highly staged, it follows a conventional formula used in musicals and music videos. For instance, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1984), Miami Sound Machine's *Dr. Beat* (1984) and Lionel Ritchie's *Dancing on the Ceiling* (1986), to mention just a few, are paradigmatic examples of this staged phenomenon. In all of these videos the viewers are made to witness an amorphous crowd and seemingly unrelated to the videos's main protagonists slowly joining them, as the songs gather momentum, in sometimes highly complex choreographies, culminating in an apothotic finale. Following Coppola's lead and encouraged by the advent of MTV, music video directors embraced the creative possibilities of computer technology by experimenting with new artistic options and using bolder plots. This wave of bolder, colorful and exciting<sup>8</sup> music videos was instrumental in making them a successful format amongst young people and in boosting music sales. This life-is-a-party-and-everyone-can-join-in formula proved to be so popular with viewers that it was also adopted and used in favored TV series, for example *Fame*, where "utterly formulaic representations of actions" are presented as being "spontaneous and improvised" (Gaggi 81). In other words, the cultural is presented as natural.

Overall, *One from the Heart* is a cinematic product that manages to capture the mood of an America walking towards extreme simulation. Meaning, both America and its people are fiction, a hologram, and a film. In other words, they are a product of the entertainment industry. As suggested by Baudrillard "the whole country is cinematic" (Baudrillard 60). That is probably one of the major reasons for the film's failure at the box-office. The audience failed to understand that the presumed lack

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<sup>8</sup> Many were the cases in which the music video outshone the song that was due to promote. Such is the case of Cyndi Lauper's *Girls Just Wanna Have Fun* (1983), again, Michael Jackson's *Thriller* (1984), A-ha's *Take On Me* (1985), and Peter Gabriel *Sledgehammer* (1986) which epitomize the experimental trend witnessed in 1980s' music videos.

of content of *One from the Heart* was deliberate — or, better still, that “the content of the film is the absence of content in American life” (Gaggi 83). To end, by quoting again from Silvio Gaggi, “*One from the Heart*, so brilliantly bad, *is* a statement!” (82).

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### ABSTRACT

In the early 1980s the music video came to prominence thanks to a phenomenon that would change American pop culture irrevocably — MTV. Born out of the necessity to stimulate record sales in a recession ridden America, music videos' impact on contemporary film, fashion and radio quickly became a reality. Based on this premise, we aim to analyze the alliance fostered by music videos and the film industry in order to develop a merchandizable version of the American Dream within a hyperreal setting — that of the city.

Taking a cue from Umberto Eco and Jean Braudillard, we will look into Francis Ford Coppola's Las Vegas in *One from the Heart* (1982) so as to explore the notion of city as stage, as a hyperreal architectural construction whose constant flux and renovation aim to fill the historical void that has always haunted the USA. We shall also explore the innovative character of the film, visible in its theatre-like aesthetics and in its use of the soundtrack as a Greek chorus. The portrayal of Las Vegas as a city immersed in a soundtrack has led *One from the Heart* to launch a new cinematic approach to city portrayal which will then be propagated by music videos. Such an approach allows for a tighter viewer-involvement with a collective imagery which combines music, image, fashion and life-style. Lastly, emphasis will be given to the representation of Las Vegas as a city of overindulgence and sensory overstimulation which leads the characters to seek a formula for love and affection that has no real existence.

### KEYWORDS

Francis Ford Coppola; Las Vegas; hyperreality; city; music video

### RESUMO

Com o início dos anos 80 o vídeo musical ganhou destaque graças a um fenómeno que haveria de mudar irrevogavelmente a cultura popular americana — a MTV. Tendo surgido da necessidade de a indústria musical estimular o aumento de vendas numa América fragilizada por um período de recessão, o impacto dos

vídeos musicais no cinema contemporâneo, na moda e na rádio tornou-se uma realidade inegável. Com base neste argumento, será aqui explorada a aliança criada entre os vídeos musicais e o cinema com o propósito de desenvolver uma versão comercializável do Sonho Americano dentro de um cenário hiper-real — a cidade.

Tendo o trabalho de Umberto Eco e de Jean Braudillard sobre Las Vegas como fio condutor, será feita a análise da Las Vegas presente em *One from the Heart* (1982), de Francis Ford Coppola, a fim de examinar a noção de cidade enquanto palco, enquanto construção arquitectónica hiper-real cujo fluxo e renovação constantes têm por objectivo a supressão do vácuo histórico que, desde há muito, assola os Estados Unidos. Será igualmente explorado o carácter inovador deste filme em concreto, que se manifesta na sua estética teatral e no uso da banda sonora com uma função semelhante à de um coro grego. A representação de Las Vegas imersa numa banda sonora faz de *One from the Heart* um filme que inaugura uma nova abordagem cinemática à cidade que proliferará em vários videoclips e que intensificará o envolvimento dos(as) espectadores(as) com um imaginário massivo que agrega música, imagem, moda e estilo de vida. Por último, será dado destaque à representação de Las Vegas como uma cidade de excessos e de super-estimulação sensorial que impele as personagens a procurarem uma fórmula de amor e de afecto que, na realidade, não existe.

#### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Francis Ford Coppola; Las Vegas; hiper-realidade; cidade; vídeo musical

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**FILMING TRANSCENDENCE  
IN THE 21<sup>ST</sup> CENTURY**



# Xavier Beauvois and Terrence Malick: Two Cinematographic Attempts at Revelation

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# Xavier Beauvois and Terrence Malick: Two Cinematographic Attempts at Revelation

## Introductory remarks

The box office success of Xavier Beauvois's *Des hommes et des dieux* (2010)<sup>1</sup> and Terrence Malick's *The Tree of Life* (2011) belie the current assumption that we live in an age of dominant materialistic values. It furthermore opposes the notion that transcendence is something of the past, the wishful-thinking and outmoded longing for the religious sensibility that the enlightened generations of today discard to the realm of supernatural fantasy and with which they only feel comfortable in the fictionalized world of films such as Clint Eastwood's *Hereafter* (2010). In this story, transcendence is featured as communion with the dead and the possibility of the afterlife is fashioned in terms of individual intuition and paranormal psychic talent.

Beauvois's and Malick's dealings with transcendence are of a different order and are sustained, in the first case and given the story, by the explicit link to Catholicism and, in the second, by the Mysteries of Creation such as they appear interwoven into ordinary human existence. Both pictures earned public recognition at the Cannes Film Festival, *Des Hommes et des Dieux* being awarded the 2010 *Grand Prix* and *The Tree of Life*, the 2011 *Palme D'Or*.<sup>2</sup> Both directors are openly concerned with the fate of

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<sup>1</sup> The title reads *Of Gods and Men* in English. The French original title will be used throughout the text.

<sup>2</sup> Among other distinctions, the French film also received the Prize of the Ecumenical Jury and the 2011 *César* for best film. In spite of the three nominations for the 2012 Academy Awards, and the 61 wins outside the Academy (namely, the AFI and the ASC Awards) *The Tree of Life* did not win at home.

men and women, whose commitment to questioning and pursuing the ways of God is anticipated by the biblical quotations which inaugurate the two films: in an interesting convergence, the epigraphs invite the spectator to contemplate the relation of God to His Creation by underscoring the frail and evanescent nature of humanity as respectively announced by Psalm 81: 6-7 and the Book of Job, 38: 4-7.

### *Des hommes et des dieux*

Inspired in the tragic abduction of seven French Trappist monks from the monastery of Tibhirine, in 1996, *Des hommes et des dieux* narrate the story of eight monks who chose to live among an impoverished community and practice the life of pious devotion, self-sufficiency and brotherhood as befits the Cistercian Order of True Observance to which they belong. According to the rules of this Monastic Order, Brotherhood entails the choice to lead a life of great simplicity and restraint, preferably among the destitute of the earth in pious reference to Jesus Christ.<sup>3</sup> The historical circumstance is important for the setting, but Xavier Beauvois will deal with it only as far as it contributes to the central issue of the story he wishes to tell and to this matter I'll return later. In the cinematic strategies of *Des hommes et des dieux*, the French director appears to emulate the simplicity of the Trappist monks: told in a from-the-beginning-to-the-end straight narrative, it formally relies on tracking shot and the efficient economy of a camera that lingers over the scenes from everyday life at the monastery, alternating them with episodes of the peaceful intercourse with the local impoverished Algerian community, or, as the film moves on, with the threats of fundamentalism, military abuse and government helplessness.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The monks were kidnapped and found beheaded. The Armed Islamic Group of Algeria claimed full responsibility for the incident. However, according to documents from the French secret services, this is a very controversial version of the occurrence. It is possible that the killings were a mistake carried out by the Algerian army during a rescue attempt, but there are other bleaker rumors about the monks' murder. Judicial action by France is in course since 2003.

<sup>4</sup> Beauvois claims that sobriety, realism and the use of unobtrusive *mise-en-scène* is the key to his approach to a story narrated as film. In his own words: "Avec les bons [films],



Introduced by the breathtaking view of the Atlas mountain range upon which appears a quote from Psalm 81 (6-7), — “Je l’ai dit: vous êtes des Dieux, des fils du Très-Haute, vous tous! Pourtant vous mourrez comme des hommes, comme les princes, tous, vous tomberez!”<sup>5</sup> —, the inaugural sequences show the camera travelling across the mountain and then, in continuous editing, the viewer is presented with a deep-focus shot from extreme foreground to extreme background, showing the monks walking out of their individual cells in absolute silence, as befits the monastic rule, toward an opening at the end of the corridor, the silence only broken by the tolling-over of a bell followed by the psalmody of the assembled monks in their chapel, repeating two lines of the invitatory Psalm 51 (50) — “Seigneur ouvre mes lèvres et ma bouche publiera ta louange.”<sup>6</sup> Geometric precision and ritualized repetition apply to the depiction of monastery life which, in a faithful reproduction of the Trappist rules, bifurcates along the monks’ peaceful routine of Liturgical Hours, individual prayer and other engagements, namely reading and writing, complementarily, showing them busy with ordinary tasks, like cooking, gardening, tilling the earth, tolling the bell or tending to the villagers who cue up at the door of the monastery dispensary.

Interconnectedness between the monastery and the villagers is woven into the daily activities, both peacefully at home up on the mountain

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tu ne vois rien, tout est très discret, les points de montage, les mouvements de camera sont invisibles. Lorsque la mise-en scène saute aux yeux, c’est qu’il y a un soucis” [“good films run smoothly, everything is very sober, montage editing, camera movements are invisible. When the *mise-en-scène* is staring us in the face, there is a problem.” (My translation)]. Thomas Baurez. “Xavier Beauvois: Réaliser un film comporte une bonne dose d’inconscience” [archive] *L’Express*, 7 septembre 2010. [http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/cinema/xavier-beauvois-realiser-un-film-comporte-unebonne-dosedin-conscience\\_917574.html#RPWHGR2z1cJEjpFT.99](http://www.lexpress.fr/culture/cinema/xavier-beauvois-realiser-un-film-comporte-unebonne-dosedin-conscience_917574.html#RPWHGR2z1cJEjpFT.99) (accessed on 28/12/2013)

<sup>5</sup> English translation: “I have said, Ye are gods; all of you are children of the Most High. But ye shall die like men, and fall like one of the princes.” *Des hommes et des dieux*. Dir. Xavier Beauvois. Perf. Lambert Wilson, Michael Lonsdale and Olivier Rabourdin. 2010. DVD. Video 1203/2011.

<sup>6</sup> English translation: “Oh Lord, open thou my lips; and my mouth shall shew forth thy praise” *The Book of Psalms. The Bible for Students of Literature and Art. Selected with an Introduction*, 274. Hence designated as *The Bible*.

plateau, with their co-dwelling marked by a dialogic spiritual dimension which, in the first sequences, is announced in a medium close-up of Father Christian, the prior of the monastery, reading at his table, followed by a succession of extreme close-ups over *The Qur'an* and books on St. Francis Assisi and St Jerome. The next sequences depict the monks' attendance to a local religious ceremony in which the Islamite villagers and the Christian monks join in a prayer for the protection of "God the Compassionate the Caring" whose "messengers are welcome without distinction" and whose mercifulness is invoked in the hope that "no soul be afflicted with troubles beyond its capacity to bear with them." Communion with the villagers also means the insertion in the day-to-day life as the next scenes show the monks at the market, selling their honey, Rabbia, a local villager and daily helper at the monastery, asking Brother Luc, the doctor, for advice about her sentimental problems, or another villager being helped to get her papers in order.

Disruption in this life of shared interests and dialogue across the Christian and Islamic cultures is gradually brought forward; first, when an eighteen year old girl is stabbed for not wearing the *hijab* and news of radical fundamentalism is made the topic of conversation between the village elders and Father Christian; then violence draws closer to the monastery, when a fundamentalist militia kills a group of Croat workers who used to help in building activities of all sorts. The following sequences show the prior's refusal to accept military protection from a corrupted authority on the grounds of privilege that exclude the villagers, the questioning of such a refusal by some of the other monks, the decision to take measures of protection and the articulation with a liturgical ceremony. Two successive scenes juxtapose the threat of civil war with the routine work at the monastery: first, the roads barricaded by the military, immediately after, Brother Christopher tilling the earth, the high-angle shot from the monastery into the surrounding landscape returning the viewer to the panoramic view with which he is familiar from previous scenes. The next sequences show the escalate in violence, the authorities' helplessness to cope with it and a first incursion of the militia in the monastery under the cover of the night, when Christmas celebration was being held and the first notes of the hymn "Voici la nuit" were heard.

Darkness and the ruthlessness of the militia under the leadership of Alli Fayattia anticipate the threat of a xenophobic attack against the

monastery. Turning out to be a demand for drugs and assistance to the wounded, it nevertheless, exposes the vulnerability of the monks, even if it ends up by fostering reconciliation between Father Christian and Fayattia on their understanding that, in spite of abyssal differences, they were both men of faith. Intriguing as this scene may be, particularly for contemporary audiences who are not aware of the common ground shared by the three monotheist religions, reconciliation is achieved around the birth of Jesus, “The Prince of Peace,” in Fayattia’s words.<sup>7</sup> With the departure of the militia, the celebration of Christmas is resumed as well as the hymnal chorus that had been interrupted.<sup>8</sup> The narrative goes on to show Father Christian praying, the rain falling and, finally, a long take of the monks gathered in assembly round the table to vote on whether in the present circumstances they should stay or flee the country.

As I referred above, historical circumstance is not the primary motor of Beauvois. Events are a mere framing to show the dilemmas of a number of monks attempting to come to terms with their religious calling and their professed commitment to live in imitation of Jesus Christ. This is the fundamental issue in *Des hommes et des dieux*, a film about alternative ways of life and in which the cinematic strategies of juxtaposition and continuity editing render the story with great economy. But juxtaposition, even if highlighting a contrast between the Trappist monks and the community at large, more aggravated in the case of the militia and, the armed forces or the Algerian authorities, does not necessarily establish irretrievable opposition. “To love one another as Jesus loves us” is a work of mercy and at the heart of the Trappist’s credo. The very title of the film introduces

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<sup>7</sup> For an appraisal of this question see Joaquim Cerqueira Gonçalves, “As religiões nos Roteiros da Paz”, 219-226.

<sup>8</sup> The inspiring Christmas Hymn “Voici la nuit” may be listened to in the site of the parish of Bon-Pasteur de Sherbrooke since April 11, 2011. It is one of the 7 liturgical pieces sang by the actors who had professional advice at the French Abbey of Notre-Dame de Tamié in Savoie. The other pieces sang by them as Tibhirine brethren at Notre-Dame de l’Atlas were: “Seigneur oeuvre mes lèvres”, “Puisqu’Il est avec nous”, “Nous ne savons pas ton Mystère”, “Cantique de Siméon”, “Psaume 142” (Comme une terre assoiffée), “Ô Père des Lumières”. <http://www.Paroissedubonpasteur.over-blog.com/article-video-voici-la-nuit-71481202.html/> (accessed on 28/12/2003)

a basic duality that will resonate in the pairing up of the community of monks with the community of villagers and, afterwards, with Fayattia's militia. Formal equivalence throughout the film, calls attention to the basic structuring around alternative images and sounds, which pair up, occasionally overlap, and appear to flow as smoothly as a river with its tributaries towards the same sea: absolute silence alternates with liturgical singing and a most efficient soundtrack; the dark interior of the monastery with the luminous landscape of the region; the Liturgy of the Hours with the Islamic religious ceremony; silent toiling within the monastic premises with the bustling of the village market; images of peace with those of unrest and guerrilla warfare, the narrative turning around the central image of the Trappist monks, in their white and black habits, the original picture that caught Beauvois' s interest and set his camera in motion.<sup>9</sup>

"Grant us oh Lord the grace of bearing our troubles according to our forces," the Christian equivalent of the Islamic "no soul be afflicted with troubles beyond its capacity to bear with them," is spelt across the faces of each one of the Trappist monks who are confronted with their own doubts and the fears in circumstances that were totally at odds with their choice of leading a monastic life grounded on the pacific principles of brotherhood and solidarity.<sup>10</sup> And again, the viewer is invited to follow the

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<sup>9</sup> As admitted by Beauvois himself, the Cistercian habit of the brethren was a source of great inspiration: "Il y avait aussi ce merveilleux habit des frères: un noir et blanc qui permet des choses magnifiques au niveau de la lumière, du cadre et de l'improvisation" [There was also the wonderful habit of the brethren: a black and white that allowed for magnificent things at the levels of the light, framing and improvisation." (My translation)]. Nicole Salez, "Des hommes et des dieux: entretien avec le réalisateur, Xavier Beauvois." *Tout pour les femmes*. 9 Septembre 2010 [archive]. <http://www.toutpourlesfemmes.com/conseil/Des-Hommes-et-des-Dieux.entretien.html> (accessed on 08/1/2014)

<sup>10</sup> My sentence is modeled on the Islamic hymn to God the Compassionate the Caring, in which the monks joined on their attendance of the Islamic Religious Ceremony; it is my purpose to call the attention to the basic economy of the film, where a single sentence (and there aren't that many, given the Trappist rule of the silence) or the minute detail in a scene contribute to the intensification of meaning and increase the extraordinary effect of a film unified around a dominant theme of the relation of the self with transcendence.

travelling camera, and with it, Father Christian's walk among the flock of sheep across the hillside to the margin of the river, the chirping birds, the over-lapping voice-over of his address to God: "we do not know your mystery, your infinite love, you, who searches for the prodigal son and embraces him, you, infinite love, you who cries with the destitute of the earth"<sup>11</sup> The extreme seriousness of this episode is neatly balanced by the comic relief of the next one as the monks' car breaks down, revealing their absolute helplessness in mending it, while a group of village women, passing by, start the engine without much ado. For the span of time in which the monks, and in particular, Father Christophe, are wrestling with their conscience, the sequences revisit the daily events at the monastery backed up by the soundtrack which catches the tolling of the bells, the scraping of agricultural implements and a host of different sounds, like the rain falling or the whispers of the breeze; and, of course, the liturgical psalmody of prayer, while the camera moves forth among the monks daily lives, the government's insistent advice that they leave and the touching villager's demand that they stay."<sup>12</sup>

For approximately an hour and a half, the viewer has been presented with a narrative objectively structured by the artful balance between travelling camera for the exterior scenes and fixed framing for the monastery takes. Even if the whole gamut of human emotion is shown, from brotherly concern, compassion and faith, to humor, indecision and human frailty, these are viewed by an "unsentimental" camera that keeps its distance in relation to the agents of the story presented in a masterful interplay between the shadowed monastic interior and the African brightness of the exterior scenes. The last half-hour of *Des hommes et des dieux*, however, provides a change that directly involves the common viewer who, until then, might have been won by the skills of the director and the inspirational photography of Caroline Champetier, without committing

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<sup>11</sup> The voice-over reproduces Father Christian's thoughts, which are presented in my translated-into-English version above.

<sup>12</sup> As Father Christian's tentatively prepares the villagers for their possible departure, he says: "we are like the birds on a branch. We do not know if we are leaving," the elders immediately reply: "we are the birds, you the branches of the tree." (My translation)

himself to the monastic experience, most probably at odds with his own as an ordinary person.<sup>13</sup>

In visual and acoustic terms, there is a prelude to the coming change, when the Tibherine monks, gathered in the chapel, after the Consecration, start singing “Ô Père des Lumières”, their voices overlapped by the drowning noise of a military helicopter getting closer and closer. Imminent as the attack appears to be, the helicopter slowly moves away, its noise gradually dying down as the liturgical choir grows in volume, and the singers draw together in a semicircle, their arms meeting over each other shoulders. The multilayered soundtrack doubtlessly intensifies the visual counterpart of the film, with sound getting the upper hand in a scene that, in the opinion of the well-known British film critic Mark Kermode, signals the turning point in the conscience crisis. Typical of Beauvois in *Des hommes et des dieux* is the juxtaposition of a highly dramatic sequence to a comparatively trivial one, in this case, the arrival of Father Bruno from the Moroccan Trappist monastery, with precious gifts for the survival of the brethren, and the ensuing group photograph of this happy reunion, which, for a second, freezes the movement of the film image as in a photographic still.<sup>14</sup> Kermode further believes that the crucial decision of remaining with the afflicted villagers is taken when the assembled monks draw closely together in the chapel, as if they were a single body.<sup>15</sup> I would add that the succeeding photograph seals the decision, with their communicating smile consecrating of a spiritual undivided bequest.

The next sequences introduce, for the first time, the travelling camera in an interior scene, starting with the slow motion images of

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<sup>13</sup> Mark Kermode, the BBC’s resident film critic and BAFTA member, after avowing that the film plot would not have caught his interest in normal circumstances, rated *Des hommes et des dieux* as “genuinely exceptional,” “extremely moving,” ranking it as the second best film of 2010. *BBC Radio 5 live: Kermode and Mayo’s Film Review*. 3 December 2010. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/programmes/p00cnj7w> (accessed on 10/01/2014)

<sup>14</sup> This is an instance of underscored film technicalities by the self-referential use of the picture within the picture, which, simultaneously, fulfils the narrative function of a last visual testimonial of the brethren’s presence in the region.

<sup>15</sup> Mark Kermode, *BBC Program*, footnote 13.

Brother Luc bringing the wine to the table where a symbolic Last Supper takes place. No words are exchanged, just the camera travelling over each one of the faces in successive, repeated close-ups scored to Tchaikovsky's *Swan Lake*. No words, only music. And those amazing faces, exchanging a look or a smile between them, occasionally stare back at us, the viewers. Baroque self-portraiture brought into the twenty-first century by the talent of Beauvois and Champetier.<sup>16</sup> Theirs is not a mere surface semblance achieved by the expert handling of light and shadow in *chiaroscuro*, but it works at deeper levels of interpellation, in an analogous fashion to the response elicited by a self-portrait such as the genre is written about by Julian Bell: "this device of proposing a *me* signaling my presence within the picture — and thus a *you* outside it whom I address — can cut across the sideways-moving space of the surrounding scene." (6, my italics)

In the case of a film, a similar effect is achieved by the close-up on a face as an "isolated zone of intense and restless consciousness" who engages the viewer, believer or not, in touching reverence for the moral greatness of the lives of Christian de Chergé, Luc Dochier, Christophe Lebreton, Célestin Ringiard, Paul-Favre-Miville, Amédée Noto, Michel Fleury, Bruno Lemarchand, and Jean-Pierre Schumacher. As their repeatedly focused faces speak of faith, courage, brotherly love, and acceptance, one is led to believe that the "pictorial equivalent for the spirit", which Rembrandt is said to have pursued in the "two-hundred-odd self-images" he created, materializes, even if only for the fraction of time of each close-up, among the Tibhirine monks in that Last Supper before their

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<sup>16</sup> In Xavier Beauvois own words: "Pour que cette séquence fonctionne, j'ai pris le soin d'éviter de faire des gros plans sur les prêtres pendant la première heure et demie de film, afin qu'à ce moment-là, le spectateur soit touché en les voyant si proches." ["To make the most of this scene, I avoided using the close-up on the priests for the first an hour and a half of the film, so that this particular moment, bringing them so close, would move the viewer."] in Thomas Baurez. See footnote 4. Caroline Champetier also admitted that she had got inspiration from the Rembrandt self-portraits, in her own words: "pour comprendre visuellement comment un homme se regarde". [to visually understand how a man looks at himself] In Sylvie Bethmont-Gallerand. "Illuminé par la grace : le film Des hommes et des dieux" [archive]. Octobre 2010. <http://www.Paris.catholique.fr/Illumine-par-la-grace-le-film.Des.html> (accessed on 10/01/2014)

abduction (Bell, 9-10). Once again, the musical score by Tchaikovsky stirs up an emotional response, the fulfillment of love after bodily death in *Swan Lake* eliciting the symbolic analogy of the reunion of the individual soul with Jesus Christ's. In their role as mediators of the spirit, each of the monks emulates the model of Christ born-man, whose mission was to announce the Spirit, bringing Him to the "experienced reality of human history." The last extreme close up of Father Christian's upper half of the face is particularly evocative of Rembrandt's search, as if his eyes, said to be the mirrors of the soul, would return to us the Incarnation he had been called to witness *in* and *by* each one of the ecstatic faces of his brethren.<sup>17</sup>

The brethren at the table are one of the several strategic repetitions, which does not merely intensify a given meaning since it also fosters narrative progression. The closing sequences of *Des hommes et des dieux* are anticipated by the first incursion of the militia in the monastery, but this time there is no truce, only the violence of a night raid, the abduction of seven monks (two escaped) in their way to each one's cross, the terrorists holding them as hostage, the difficult progression under the falling snow, Father Christian sustaining old, asthmatic Brother Luke, in a macabre resonance of the first sequences, with the monks gradually disappearing to the last one, not in the silent entrance of the chapel, but in the silent mysteries of the enveloping whiteness. Before they vanish, the viewer is given the solace of listening to the premonitory testament of Chirstian de Chergé in voice-over, written some years before when he felt that terrorism and civil war might endanger his and the brethren's lives:

S'il m'arrivait un jour — et ça pourrait être aujourd'hui — d'être victime du terrorisme qui semble vouloir englober maintenant tous les étrangers vivant en Algérie, j'aimerais que ma communauté, mon Église, ma famille, se souviennent que ma vie était DONNÉE à Dieu et à ce pays.

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<sup>17</sup> Incarnation in the sense of Jesus Christ being born again in the person whose rebirth is actually initiated in the course of this permutation. The Tibherine monks fulfill their role in imitation of Christ, mediator of the Spirit, to the limit of bequeathing their lives for sake of their faith and for the love of the community of villagers which are assailed by the plagues of terrorism and civil war. Cf. J. T. Mendonça and Duarte Belo. *Os Rostos de Jesus: uma revelação*, 22.



Qu'ils acceptent que le Maître unique de toute vie ne saurait être étranger à ce départ brutal.

Qu'ils prient pour moi.

comment serais-je trouvé digne d'une telle offrande?

[...]

Dans ce MERCI où tout est dit, désormais, de ma vie, je vous inclus bien sûr, amis d'hier et d'aujourd'hui, et vous, ô amis d'ici, aux côtés de ma mère et de mon père, de mes soeurs et de mes frères et des leurs, centuple accordé comme il était promis! Et toi aussi, l'ami de la dernière minute, qui n'auras pas su ce que tu faisais, oui, pour toi aussi je le veux, ce MERCI, et cet «A-DIEU» envisagé pour toi. Et qu'il nous soit donné de nous retrouver, larrons heureux, en paradis, s'il plaît à Dieu, notre Père à tous deux. Amen! Inch' Allah.<sup>18</sup>

### *The Tree of Life*

Less explicitly associated with a particular religious denomination in its foregrounding of the interconnectedness between Creation and a suburban American family, *The Tree of Life* provoked considerable stir among the host of Terrence Malick's admirers when it won the 2011 *Palme D'Or*.

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<sup>18</sup> The document has been written on two different occasions, December 1, 1993 and January 1, 1994. "If ever it happens to me – and it could be today – to be a victim of the terrorism that appears to want to besiege all foreigners dwelling nowadays in Algeria, it would make me happy to know that my community, my Church, my family, bear in mind that my life was DONATED to God and to this country./May they accept that the only Lord of all life would not be a stranger to this brutal departure./ May they pray for me: how have I been found worthy of such a bequest?[...] In this THANK YOU in which everything is said, henceforth, of my life, of course I include you all, friends of yesterday and of today, and you, oh my friends here, side to side to my mother and father, my sisters and my brothers and theirs, a hundredfold granted as it was promised! And also you, my friend of the last minute, who will not have known what you were doing, yes, I also wish to offer this THANK YOU, and this "A-DIEU" in which I be-hold you. And that it may be granted that we meet again, two happy rascals, in paradise, if it pleases God, our Father to both of us. Amen! Inch' Allah." (My Translation) For the complete version see <http://www.la-croix.com/religion/Appfondir/Documents/Le-Testament-du-P.-Christian-de-Cherge-F> (published in 03/09/2010; accessed on 27/12/2013).

A rough résumé of the story locates the action in Waco, Texas, in the 1950's, the town where Mr. and Mrs. O'Brien are living and raising their three children. A reviewer pointed out that the details of time, place and family, although supporting a parallel with the director's own life, has an archetypal cultural resonance, which locates the story in the small-town America of the fifties. At the center of the film is Jack, the eldest son of the O'Briens, a middle-aged architect who lives amid the "gleaming skyscrapers and clean ultramodern surfaces" of a typical contemporary metropolis, and whose remembrances weave the story we are invited to watch.<sup>19</sup> But this film soon becomes a tale of wonder, dealing with a wider span than the narrator's flashback into the events of his youth, as it turns out to be a self-scrutinizing exercise in which the present is suspended in favor of the past, on and off intersecting and converging in a final vision of the so-called Shores of Eternity.

Characteristically Malick makes use of the hushed voice-over to give a first hint of the nature of Jack's quest and associates it to two inaugural words, "Brother", "mother", which are followed by the question "where are you?" A first hint of the interconnectedness between different times and places is the parallel created with the Word of God addressing Job in the inaugural epigraph: "Where were you when I laid the foundations of the earth?", the change in verb tense pointing to the parallel between past and present stories. The invocation of brother and mother in the contemporary story is, by consensual opinion, linked to the flickering flame-like shape that transliterates the Word as inscribed in the epigraph into the iconic visual image of the divinity, addressed by Jack as "You" in his attempt to sort out the foundations of his own life.<sup>20</sup> Inscribed in those

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<sup>19</sup> A. O. Scott, "Heaven, Texas and the Cosmic Who dunit" *New York Times's Critic's Pick*, May 26, 2011. <http://films.nytimes.com/2011/05/27/films/the-tree-of-life-from-terrence-malick-review.html> (accessed on 14/01/2014)

<sup>20</sup> Interestingly and in tune with contemporary sensibilities, some reviewers appear to shy away, in evasive references, when tackling the question of God. Among others, A. O. Scott speaks of the "creator" as "the elusive deity whose presence in the world is both the film's overt subject and the source of its deepest, most anxious mysteries" and mentions the director's "idiosyncratic Christianity". See previous footnote; and interdisciplinary artist Miranda Laud in her excellent analysis of the film comments

foundations and, in a sense, the driving motif behind Jack's labyrinthic journey into the past is the untimely death of his brother Robert [R. L.], when he was nineteen years old.

Coming after Job's epigraph is a succession of images with no affinity to the account of a story based on linear narrative that invites the viewer into a multitude of sensorial experiences as image flows into image allowing him to wonder at the flicking and ever changing flame-like shape; to listen to the voice-over whispering "they took me to Your door"; to see and hear the little girl who becomes the mother later choosing the way of grace over that of nature with John Tavener's *Funeral Canticle* as background music— "I'll be true to You whatever comes" —; to look at sunflowers stretching into the horizon; to momentarily linger over the image of the little girl hugging her father, holding a dog, gazing at a herd of cows; to watch the O'Brien family together — the mother, the father, the three boys, the swing set, children climbing a ladder and rope to a large tree; to hear the *Canticle* fading into ominous silence, and jump forward to another house, see the postman delivering the fatidic letter, the mother crumbling to the floor with a cry; to follow another cut into a plane on an airfield and the father on the phone, framed in close-up; to hear the roaring engines, to see the crouching father, to hear Lupica's "Cosmic Beam Take 5", and have a glimpse of R. L.; to follow another cut in the tolling of bells and catch a glimpse of the sunset; to listen to the mother's hushed, grieving voice — "my son ...I only want to die to be with him" — against the background music of Mahler's Symphony No. 1; to look at R. L.'s empty room, the camera momentarily lingering over the guitar; to commiserate with the O'Briens' neighbors after the burial ceremony, and hear the mother's mother attempt at consolation — "Time heals nothing stays the same...the Lord gives and takes away" —; to follow with the eyes R. L.'s ladder upon the tree; to listen... to the distressed father — "never told him...

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parenthetically that "despite the Christian texts for some of Malick's musical choices, it seems he implies a universal creator that is outside of any one denomination, beyond definition." "Music and Image in Malick's *The Tree of Life*". *Nature Stage*. July 15, 2011. <http://www.naturestage.org/2011/07/music-and-image-in-malicks-the-tree-of-life/> (accessed on 14/01/2014)

I was sorry...poor boy” — and again follow his aimless drift among the tall trees; to wonder at the flame-like shape; to listen to middle-aged Jack — “how did You come to me, under which shape, which disguise?” — and see him at home with the wife, to hear sounds of tap water and of high heeled shoes walking the floors, climbing stairs; to wonder at another glimpse of the flame-like shape, followed by the image of the child Jack with R. L. — “true, good ... dead at 19”; to follow the middle-aged elder brother going up the building in the elevator into present time; to flash forward into a glimpse of the forthcoming Shores of Eternity; to flash backward to boyhood games by the river; and forward again to the present time in Jack’s atelier; to watch him addressing his father on the phone, asking for forgiveness and after a pause hearing his meditative “I think about him everyday” —; to listen to the whispered words — “how did I lose You?” — interspersed by a glimpse of the cascading water and the revolving clouds, “forgot You?” — newly interspersed by images of a desert landscape changing into images of the Shores of Eternity; to follow the bridge into Jack’s youth while hearing the voice-over — “find me” — , to see once again images of mother and brother, the father, the huge garden tree; to watch the choreography of black specks in the skies, cloud-like birds flowing into nowhere, the mother below, among the trees with the sky above; to newly wonder at the flame-like shape and listen to the mother’s pleading voice — “Lord ...why? ...where were You?”; to see the dark clouds above the waters, the flame-like shape become a red circling eye, gradually fading into a whiter shade of pale; to listen again to the mother’s prayer-like voice — did You know? Who are we to You?” —; to watch images of a black galaxy and light blue; to follow the halting voice — “answer me” —; to see the illuminated fissure, the circling irregular shapes, the clouds anticipating the 18 minute long sequence of the Creation of the World according to Terrence Malick and scored to “Lacrimosa 2” from Zbigniew Preisner’s *Requiem For My Friend*, composed in honor of the great Polish director, Krzysztof Kieslowski.

There is no conventional sequence in this rough enumeration of images that flow into images against the background of sound and music and the scattered whispering voices of the protagonists. There is, on the other hand, exponential reliance on ellipse and jump-cut, techniques which invite the viewer to follow the director’s clues and to fulfill his role as a

player in Malick's film, the O'Briens story becoming a doorway into other stories, most relevantly Job's, which revisits the original biblical tale of origins. Malick's sequence of creation provides on such an account a frame that also endows the family whose citizenship is of a given place and time — Waco, Texas in the fifties — with universal significance based on a spiritual kinship that transcends the here and now of their merely material existence. And if the viewer is familiar with the literary account of the creation of the world in *Genesis*,<sup>21</sup> he will marvel at the close parallels achieved by Terrence Malick's filmic version of the "darkness over the surface of the deep", "the formless and empty earth", "the spirit of God hovering over the waters"; the "emergence of light", "the separation from the darkness," the "evening" and "the morning" of "the first day" (*Genesis* 1-5). As image flows into image, so will the film render "the vault between the waters to separate water from water" and its gradual expansion in "the sky"; the gathering of "the water under the sky to one place", and the "dry ground" of "earth" to the other, distinct from "the seas"; the land-produced vegetation, and "the lights in the vault of the sky to separate the day from the night", "two great lights-the greater light to govern the day, the lesser light to govern the night." (*Genesis*: 6-17) Finally, "the water teemed with living creatures and birds [flying] above the earth across the vault of the sky" (*Genesis* 20-21).

Written at a later period and the first of the Bible's sapiential texts, *The Book of Job*<sup>22</sup> chosen by Malick as the portico to the O'Briens's story sheds new light on the question of Creation and the place of man in it, adopting a dominant interrogative mode and using dialogue instead of narration permeated by the univocal, authoritarian voice. God is, nevertheless, as much in full command of Creation as he is in *Genesis* — "Where wast thou when I laid the foundations of the earth? Declare, if thou hast understanding. Who hath laid the measures thereof, if thou knowest? Or who hath stretched the line upon it?" (*Job*: 38:4-6) — , but the focus of the book is on Job's personal history; on his need to deal with his own life in connection with his belief in God, who, in his view, did him injustice.

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<sup>21</sup> *Genesis. The Bible*, 5-54.

<sup>22</sup> *The Book of Job. The Bible*, 237-258. Henceforth abridged to *Job*.

In fact, it becomes a paradigm for subsequent metaphysical speculations about the nature and agency of the individual human being who abides by faith and grace and, even so, is afflicted with loss and suffering. The parallel with the O'Brien's is evident. The religious upbringing of the mother led her to trust that if the way of grace were chosen over that of nature, nothing bad would happen to her. The continuities between these two stories go, however, beyond thematic analogy and are emphasized by the repetition of images that in each of them bears the mark of their time either at literary or visual levels. *Job* deals with the words and the interpretation of men, which, in opposition to the divine perfection, exhibit the limits of human knowledge and wisdom. But their progress in knowledge is also spelt in the text by the diversification of species — “the great creatures of the sea” (*Genesis* 21) differentiating as the “behemoth” and the “leviathan” (*Job* 40:15; 41:1), a similar process of bio-diversification occurring at all levels of natural life and witnessing to the different historical periods in which both texts were written.

The Creation of the World according to Terrence Malick is also a product of his time and experience as a film director. Beginning with Creation and going through the Big Bang, precellular life, the Mesozoic age, family life in the fifties, up to our days and a vision of the end of time, Malick makes use of scientific and technological progress to recreate a cinematographic idiom capable of encompassing the span of life and visionary experience.<sup>23</sup> He has been described by his close associates as someone who believes in paradisaical innocence, loves bird-watching and has a Romantic fondness for the natural world, but his films are also a kind of laboratory where he experiments and uses groundbreaking techniques by means of which he is able to present his own metaphysical vision of life. The connections between his choice of images and his philosophical themes owe, in *The Tree of Life*, a good deal to the artful montage of

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<sup>23</sup> For a good and detailed exploration of Malick's technique and reference to his closest collaborators see Manohla Dargis, et al, “Pursuing Imperfection in Malick's Eden.” *The New York Times*. 19 August 2012. <http://www.nytimes.com/2011/05/22/movies/the-tree-of-life-premiered-at-cannes.html?pagewanted=all> (accessed on 16/01/2014)

special-effects sequences and nature shots, showing his talent to revisit transcendence in the light of renewed sensibility and contemporary knowledge.<sup>24</sup>

Emmanuel Lubezki, the cinematographer that has collaborated with Malick since *The New World*, claims that he has, above all, striven for a documentary-style spontaneity, which, in this film, owes much to his preference for handheld mobility and avoidance of traditional camera setups. Spontaneity suits, indeed, the story of the O'Briens and their three boys, Jack, Robert and Steve, in as much as the flux of images intersecting and connecting different times realistically reproduces middle-aged Jack's stream of consciousness, dangling between the character's present dilemmas and the contradictory emotions of a youngster growing into adulthood. His journey into the self, the flashback to the conflicts and changing moods of a typical family of the fifties may mislead the viewer into the assumption that he is watching a melodrama, in which the almost ethereal mother plays the angelic role as the guardian of grace, and the authoritarian, strict father embodies the opposite state of nature and the less sympathetic materialistic way of life connoted with the American capitalist system. The younger brother, Steve, is given no voice throughout the film, while Jack, on his own admittance, takes after the father and R. L. after the mother. "Brother," "mother" are the words that set the film flowing, but as the camera zooms between present and past, there are several occasions in which the boundaries between grace and nature fade, the opposition originating with an advice from the nuns who were entrusted with the mother's schooling.

It is difficult not to sever grace from nature when we limit the father to a prototype, forgetting that he, after all, is the one who introduces children to the grace of music — Brahms Symphony No 4, Bach Fugue in d<sup>m</sup> BWV 565 on the organ — , insists on being addressed as "sir" but is concerned with the affection his boys feel for him, searches solace in nature when stricken by the son's death, is tenderly loved by the mother equated to grace, and, in the close sequences scored to the "Agnus Dei" from Berlioz's *Requiem*, takes intrinsic part in the envisioned reconciliation.

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<sup>24</sup> On this subject and on Malick's fondness for the philosophy of Heidegger, see Susana Viegas "Os filmes de Terrence Malick", 302-3.

I endorse film critic Roger Ebert's point of view when he refers to this character not only as the typical father of the fifties but also as the father who wants the best for his children.<sup>25</sup> Nature from a narrow point of view may be associated with evolutionary theory and economics thereby securing the link to the Darwinian sequence in which the powerful dominating dinosaur threatens the little one lying on the ground, soundtrack superimposing on the music the stomping feet of the menacing creature. But, immediately afterwards, the viewer sees and hears a fetus heart beating fast (a dinosaur's? a child's?) and listens to the mother's voice-over "light of my life...I search for you...my hope...my child" —, a whispered prayer-like lament which resonates with the poem that inspired Górecki's first movement in *Symphony of Sorrowful Songs*.<sup>26</sup> Another jump-cut leads the viewer into an almost reverberation of the voice-over, this time, middle-aged Jack is apparently finding an answer for his earlier wondering about the mystery that governs life — "You spoke to me through the sky, the trees...You spoke to me before I knew..." —; the pause is mediated by the image of the flowing river, and then a further prayer-like whisper — "when did You first touch my heart?"

Nature as river, forest, the skies, shapes also as wonder and biblical mystery. Mother, too, is associated with natural elements, the sunflowers, the birds, the clouds, the trees, her ethereal figure the consistent embodiment

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<sup>25</sup> Film critic Roger Ebert has perceptively written about the *Tree of Life* referring to the complex character of the father by describing one of the scenes as follows: "In the face of Hunter McCracken, who plays Jack as a boy, we see the face of Sean Penn, who plays him as a man. We see fierceness and pain. We see that he hates his father and loves him. When his father has a talk with him and says, "I was a little hard on you sometimes," he says, "It's your house. You can do what you want to." And we realize how those are not words of anger but actually words of forgiveness." Someday he will be the father. It will not be so easy." "A Prayer beneath the Tree of Life". *Roger Ebert's Journal*. May 17, 2011. <http://www.rogerebert.com/rogers-journal/a-prayer-beneath-the-tree-of-life> (accessed on 16/01/2014)

<sup>26</sup> Górecki's composition in three movements flashes back and forward in time, the first being inspired in a mid fifteenth-century lament focused on the sorrows of motherhood. As in this scene from *The Tree of Life*, the address starts with the words "my son" and ends with "my cherished hope."



of grace throughout the film. *The Tree of Life* does not deviate one millimeter from Malick's characteristic framing of character in nature or the contemplation of natural phenomena by the human eye or the surrogate camera. Nature is granted grace by the images of sunlight streaming through the windows, lacing curtains, splashing on lawns, refracting upon garden hoses; the rustling of the tree leaves in the breeze; revolving water mounting to the clouds in the skies. It seems to me that there is a truly Emersonian ring in this director's devotion to Nature, although more often than not he has been associated to Heidegger for his unflinching expression of the "poetic visions" of reality in the form of intuition and philosophical thought. Emerson, however, started it all when he claimed that everything is Nature and the natural world should be interpreted as a reflection of a higher spiritual order upon the visible material world of perception.

Malick's distancing from earlier techniques, when he privileged contemplative duration and long-take sequences, in favor of images flowing one into another also suits the director's expressed intention to give a universal twist to the story, uprooting it from the domestic scene of a given time and a given place — the tensions, conflicts, frustrations but also the tenderness of family life — and choosing instead to associate it to the continuities of Creation and would-be reconciliation in a vision of the afterlife. Fragmentary as the flux of images may appear on a first screening of the film — and how could it be otherwise given the scope of the project? —, Terrence Malick succeeds, nevertheless, in creating a deep sense of cohesion by using several devices. Most obviously, at the level of the repeated imagery, when we first see the lying smaller dinosaur in the primeval forest of redwood trees and, then, watch the Mother wandering through the same forest, gazing up towards the sun. Or when we realize that the stretch of the river where the dinosaurs appear is the same stretch where the three brothers play, symbolic of the ever-flowing river of life running under the clouds that recurrently glide along the skies. Or, finally, when we gaze upon images of Creation and of the Shores of Eternity, which flash-like intersect with the voyage of Jack as contemporary wayfarer in quest of his own self.

Cohesion is, however, highlighted by the background music which links scenes at different temporal points of the universe and, further, provides a bridge that integrates "a vast sonic flash back into the flow of the

present.”<sup>27</sup> The original score by Alexandre Desplat exemplarily illustrates this point by accommodating classic and contemporary pieces in a seamless composition which accompanies the flux of images, both concurring in a multi-layered depth of meaning. This is, for instance, the case with the sequences scored to Smetana’s *My Country — Vlatva (The Moldau)*, in which the flowing river and the dancing camera unite to catch the rhythms of family life, a tinge of melancholia contrasting with the energy of the three boys playing on the lawn, running along the river’s edge, having fun in the fields or slowing down for a night’s rest anticipated by the lulling stories of Mother — “tell us a story from before we can remember”, asks R. L. And indeed *The Tree of Life*, true to the symbolic nature of its title, reaches far beyond the O’Briens story, far beyond the time they could remember, served by the perfect blend of music and image — “pure syncretism” in Hillman’s words —, music no longer at the exclusive service of mood suggestion or atmosphere conveyance, but contributing to the building of meaning as much as its visual counterpart. It is also the case with Couperin’s *Les Barricades Mystérieuses*, the baroque harpsichord which we hear twice in the film as a frame to motherhood and the intimate relationship with the tree sons. In Miranda Laud’s opinion, this musical Baroque piece is central to the meaning of the film, the barricades overcome and become the bridge across which frail human nature walks into intimations of immortality.<sup>28</sup>

Over two centuries separate François Couperin and Bedrich Smetana; over one, Smetana and the host of concurring contemporary composers, among them, Sir John Tavener, Zbigniew Preisner, Henryk Górecki or Francesco Lupica, who are cited in *The Tree of Life*. As the film is scored to baroque, classical, romantic and contemporary music, it enforces the

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<sup>27</sup> In “Malick’s Music of the Spheres: *The Tree of Life*”, Roger Hillman offers, perhaps, the best analysis of the musical score together with commentaries on this director’s previous films. December 2012. <http://www.screeningthepast.com/2012/12/malick%25E2%2580%2599s-music-of-the-spheres-%25E2%2> (accessed on 17/01/2014)

<sup>28</sup> For Miranda Laud, the universal quality of the film is in good measure achieved by the combination of “cinematography, out-of-time sequences, whispered and sometimes inaudible prayers and music,” this combination reinforcing “a mystical reaching for transcendence and cosmic understanding of human suffering and mortality.” “Music and Image in Malick’s *The Tree of Life*”, see footnote 20.

feeling that the repeated patterns along the different periods, bridge the span across the times. Music itself makes such a span extremely visible and Alexandre Desplat definitely uses the repetitive pattern as a tool to achieve meaning and cohesion along the musical score. Several references in the film remind us of this sonorous effect by the use of repetition and variation, namely Brahms's *Symphony no 4* (second movement), which interrupts a family dinner conversation, and Bach's *Fugue in D minor*, played on the organ by the Father, both pieces using those stylistic devices. Repetition and variation are indeed fundamental strategies throughout the filmic account that interconnects middle-aged Jack's quest of the self with the birth of the universe and the evolution of life on earth. The quest is, further, given a titanic ring by the echo of Mahler's *Symphony No. 1* (first movement), which, as mentioned before, has been chosen as background music to the fatidic news of R. L.'s death, the driving force behind the elder brother's voyage into the past.

With the progression of the film, the premature departure of R. L. and the spiritual demand of middle-aged Jack are endowed with universal significance and gradually stripped off particularities, as we realize that we may be watching our own story on the screen. The compulsion to come to terms with death is ingrained in our existence even for those who, like Héctor Berlioz, profess to be atheists. In his *Requiem*, also known as *Grand Messe des Morts*, Berlioz follows traditional patterns and themes, inviting into his composition a large combination of orchestral and choral elements, which endow the piece with grandeur. Almost two centuries later, Malick would set the sequences of his *Shores of Eternity*, to the "Agnus Dei", the closing movement of prayer for the intercession of Jesus on behalf of the departed ones. It is also the movement in which melodies from the previous ones are recapitulated and brought to fulfillment as it is the case with the supplication for "eternal rest", introduced earlier in "Domine Jesu Christe," also present in *The Tree of Life*.<sup>29</sup> Recapitulation as a structural

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<sup>29</sup> The "Agnus Dei" connoted, from the very beginning, with Christ, the Lamb of God (Cf. John, 1: 29; Mathew, 9: 27) through whose intercession humankind fulfils the designs of the Creator, such connotation being valid either in the ecclesiastical ceremony or the ensuing orchestrated concert.

device admirably suits a story going over the past to make sense of the present and in which death is featured as part of the natural process of ever-flowing life, not as a final stage, but as the intermediate doorway to fully-achieved spirituality.

Berlioz's *Requiem* furthermore operates dialogic intensification with pieces glossing the same theme, namely Tavener's inaugural *Funeral Canticle* and Preisner's "Lacrimosa 2." As background music to the inaugural scenes, the *Canticle* induces contemplative lyricism which is brought to dramatic height in Preisner's score. The identification between "Lacrimosa" and the pleading voice-over is absolute in the sequences of Creation. A mother weeps for her dead son and demands of God — Who are we to You? —, the question conveying affliction and incomprehension for the mysteries of created life. A similar convergence, although of a different nature, occurs in the vision of the Shores of Eternity, when spiritual life allows for peace and reconciliation at the sound of the plea for eternal rest. These are merely two instances that illustrate the force of cohesion in *The Tree of Life* by the interaction of all its constitutive elements, image, music, and soundtrack. Mystery, however, is also intensified by the very cohesion achieved. It takes shape in the sonorities of the musical score, heightened, interrupted, or getting along with the soundtrack and the noises of the world — the water through the hose, the grating garden implements, the explosive Big Bang, the roaring cascades, the chirping birds, — the occasional dialogue, the barely hushed-in voice-over, and the unsettling noise of the empty silence in a multi-layered architecture of sound and image. Even the images from the natural world, the Utah salt flats or the California redwood trees at a low-angle shot do not clash with the surreal world in which a boy emerging from a water house (Jack) or a floating mother are accepted as "real" as the mysterious flame-like shape throughout a film that in its reach inside for the roots of the "Tree of life", and in its reach outside for its branches fosters the symbolic union of the earth in which we dwell with the transcendental heights to which we are transported by watching films like *The Tree of Life* and *Des hommes et des dieux*.

## Final remarks

Both films bring the viewer closer to transcendence; the formal means by which such an effect is achieved being, however, very different in each case. But is there any particular way to reach out for what lies beyond experience lived in materialistic ways? Xavier Beauvois and Terrence Malick appear to have little in common when we put aside their talent as directors, and mainly consider the formal orientations of their practices, the almost academic *mise-en-scène* of the former against the highly experimental format of the latter. In the sphere of public identity, they, again, appear to be as different as they could be, particularly when we bear in mind that the French director professes to be a non-believer, and the American is known for his idiosyncratic Christianity. One is inspired by actual history and the dialogue across Christian and Islamic cultures in Algeria, the other by a cross-culture jump that links the American fifties with the Creation of the World, bringing both periods into the contemporary scene and beyond.

On the surface and in spite of the critical acclaim that both films received, the contrast between them could not be greater and might be expressed in a simple question. How does historic scale come to compare with the cosmic one? This is, of course, a rhetorical question to set the argument going, for there is plenty of common ground upon which Beauvois and Malick tread. First, the superb cast of performers who mediate between the script and the audience, leading their roles with the aura of their artistic identity and, simultaneously, winning the viewer to a deep empathy with their impersonations: Lambert Wilson as Christian, Michael Lonsdale as Luc, Olivier Rabourdin as Christophe, give admirable portraits of their split between the frailties of human condition and the inspiring light of faith in *Des hommes et des dieux*; Hunter McCracken as young Jack, Laramie Eppler as R. L., Jessica Chastain as Mother, Brad Pitt as Father and Sean Penn as middle-aged Jack, also give excellent performances of their grappling with disappointment, sickness and death, as these come to be balanced by the grace of compassion and the memory of love in *The Tree of Life*.

Xavier Beauvois and Terrence Malick are also consummate experts in making the sound and the visual architectures of their films highly operative. The tension of the musical scores with visual imagery is as

productive as the combination of the different genres in clusters of meaning: *a capella* liturgical singing and classic ballet music, in Beauvois; sacred, symphonic and instrumental music, in Malick. In one as in the other, the scores powerfully highlight the states of the soul by, running the whole scale of human emotion, but, simultaneously, they are brought to the foreground as structural and thematic components of the stories, in parallel with the multi-layered soundtracks, becoming as relevant as the visual images to the meaning of the films. But most interestingly, perhaps, in both directors, is the deliberate use of silence against which all other sounds appear to be measured. Silence also backs up efficiently the travelling camera over the landscape or in the enclosed spaces of dwelling, fulfilling as much a significant function in relation to sound as the opposition created between the natural light of the exterior scenes and the darkened inside of the interior ones.

As in the novel, there are many ways of playing around a theme or a motif in cinema, which, on being approached from different angles and being told in different styles, fosters a wealth of distinct connotations. The Trappist monks were the tree where the “birds” of the region alighted. They were the spiritual and the material sustenance of the villagers, the healing friends in times of deprivation, and, on such an account, analogized to the enduring natural element — “we are the birds, *you the branches of the tree*” (my italics, my translation) — against which vulnerability likened to a bird’s is measured. In Catholic symbology, the “tree of life” represents the immaculate state of humanity before the fall, but to Pope Benedictus XVI, the cross becomes understandably the true tree of life.<sup>30</sup> According

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<sup>30</sup> In his address to youth in World Youth Day, Pope Benedictus XVI emphasized the connotations to the usual meaning of the cross upon which Jesus died, associating them with love and peace, such an association drawing, in my opinion, a parallel with the in-between lines statement of Christian de Chergé in his “Testament”. René Girard used the innovative approach to the death of Christ as an act of pure love for his fellowmen in the book, *Des choses cachés depuis la fondation du monde* (1978). See Benedictus XVI’s complete address in “Pope tells WYD youth: the cross of Jesus is the real tree of life”. *AsiaNews.it*. 4 September 2006. <http://www.asianews.it/news-en/Pope-tells-WYD-youth:-the-cross-of-Jesus-is-the-real-tree-of-life-5864.html> (accessed in 18/01/2014)

to these two standards, *Des hommes et des dieux* concurs with Malick's central symbol and film title. Manifestly branching out in as many directions as those of a universal symbol, the "tree of life" is always associated with *interconnectedness* between distinct times and distinct spheres, linking immanence to transcendence, in its variable cultural appropriations. I could hardly think of a better title for a film that is intent on establishing a bridge across the beginning of the world, throughout our contemporary age into the Shores of Eternity.

Both directors are concerned with values that from the beginning of times have set the human heart wondering and speculating. Is the human condition fated to live within the limits of a universe perceived in the exclusive terms of its materiality? What about the pull toward the unknown, the unfathomable intuition that there is something beyond bodily existence, that in the absence of spiritual life, the mind may dwindle to the shadow of one's shadow? In his Testament, Brother Christian de Chergé speaks of a "consuming curiosity" that only death may appease, and also of the hope to look in the eyes of God and, through them, to contemplate His children of Islam. There is ambiguity in this statement, particularly because the reason for the peculiar curiosity is left unsaid. But will it not be of the same kind as the hushed, tentative addresses of the voice-over to that numinous "You" in *The Tree of Life*? And is the elusive deity not the source of Job's anxious despair, the Mysterious Presence rhapsodized in Biblical Psalmody? Cinema is by nature particularly attuned to the performance of ambivalent moods and indefinable states of the soul. It is by definition the art of the ellipse, built on the gaps in time and space continuity within a narrative, on such an account, becoming a privileged means of bringing home a point of view that necessarily interpellates the viewer's, simultaneously, returning him, to the pleasures and difficulties of his own wondering self in *Des hommes et des dieux* as well as in *The Tree of Life*.

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## Filmography

*Des hommes et des dieux*. Dir. Xavier Beauvois. Perf. Lambert Wilson, Michael Lonsdale and Olivier Rabourdin. 2010. DVD. Video 1203/2011.

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### ABSTRACT

In *Des Hommes et des Dieux* and *The Tree of Life*, both Xavier Beauvois and Terrence Malick are concerned with values that from the beginning of time to our day have set the human heart wondering and speculating. These issues are brought to their respective films in a distinctive style, which, however, may be closely associated with a common trait in both directors — creative imagination and zest to make the most out of the art of cinema. Their skilful exploration of filmic devices, their invitation to other artistic expressions, namely music and painting, to figure in their films in a signifying role, is tentatively accounted for in this essay, in order to show how a visual narrative, in the case of Beauvois, and an ever-flowing succession of images, in the case of Malick, may contribute to illustrate unsuspected structural and thematic affinities, their remarkable differences notwithstanding.

### KEYWORDS

Cinema; music; self-portraiture; consciousness; identity

### RESUMO

Em *Des Hommes et des Dieux* and *The Tree of Life*, tanto Xavier Beauvois como Terrence Malick se ocupam de valores que, desde o princípio dos tempos aos dias de hoje, trouxeram aos nossos corações o assombro e a especulação. Estes assuntos assumem um estilo específico nos respectivos filmes, que, contudo, pode ser ligado a um traço comum a ambos os realizadores — a imaginação criadora e o gosto de tirar o melhor partido da arte cinematográfica. A artificiosa exploração dos instrumentos filmicos, o convite a que outras expressões artísticas, nomeadamente a música e a pintura, participem substancialmente a níveis de sentido, são experimentalmente ensaiados neste ensaio, de modo a pôr em evidência o que numa narrativa visual, no caso de Beauvois, e no ininterrupto fluir de imagens, no caso de Malick, pode, apesar das notáveis diferenças entre eles, ilustrar insuspeitadas afinidades temáticas e estruturais.

### PALAVRAS CHAVE

Cinema; música; auto-retrato; sentimento de si; identidade

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# TECHNOLOGY



# The Subaltern Condition of Video

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## The Subaltern Condition of Video

Digital video technology has created an unprecedented dichotomy in a field where professional cinematographic production and academic standards still predominate. Digital video technology has actually provoked a unique tension between audiovisual amateurs and professionals, between subaltern and hegemonic powers, by making audiovisual production tools accessible to the masses. Such a dichotomy will be briefly analyzed in this essay from a subaltern perspective. This is probably the first time that the notion of the subaltern is taken from its original political context and used to explore the tensions between two media. The notion of the subaltern is actually decontextualised in an attempt to develop a theoretical basis for digital video that is not copied or derived from the film tradition, but that is based on its unique technical and technological characteristics. For that matter, this essay borrows Gyan Prakash's definition of subalternity, taken from his piece "The Impossibility of Subaltern History" (2000):

... we should understand subalternity as an abstraction used in order to identify the intractability that surfaces inside the dominant system — it signifies that which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment ... This means that the subaltern poses counter hegemonic possibilities not as inviolable otherness from the outside but from within the functioning of power, forcing contradictions and dislocations in the dominant discourse and providing sources of an immanent critique.

Does the amateur, subaltern, vernacular<sup>1</sup> use of digital video represent an abstraction, an otherness to the cinematographic, professional, hegemonic<sup>2</sup> tradition? Can digital video practices elude cinematographic conventions and force contradictions and dislocations in cinema's "dominant discourse"? Does digital video offer production practices that "resist containment" within traditional cinematographic structures like universities or production studios? If one considers, for example, the pedagogical paradox of many film schools today that teach cinematographic theory with digital video equipment, or if one considers the taken for granted concept of "Digital Cinema", the answer is yes. The short historical overview that follows will provide a more elaborate explanation to the questions posed because, in fact, it is possible to associate digital video to the notion of the subaltern for two main reasons: 1. because it has been subalternised by the film tradition, and 2. because of the unique technical features of the digital video apparatus, that promote non-professional, non-standardized working methods.

### The "subalternisation" of video

In his lecture "The Nine Lives of Video Art: Technological evolution, the repeated near-death of video art, and the life force of vernacular video..." (2005) Tom Sherman says:

... video's early imagery was mostly flat and grayish and unimpressive, and the synchronized audio was uniformly horrific. Automatic gain controls surged with noise and frequency limitations (there was zero-dynamic range) made

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<sup>1</sup> The term subaltern, borrowed from Subaltern Studies, refers to a subject or object that is put in a position of subordination, a subject or object having a lower rank or status; the term amateur refers to non-professionalism, meaning no academic, professional training; the term vernacular is borrowed from linguistics in order to refer to the plain, everyday way in which people express themselves.

<sup>2</sup> For the purpose of this text, the concept of hegemony is linked to "cultural hegemony", that is the act of imposing a given worldview on a subject or a group of individuals, so that it becomes the cultural norm, the "universally valid, dominant ideology" (Bullock 387).



everything sound muddy and irritating. Analog video recordings degraded quickly as they were edited and copied. In the early days recordings were technically erratic and often wouldn't play back consistently from one machine to another. In short, the medium was unimpressive, even ugly, on a sensual level, and totally unstable technically.

As Sherman relates, the first decades of practical use of video (from the 50's until the early 70's) were marked by the "technically erratic" condition of the medium, with its reel-to-reel VTR rapidly degrading formats (ranging from 2" to 1/4" tapes), or with its generally low output, high signal-to-noise ratio video camera tubes, among other characteristics. Aesthetically speaking, instead of being considered an audiovisual production tool as impressive as the cinematographic apparatus, video was initially seen as a low-grade, second-class technology: its "ugliness", its "technical unstableness" could not be compared to cinema's already well-established artistic tradition. Even today, video can only have a professional, artistic look if it resembles film not only in terms of design — in the case of the cameras, for example, but mostly in terms of resolution — 2K equals 16mm, 4K equals 35mm, and so on.

As video started its quick technical evolution, cinematographic practices had already developed its own canons, its own set of theories, and its own working methods. In fact, when the first Video Tape Recorder intended for home use appeared in 1964, freeing analog video from television, cinema was seventy years-old, cinema was already an industry, an art and a field of study. But even with the accessibility of the video equipment and the alleged birth of video art in the late 60's, it was difficult to define video, it was maybe too early for video to affirm itself as an apparatus in its own right. On the contrary, it was easy for spectators and scholars to approach videographic works with concepts derived from formal or technical elements of film (lighting, depth of field, shot composition, use of color, montage, etc.). Videography was subalternised by the cinematographic tradition (perhaps inadvertently) because moving images — with synchronous sound — already had a concrete ideological and aesthetic point of reference: video was new as a technology but not necessarily as an experience, it represented a new way of recording images but it was not the first time images were captured, so video was "described"

with a terminology that belonged to a different apparatus (“shoot a video”, “direct a video”, “produce a video”). However, video remained (and in some cases still is) an abstraction, “an otherness that resisted containment”, not only because of its unique features (such as the instant replay), but also because unlike cinema video was not limited to artistic or mass media productions, video already was a multidirectional audiovisual tool. As Jon Burris states in his text “Did the Portapak Cause Video Art? Notes on the Formation of a New Medium” (1996):

Whereas previous new media had emerged gradually with one or two styles or aesthetic approaches, the most distinctive aspect of video’s formation was the immediate and simultaneous emergence of multiple genres: activist, documentary, synthesized and image-processed, abstract or abstractive, performance, conceptual, ecological, diaristic, agit-prop, dance, music, bio-feedback and other forms made their appearance in the years 1968-1972. ... There was an atmosphere of mutual support and a sense of a shared and privileged destiny investing video with powerful aspirations to be what no other medium had been, nor had been asked to be: at one and the same time a medium through which to view the world, a means to test the limits of the world, a political tool, a communications tool, and a responsive art medium.

Video’s “multidirectionality” can actually be reduced to two main directions: the professional and the amateur. Video has both incorporated the cinematographic standards and developed its intrinsic videographic potential; it has almost caused the disappearance of the celluloid and offered new, accessible production tools for professionals and amateurs; it has claimed its own space at all of the institutions that derived from film (film schools, cinematheques, production studios, festivals, etc.) and invaded the everyday life with equipment ranging from cell phones and webcams to surveillance cameras, 3D endoscopic cameras, thermographic cameras or even affordable, full color video observational systems for amateur or professional stargazing.

However, in spite of digital video’s ubiquity, it would be wrong to state that cinema is dead. Not only because there still exist film schools offering courses in 16mm or 8mm film stock, but also because a lot of

professional footage is still shot on film. The point is that the celluloid might be disappearing as an artefact, as a technical expertise, but not as a tradition, since the patterns of cinematographic praxis are still the rule: scripts and storyboards are an essential part of any professional production, productions are divided and carried out by “shots”, all the traditional crew positions of film were imported to videographic productions (producers, the DOP’s, editors, etc.), to work professionally it is often necessary to go through academia... The cinematographic industry is still there, there are more cinematographic schools than ever before, Cineplexes are still full even if films are distributed on hard drives or via satellite instead of 35mm copies. Cinema is not dead: its original medium is disappearing but not its doctrine, not its standards, not its narrative conventions. Video was subalternised all along this process because it has come to be the technological substitute of film, but not its theoretical replacement. How many film schools teach digital video theory or how many of them promote videographic production methods? Not many, in spite of the fact that most film schools today work with digital video equipment. How many Film Studies departments offer a digital video history course, given that film viewing is often done on DVD’s or Blu-Rays? How many film production programs make their students explore the subaltern, amateur and vernacular use of digital video? That is the pedagogical paradox of film academia today.

In 1923 Ricciotto Canudo had already claimed that cinematographic art was the seventh art. Is videographic art an art in itself or is videography implied in the 7<sup>th</sup> art category? The internet version of the Oxford dictionary defines cinematography as “the art of photography and camera work in film-making”, but it defines videography as “the process or art of making video films”. For many practitioners, consumers and scholars, videography might not be an art (as cinematography is), because what has been defined as “artistic” in the audiovisual world was established upon cinematographic terms (lighting, depth of field, shot composition, use of color, montage, etc.). The subaltern, amateur, vernacular essence of videography that this paper presents as one of the many possible theoretical frameworks for digital video does not fit in the definition of the seventh art because historically the seventh art has been catalogued with cinematographic oeuvres that do not incorporate these techniques.

Even though these two technologies are certainly related, digital video is a separate, distinct, audiovisual apparatus for evident historical, technical and aesthetic reasons, as Tom Sherman indicates it in his latest text entitled “Video is a Perceptual Prosthetic” (2012):

Video technology developed as a visual expansion of audio tape recorders. Video technology did not arise from film-based motion picture technology. Video evolved from audiotape, electromagnetic sound recorders. Film technology evolved from still photography ... The celluloid-based motion picture was first silent and then had sound added as a separate technological component. With video, moving visual images and synchronous sound were recorded simultaneously, literally on the same medium, initially as electronic signals recorded onto magnetic tape.

### **The digital video apparatus**

As mentioned previously, it is possible to associate digital video to the notion of the subaltern because it has been subalternised by the film tradition, and because of its unique technical features that promote non-professional, non-standardized working methods. In order to explore a few of those unique features, the digital video camera will be taken as an example. Given the wide variety of digital video cameras, this text will concentrate on those devices that are economic, small, light, compact and user-friendly; cameras capable of recording sound and image simultaneously on an electronic data storage device; cameras that do not require any kind of academic training to be used, that promote autodidactic learning processes and spontaneous recording methods; cameras that are sometimes combined to other devices such as computers, telephones, pens, glasses, helmets, etc.; cameras whose design and mode of work does not resemble cinematographic equipment.

This short examination presents three of the many characteristics of the digital video cameras in order to illustrate how a given apparatus forces a user to adapt his or her working method (and by extension his or her productions) to the technical specificities of the medium. This is important in order to understand the extent to which the technical differences between the two audiovisual apparatuses in question affect not only the

way one shoots/records images and sounds, but also the aesthetics of the final product.

1) Viewfinders: Different types of viewfinders propose different types of interaction between camera operators and their surroundings: Viewfinders for film cameras force operators to keep one eye closed and the other one fixed to the viewfinder.<sup>3</sup> Operators only see what the camera sees and are visually isolated from their surroundings as the camera is rolling; it is a more “artistic”, aesthetically engaged act, because their attention focuses fully in the act of framing. On the other hand, the electronic viewfinder of digital video cameras forces operators to keep a certain distance from the camera and to keep both eyes open, allowing them to see more than what the camera sees. In this case framing is not the only action operators can perform as they are video-recording. Framing might not even be the main action for videographers, as in the case of the GoPro (that does not even have a viewfinder), where framing is secondary to another action. This is also why the electronic viewfinder has become an essential tool for protesters and activists who can actually run, shout, jump while they are recording a public demonstration, and it is just as true for surgeons, who treat patients while they are recording. However, surgeons do not have an audiovisual education, they do not need to know theories about montage or shot composition. In video framing you are not necessarily absorbed in an aesthetic act, you are doing something else, but you are also recording it.

2) Instant Replay: Digital video proposes a different relationship between users and their work during the stages of production and pre-production. Marshall McLuhan once said that the greatest invention of the 20th century was the instant replay (Sherman 7), which, of course, is an inherent feature of digital video cameras. The instant replay is a tool that helps practitioners understand in an immediate way how the apparatus perceives the world and how successful they have been in capturing images. With the instant replay one can check the product as it is being created and improve whatever is necessary in the process. For that reason, the

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<sup>3</sup> Even if very experienced camera operators can work with both eyes open, their eyes are fixed on “the shot”.

process, the attempt, becomes more important than the prearrangements in digital video recording. Just like in painting, sketches, rough, unfinished sequences are often recorded in digital video in order to subsequently make a more finished product. Digital video allows users to record, erase and alter their work in such an easy, instantaneous way, that it actually encourages practitioners to work with moving audiovisual sketches rather than with scripts, storyboards or shooting schedules. By making of the script a dispensable technique, the instant, moving, audiovisual sketches encourage spontaneity and improvisation instead of detailed pre-production. Such “moving audiovisual sketches” are possible, among other things, thanks to the electronic viewfinder (which has the double role of a viewfinder and a screen), but also thanks to the memory card: an electronic data storage device that can be used numerous times and that allows practitioners to view the data compressed in it instantly. Celluloid, on the other hand, is a technology that is usually only exposed once (except for matting effects), that needs to be developed before one can see the final product, and that has to be discarded if the product is not satisfactory. For that reason, and just like early photography, celluloid imposes a one-shot method that has “ritualised” cinematography, because every aspect of cinematography must work correctly during that one, single moment that the celluloid is being exposed: this is what makes the script an essential step for film production. Contrary to the script, the audiovisual sketches are not yet considered a professional practice.

3) Integration vs. Division: The relationship that a user can have with the videographic or the cinematographic apparatuses must necessarily be different simply because digital videographic production is integrated and cinematographic production is divided. Cinematographic equipment is by nature segregated, making it necessary to have specialised technicians to operate each piece of equipment. In the case of the film camera, it takes at least two technicians to effectively operate one camera (the fact of having one eye closed while one is filming contributes to this). Such “division” also demands, as a consequence, the effective orchestration of every technician’s work during the shooting. Cinema has therefore developed not only a ritualised working method but also a pyramidal working structure where one finds the producers on top and the gaffers at the bottom, for example. Digital video cameras, on the other hand, allow the cameraperson to record

sound and image simultaneously, to measure the light and calibrate colours, to do a quick montage on-camera and with more recent devices to upload the product immediately to the internet. There is no need for separate specialised technicians. Instead of being pyramidal, the digital is compact, with no hierarchy, no stratification of the work, given that many tools converge into one point, into one operator. A Digital Video Auteur Theory could arise from this.

Yes, digital video has its own aesthetics, and it is asking for its own theoretical framework based on its subaltern, vernacular, amateur nature. Subaltern because digital video “signifies that which the dominant discourse cannot appropriate completely, an otherness that resists containment” (Prakash 287). Digital video resists containment in traditional film schemes because it has gone beyond mass media practices, because it is simultaneously professional and amateur, because it has given a voice to the voiceless, to the less fortunate masses that could not afford film school or film equipment, digital video eliminates the need of being a professional in order to produce media, art, or any kind of audiovisual work. The digital apparatus imposes working methods that are still not regulated, still not part of an academic curriculum, still not represented by an audiovisual syndicate. Users can use digital video in a vernacular way and — for better or for worse — anyone can now produce unofficial versions of events and distribute “illegitimate” reports on a given topic in a non-standardised, fully amateur manner. Mass media, mass entertainment, audiovisual culture, are not centralised practices anymore. Rather, digital video (“subalternised” by both the cinematographic tradition and by its own technical characteristics) has gained strength at the margins of the cinematographic structures. For as long as no true digital video exists, or for as long as film schools concentrate uniquely on the cinematographic tradition simply because handycams and cell phones do not have an “acceptable resolution”; for as long as the industry and the academia do not consider the intrinsic potential of digital video as artistic (simply because it does not correspond to the conventional definition of the seventh art), the subaltern, vernacular and amateur potential of digital video will remain exactly that: a potentiality.

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**ABSTRACT**

This text borrows the notion of the subaltern to analyze a few of the historical and aesthetic tensions between film and video. Particular attention is given to the relationship between the operator and the apparatus, with specific examples taken from the film and the digital video cameras. Given that video has been inadvertently but unfairly “subalternised” by the cinematographic tradition, video is often seen as the technical substitute of film and not as an audiovisual apparatus in its own right. The main purpose of this text is to propose a new theoretical approach for digital video that is not derived or inherited from cinematography, but that is rather based on its subaltern, vernacular, amateur nature.

**KEYWORDS**

Digital; Video; Subaltern; Vernacular; Amateur

**RESUMEN**

Este texto toma prestada la noción de lo subalterno afin de analizar algunas de las tensiones históricas y estéticas entre la película y el video. Se hace especial énfasis en la relación entre el operador y el equipo, tomando ejemplos específicos de las cámaras de cine y de video. Dado que el video ha sido inadvertida pero injustamente “subalternizado” por la tradición cinematográfica, a menudo el video es considerado el sustituto técnico de la película y no un aparato audiovisual en sí. El objetivo principal de este texto es proponer un nuevo enfoque teórico para el video digital, que no sea derivado o heredado de la cinematografía, sino que más bien se base en su naturaleza suablterna, vernácula y aficionada.

**PALABRAS CLAVE**

Digital; Video; Subalterno; Vernáculo; Aficionado

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# The Bits and Pieces of the Cinematographer: The Digitalization of Finnish Cinematography

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# The Bits and Pieces of the Cinematographer: The Digitalization of Finnish Cinematography

## Introduction

The world is already fully digitized. Cinema is another industry that has been through this change from its traditional, analogue ways using film and photochemical process to digital, computer and file-based techniques when rendering stories from script to screen. This change has been happening during the past years slowly, almost undetected, step by step. Sound design, editing and post production including special effects have turned to digital working methods at their own pace. This changeover has made it easier for the remaining disciples of moving picture industry to acquire and digest the new digital ways, including the use of digital cinematography and the distribution of the ready movie products in digital packages, to be screened digitally in the theatres.

This development has been recently assessed by David Bordwell, in his book *Pandora's Digital Box: Films, Files and the Future of Movies* (2012), and this digital volume offers a good view on the digitalization process of the industry on the projection side. On the technical side, the steps have been acknowledged by internationally influential technical organizations of the engineers of the industry, such as the American Society of Motion Picture and Television Engineers (SMPTE) and the British Kinematograph, Sound and Television Society (BKSTS). Many aspects of the digitalization process have been dealt with in the publications and social media of the cinematographers around the world. The impact of the change on filmmaking has been pondered and evaluated by filmmakers around the world in the documentary *Side by Side* (2012), produced by Keanu Reeves and Justin Szlasa, and directed by Chris Kenneally. This evolutionary process has happened all as powerfully as ever, and change is continuous.

How did this evolution happen in Finland? How were the days of the “Film Era” and what changed in the world to become the “digital times”? There is no comprehensive study about the situation available, only bits and pieces such as evaluation tests of the new equipment done by cinematographers. Moreover, I did not find any previous studies on its consequences to the film industry as a whole. As a cinematographer, I am studying the impact of this change on the work, role, status and art of the cinematographer. To achieve this goal, I have interviewed fellow cinematographers, from old timers who will touch no other material than film, to young geniuses who will never get to touch film material — and peers and colleagues in between, including my own experience. The aim of this study is to describe the work of Finnish cinematographers who have used film, and to show the change that happens when the means of capturing images changes. This study thus investigates how the digitalization process has emerged in the world of cinema, and how it came to Finland. It shows how the change happened there, what it has meant — especially for the art of the cinematographer — and what the challenges are for the future.

This investigation thus explores the following research questions: How has this change happened, particularly in Finland? What does it mean for the cinematographer, who is in charge of capturing the pictures in the first place, when producing a motion picture? How does this change affect the work of the cinematographer, his/her role, his/her status and most importantly, his/her art?

This paper will show that there has been an actual paradigm shift in the work of the cinematographer, through the change that has happened with the equipment with which the work is done. Along with the change of equipment for movie making, the importance of post-production work — as well as pre-production — has increased greatly. Although the basic work — capturing images to tell the story — remains the same, the digital cinematographer has a different status and standpoint as compared to his analogue peer. Film itself as material may be left only for the artists — and if the manufacturers cease to make the material for any reason (read: too little profit), the artist will have to make the emulsion proper him/herself — as did her trail blazing ancestors.

## Background

The Finnish language is a small one — there are about 5,4 million people living in Finland at the moment — and this leads to a quite small audience potential for the Finnish film industry. Major technical changes have meant rather drastic responses in the industry. In the beginning of the 60's, when television (which appeared in 1953 in Finland) competed for the souls of the spectators with the movie industry, the actors' union went on strike against appearing in films, protesting against working conditions and tight schedules. With the financial pressure from new techniques, this meant a collapse of the until-then prosperous Finnish studio system; major companies went bankrupt or diminished their activities considerably, and the studio personnel — artists, technicians and all — had to find a new means of supporting themselves. Many went to television, but a lot of talent was lost to odd jobs.

After the fall of the studios, the Finnish film industry had to start from scratch. The new cinematographers and technicians had to “invent the wheel again”, as there were no experienced peers available to pass on their knowledge — which in many respects is learned by working with, and as, an assistant to masters, and can only partly be learned theoretically. It can be argued that this meant a gap in the heritage of Finnish film making, a different situation compared to most European countries, where the film making tradition has usually been built on the achievements of the previous generations. This development has led to the situation where the Finnish film production industry consists mostly of smaller companies.

These companies do not have a large amount of equipment and studios of their own. The normal way of operating is to rent equipment and studios, even when the company may have their own cameras. This also means that the production companies can easily adapt to new technologies, and more often than not they are eager to do that.

Finnish films rarely reach the international market. The Kaurismäki brothers are the only ones to have their movies shown on foreign screens on a regular basis. The finance of the Finnish film production companies rely on the government subsidies.

The Finnish exhibitors have already changed their ways in response

to the digital revolution: in January 2012 the distribution of movies as celluloid copies ceased, and all major distribution is now done digitally. All this affects the work of the cinematographer.

### **The Cinematographer**

The cinematographer is the link between art and technique in a movie production: s/he is supposed to be an artist of light, shadow, composition and movement as well as an engineer who is capable of using sophisticated equipment to capture his art. At the moment, the engineering aspect of the profession has in large part changed. The cinematographer who uses film as his/her recording material has to master fine mechanics and photochemical processes. The new methods using digital media challenge him/her with new tasks: s/he has to be able to keep the digital information of the images intact, from computer to computer. Cinematography has turned digital.

When the movies were made on film, the cinematographer was the real key figure in the production. During the shoot s/he was in charge of his/her technical team, cameras and lighting. In addition, s/he was the one to see the action<sup>1</sup>, and all communication about the images went through her/him. Photochemical process was the means to capture the images: the negative was exposed and taken to the laboratory, where it was developed and copied. The laboratory process was good when it was stable and consistent — and this depended on the continuity of the process. A good laboratory had a big enough volume of film going through its processors all the time. The cinematographer was the person in a production to be in touch with the laboratory personnel, and s/he was able to control the entirety of the visual film process from the start of the production to the screening of the film. The cinematographer was a highly qualified and much appreciated professional, who had extensive training — either through an apprenticeship or through special film school curricula.

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<sup>1</sup> I am referring to the European tradition which is used in Finland, where more often than not the cinematographer himself is acting as the camera operator. In the Hollywood tradition the Director of Photography is accompanied by a Camera Operator.



The cinematographer's means to manipulate the look of the film included several technical and artistic tools, such as the choice of the lenses used, of the film materials and the way the scene was lit. The choice of lenses for a particular production was — and still is — one of the most important ways of affecting what the images look like. The image is formed in the lens and then captured by either on light-sensitive film in analogue form, or on a chip to be transferred to an electromagnetic or digital signal. The optical quality and the performance of the lens are of vital importance in this process. When the cinematographer chose film materials (such as the negative, intermediate or print material) for a production, he had already made many decisions: each material has its own characteristics, its sensitivity, latitude and contrast. Because the development and other means of altering the image in the laboratory could be done only by a roll of film at a time (as compared to modern virtually limitless digital possibilities), a roll was the smallest unit that could be manipulated. With this in mind, it is clear that, in film based productions, the lighting of scenes, control of exposure and ways of filtering the image was the most important way of controlling the look of the film.

### **Digitalization of Cinema**

Digitalization has evaded every walk of life. Sound, music and still photography were digitalized first, and then change came to every aspect of film production. When digital techniques developed, editing and post production were next to get digital platforms for professional filmmaking. The digitalization of post-production processes meant the first big change in the working methods of the cinematographer. This brought new control on the contrast, colour correction and image manipulation, and the digital intermediate process (DI) became normal procedure, with an output to film for distribution. This process also meant that the cinematographers were introduced to a new world of digital image manipulation.

The first professional cameras to compete with the film format in terms of picture quality were the High Definition (HD) video cameras, the first of which to appear on the market was supplied by Sony. Most of these cameras came from video manufacturers. The one to be mentioned here is the Thompson Grass Valley Viper, which offered a possibility to

record the images in 2K raw logarithmic format straight on files — although sometimes it was quite tiresome to do that, due to the sizes of the files and the bitrate: there simply was not enough space available easily for the productions, especially the ones in Finland. At least one Finnish film was captured with a Viper: Joe Davidow's *My Love is My Madness — Nijinsky* (2006)<sup>2</sup>. The file management was very tedious without benefit of the specially planned capturing hard drive, "the Venom". The Viper has a 2/3 inch chip, a size familiar from the video world. This affects the optical qualities of the image, especially the angle of view and the depth of field — making these qualities closer to video visuals than film.

Although the Viper had undoubted assets — the most important of which was the raw format, offering more possibilities for image manipulation that somewhat resembled the use of film negative — the camera gained no wide popularity. The real breakthrough in digital filmmaking came with the Red One camera.

The Red One was a marketing phenomenon — a brand new camera from a manufacturer who started from scratch, announced its product in 2006 and selling some three thousand units in advance. Red Digital Cinema started to ship the units in 2007, and the first ones arrived to Finland in spring of 2008. It is said that almost 20 units were sold to Finland — a believable figure, because the few Finnish rental houses offering professional camera equipment bought a few, in addition to some production companies and even individual cinematographers. Finnish filmmaking took a giant step towards the age of digital cinematography.

The traditional film camera manufacturer, Arri, introduced their new digital camera, Arri Alexa, in 2012. This meant a success after less interesting try-outs in the field, the D-20 and D-21. The camera offered digital features made with insights that came from film camera manufacturing experience, and this combination proved to be popular with cinematographers.

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<sup>2</sup> Joe Davidow: *My Love is My Madness – Nijinsky* (2006), produced by Claes Olsson for Kinoproduction. The writer of the current text was the cinematographer on that production.

## The Change

The new digital cameras have developed to such a degree that they compete in image quality with — and in some aspects surpass — film. The situation is such that all investments in professional motion picture camera development goes to the digital field instead of the traditional film cameras. This means that digital cameras and equipment will get better all the time — but that film cameras will stay as they are.

Digital image processing is versatile: compositing of images from several sources is easy and can be accomplished and adjusted even on set during shooting — and, of course, later. The importance of post-production has grown considerably, which is the big change in the ways of the industry. The planning of post-production starts already in the beginning of the production, and in many ways governs the pre-production and even the main shooting itself.

The “look” of films has already changed: the feel of a film shot on film is more organic, there’s grain; the feel of digitally captured image is clean, even with deliberate means of achieving a “film-look”. The spreading of HD television has accustomed the audiences to razor-sharp pictures more than before. As more and more movies are shot digitally, cinematographers learn the qualities of the medium. Digital cinematography is more sensitive in low light situations, but film behaves better in high lights. The attitude of the older cinematographers is that with film, one had to know how to light a scene, and now anyone can do the job and make it right in post-production; the younger are eager to experiment in the low light situations, considering even “night for day” situations.

The importance of the workflow of a production is also a new feature. In the film era, there was infrequent talk about workflow, because work flowed quite the same way in all productions. Nowadays, the workflow of each production must be carefully planned and tested — parts of the post-production work can be outsourced to many different companies, and spread over a variety of locations.

The vulnerability of digital material and media is the biggest drawback and unsolved problem in the field. Furthermore, archival questions remain unanswered. The captured material must be copied many times for back-up, and throughout the digital process it must be safely and securely

handled. The problems of archiving the finished product are even bigger, and yet to be solved. The problems are twofold: firstly, there is the instability of the digital media in which the information is stored, and secondly, the updating of the programs involved and the danger of the production — now in files — becoming obsolete.

### **The Challenge for the Cinematographer**

In the film era, the cinematographer just chose a familiar camera and film stock, and checked that the laboratory process was steady and constant. Now, in digital times, the cinematographer must be aware of the constant change of his equipment. The updates of post-production software and camera firmware make the situation unfamiliar to the old school cinematographer: even the same piece of equipment can behave differently when updated.

All this has led to the diminishing of the status of the cinematographer. Although s/he is still in charge of the imagery captured and lighting the scenes, he has lost the pivotal position in the process of shooting. S/he is no more the only one to see what is done, because the high definition monitoring on the set allows all to see what is done. Also, especially when the production involves a lot of post-production including CGI, green screen work and compositing, the planned workflow dictates in many ways what the cinematographer has to do.

In a motion picture production, there has to be someone who takes the responsibility for the whole process of the technical image generation. This person must have a thorough understanding of the digital process from camera to the screen. From where this person comes does not matter. S/he can be the cinematographer, the production designer or a post-production employee — s/he must know the bits and pieces of the digital world. And — in different productions, with different persons involved — these roles may vary, according to individuals' skills. In any case, the co-operation of the cinematographer with the production designer and the post production staff has ever bigger importance in the success of the productions.

## The Future?

Today, it is possible to make a whole film production in digital form, without using film either to capture the images or to project the result. Already, the status of the cinematographer has changed. Although shooting and lighting remain his/her most important contribution, s/he is merely one maker in the chain: his/her work done, the material goes further to some other hands, and the intentions of the cinematographer may be discarded.

The end of cinematography as we knew it is at hand. The profession, tasks and status of the cinematographer have experienced a change, alongside the ever accelerating development of digital filmmaking. If we compare the cinematographer of the film era to his peer in the digital times, the profession has experienced a veritable paradigm shift. Film as material will probably be left for the artists' use — as long as they get or are able to make the emulsion proper... But, as senior cinematographer Michael Ballhaus stated in the documentary *Side by Side* (2012): “If you do it with your heart in it, it doesn't matter what you are using.” The basic task for the cinematographer is still there: to let light and shadow play in the images, and to capture that play.

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**ABSTRACT**

Film, the traditional medium for motion picture image capture, has all but ceased to exist. Since 2011, most movies intended for cinema release in the world have been recorded on digital media instead of film. How has this revolutionary turn happened? What has this change meant for the industry and the profession of the cinematographer? How is the art of cinematography changing?

This paper researches how this change has occurred in Finland and discusses its consequences to the profession of the cinematographer: how was work in the “film era” and how the ways have changed now in these “digital times”.

The basic artistic work of the cinematographer — photographing the images to tell the story — remains the same. New equipment and new working ways have emerged. As the capture and manipulation of motion picture images has turned digital, there has occurred a veritable paradigm change in the profession of the cinematographer.

**KEYWORDS**

Cinematographer; Cinematography; Digitalization; Digital Cinematography; Film Industry

**ABRÉGÉ**

La pellicule, le médium traditionnel pour fixer l'image animée, a pratiquement cessé d'exister. Depuis 2011, dans le monde, la plupart des films destinés pour les salles de cinéma a été enregistrée en numérique plutôt que sur pellicule. Comment ce changement révolutionnaire est-il survenu? Que signifie ce changement pour l'industrie cinématographique et la profession de cinéaste? En quoi l'art de la cinématographie s'est-il modifié?

Ce projet cherche comment ce changement s'est produit en Finlande et débat des conséquences sur la profession de cinéaste: comment cela fonctionnait à “l'ère du film” et comment les voies se sont transformées maintenant au “temps du numérique”.

Le travail artistique de base du cinéaste — photographier des images pour raconter une histoire — reste le même. De nouveaux équipements et de nouvelles façons de travailler ont émergé. Quand la capture et la manipulation des images animées sont passées au numérique, il y a eu un véritable changement de paradigme dans la profession de directeur de la photographie cinématographique.

MOTS CLÉS

Cinéaste; Photographie Cinématographique; Numérisation; Cinema Numérique; Industrie du Cinéma

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# INTERVIEWS



# A Strange Kind of Feeling: Conflict and Alliance in Literature on Screen

Interview with Lília Jorge

Interviewer: Suzana Ramos

Translation by Edgardo Medeiros da Silva

*The film adaptation of A Costa dos Murmúrios (The Murmuring Coast) by Margarida Cardoso has probably brought you a number of positive and/or negative things. What has been the impact of this project on the overall evaluation of your literary work, including how you see the relationship between literature and cinema?*

In some cases, film adaptations do not bring anything positive to the books they were based on, but this is not the case of Margarida Cardoso's work. The film *A Costa dos Murmúrios* came into being sixteen years after the publication of the book. Thus, it allowed audiences to revisit topics associated with the end of colonial empires and particular situations resulting from them. It generated debate on a subject which is still present and relevant in Portuguese society, and European societies for that matter. The film also permitted the book to be revisited, opening it up for new readers. Comparing the two "objects", different compositions transmitting the same message but offering different interpretation possibilities, raises interesting questions. Therefore, I can say that as a novel *A Costa dos Murmúrios* has benefited from Margarida Cardoso's adaptation, especially because this highlighted an extremely contemporary topic.

*The atmosphere of nostalgia in A Costa dos Murmúrios is equally present in the film. In your opinion does cinema do justice to the novel in its capacity to register memory and silence on film?*

The atmosphere of nostalgia that structures the film corresponds to the feeling as it also exists in the book. I would actually say that in that respect Margarida Cardoso, who is much younger than I, and who experienced the atmosphere of the Colonial War as a child, managed to add a very special phantasmagoric element to the film, highlighting this message of

penumbra, unspoken space and the incapacity to write about the Human history, all of which exist in the book. We disagree, however, on the light shed on the memory of the war testimonials. Margarida Cardoso has favored inner spaces, and for that reason the war memories in her film are even more “murmuring” than the murmurs in the book itself. From that perspective, the novel is informed by a cruder type of narrative, much more open, and above all, a lot crueller. Margarida has opted for those things which are suggested and implicit, adding a much more symbolic dimension to the scenes. A good example of this difference is the portrayal of the killing of the birds. In the film, the birds can be seen in the background, the violence in the scene is transferred to the reaction of the women in the foreground. This transference required considerable skill, and the film gains considerably from this. Emphasizing the message itself through the poetic charge, Margarida managed to add to the sequence.

*In what way has cinema influenced your literary production, especially your novels and your shorter fiction, for instance, *Marido e Outros Contos*?*

The influence of cinema is everywhere. Throughout the twentieth century, literature coexisted with cinema, absorbing its narrative techniques, but it also tried to escape from it in order to survive within its own physical space, recreating what it has always been, a sort of “blind cinema” whose limitless fruition is derived from the words themselves. Insofar as interdisciplinarity goes, I feel I am a sort of grandchild, great-grandchild even, of others, a natural offspring of that very tension. That is to say, it is rather difficult for me to talk about the influence you mention, which is both a conflict and an alliance, especially as neither of these tensions can be accurately measured or quantified. What I can say is that there is a strong possibility that I would not write as I do, mindful of the murmur of smaller things, if I had not seen all those Nouvelle Vague films, if I had not been drawn to Buñuel’s mystical diabolism, to Fellini’s celebration of grand feasts, or even to Visconti’s aestheticism. Later on in life, I grew closer to film directors who are capable of drawing remarkable syntheses of all of these things. Some time ago, I wrote a short story entitled *O Perfume*, dedicated to Yılmaz Güney, because of his unforgettable film *Yol*. I wanted to pay homage to him by bringing that story up to date, to our own time and to

our own culture. Still, cinema is like music: both influence us, not to produce analogous objects, but rather to help us create works that are comparable both in quality and skill.

*Just as there are film directors who are extremely literary, we also have writers who are profoundly cinematographic. How do you see the future of this kind of interdisciplinarity?*

In my view, there is no conflict at all. The two domains join forces all the time, being at the same time quite well defined. It is not necessary for me to state that I am an interested party in this matter when I say that in this combination literature leads the way and should feel that it holds a primary position. The fact is that when it comes to the actual mutualization of the two genres, those narrative forms that are exclusively verbal can profit from cinematic techniques. As far as I can tell, the contamination does not go beyond that. The nature of what falls within the domain of the literary lies precisely in the autonomy of the *language of words* itself, an idea which I emphasize. For this reason, and only because of it, the literary contains within itself the ultimate film. That is to say, for better or for worse, cinema is a hybrid genre, literature is a genre that is pure. Film directors know that. The *script* is the go-between linking one *language* to the other. Aware of this special quality and connection, more and more the two genres will move along side by side, ever different, but always close to one another. I would even suggest that we shift the question of interdisciplinarity, which is a settled issue that has been more or less settled by now, onto a different domain — how will Cinema and Literature survive given the expansion of the audiovisual industry of pure entertainment and cultural mass consumption which characterize our world and are set to become reality in the future? Authenticity and refusal to give in to the demands of ready market consumption, there lies the greatest challenge faced by artists.



# The Truth of the Cinematograph: The Metamorphic Architecture Between Literature and Cinema

Interview With Fernando Guerreiro

Interviewer Suzana Ramos  
Translation by Ana Filipa Vieira

*Lecturing in Cinema at the Faculty of Letters, University of Lisbon, I would like to ask how you think this discipline raises students' awareness of the link between cinema and literature, especially in terms of adaptation?*

*Independent of recent developments in the conceptualization of adaptation, do you feel that there is still a tendency to undermine cinema, when the relationship between Literature and Cinema is reviewed. Is cinema seen as subordinate to literature, rather than a reinvention of the literary object? Also one tends to compare films or versions of various adaptations, something that doesn't happen with literary works.*

Is there even a relation, supposedly “original”, between Cinema and Literature? Basically, we question the (false) “obviousness” of 2 or 3 (fairly “established”) beliefs regarding this subject. First, that there is a *isomorphism* (parallelism) relationship between Cinema and Literature; an allegation that, on the one hand, attempts to homogenise cinema based on an idea of literature, and on the other hand, tends to legitimate the assumption (also valid for “literature”) that cinema is congenitally, or fatally, *narrative*.

Nothing stipulates that this “has” to be the case. In his *Notas sobre o Cinematógrafo*, placing himself within a context that has existed since the 1920s Modernists, Robert Bresson repeated that “the truth of the cinematograph cannot be the truth of the theatre, nor the truth of romance, nor the truth of painting” — and Élie Faure, in a text that dates back to

the early 1930s (“Introdução à Mística do Cinema”) specifies: “only by the subordination of narrative, dialogue, soliloquy to image and not the other way around, shall cinema find itself and its suggestive power once again.”

The second (widespread) belief is that cinema is mainly *visual* and not *mental*, as literature can be. From Jean Epstein to Eisenstein, Hitchcock or David Lynch (not forgetting Gilles Deleuze and Jean Louis Schefer), Cinema can also be regarded (and exercised) as a *mental process* developing from heterogeneous stimuli, composites of sensations-images and images-sensations that are also concepts. For Epstein (*Bonjours Cinéma*, 1921), cinema not only “registered” (recorded) but also “produced thought”, even where this might not have existed. Faure also writes that from the dual standpoint of “forms” and their “perception”, cinema may be described, in its conduct and effects (have you seen, for instance, Christopher Nolan’s *Inception*?), as a *metamorphic architecture*, both mobile and imaginary, resulting from the fluxional and sinusoidal dance of forms (and matters) in time (“formal drama launched in time” (34). Faure had already elaborated on this subject, writing in “Da Cineplástica”, 1922), “an architecture in movement that must remain in constant agreement, continuously balancing the relationship with the environment and the landscapes where it rises and dives” (27). And these ideas led to Loie Fuller’s so-called “serpentine dance”, at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, to Godard’s “video-shape” (consider *Puissance de la parole*, 1986).

That way, perhaps it is better to speak of a *unique poetic principle*, objectifiable in various matters, shapes and bodies, a constantly composite and impure principle, monstrous and unfinished, made out of the unnecessary or desirably resolved mixture of matters (shapes/forms), themselves irreconcilable. “In every art, there is a diabolical principle that acts against and tries to destroy it,” says Bresson in one of his aphorisms to conclude: “Such a principle may not be totally unfavourable to the cinematographer” (37).

Therefore, this subject (cinema) should not be subdued to the narrow framework of “adaptation”. One may apply to literature (to any “art”) what Bresson states about theatre: “There can be no sponsals between theatre and cinematographer, without the extermination of both” (20).



As a result, even when it seems to be following the example (program) of other arts, cinema *changes* them, *transforms* them, is ungrateful and unfaithful to them, sometimes producing surprising effects or even revealing repressed or unforeseen elements. In other instances, it employs techniques and processes that are seemingly external to it, to search, wonder and excite itself, to attack or to discover itself. Also, in other instances, it handles the blow of opposition/difference between systems of form, *constantly (re)definining itself* according to the difference thus introduced (Manoel de Oliveira offers a good example of this). Or, in other cases, it strives to reproduce, from within itself, in this field, the effects and transformations brought about by other practices of forms (Godard or Lynch's "video-cinema", for instance).

Still today, Cinema may be treated as a bastard art (which, like Heathcliff, has no problem biting the hand that feeds it), impure and immature, proud and domineering in the way it incorporates new functions — now with 3D — organs and prostheses).

In the early 1920s, in an article about Charlot, Élie Faure, placed the question interestingly. For Faure, cinema was "a new art, inorganic still", and he stressed: "A new art creates its own organs. The only way we can help is by pulling it out of the chaos" (39). In the dialogues of *Le Gai Savoir* (1969), Godard verbalised the issue in a more enigmatic way: "What is cinema? Nothing. What does it want? Everything. What is it capable of? Something."

Thus, approaching this subject as a "teacher" is always an exercise endowed with a certain paradoxicality which we must handle (as best as we can).

"Sensitising" — in the etymological sense of the term *aesthetics* (in Greek), which connects it to the role of sensations and senses — yes, but less to the "relations" between Cinema and Literature (or "adaptation") and more to its *differences, specificities*; using one formal system against the other in order to maintain that "open" space (*écart*), prolific between the "arts" that Diderot defended so fervently.

*In your opinion, is the structure of the National Cinema Plan suitable to educate the new generations for both visual culture and inter-disciplinarity?*

*Why do you think Portuguese cinema has begun to flourish recently? Did it meet the critics, or have the critics seen creative potential in our country?*

I don't know if there is (or if there should be) something we can call "Portuguese cinema" (especially in our case, where there is no "tradition" or "schools", only "families", at best). Maybe it is better to talk about films made in Portugal, in a specific geographical space (in an atmosphere with specific features) and in the context of a community that is, fortunately, heterogeneous and disperse, which lives and works in this time-space (though records do not have to be, necessarily, chronological and homogeneous). A cinema made by "national filmmakers" (?), and not only. And for other reasons — related to imagination, cultural issues or sensibilities — not necessarily made here. Is Aki Kaurismäke a Portuguese film-maker, Pedro Costa a Japanese film-maker? Disregarding production issues — which are important — does that title (in spite of João Botelho or João Mário Grilo's well-structured arguments in its favour), aesthetically speaking, make sense to you? Why are some of those films well received in other countries? Perhaps because, primarily, in those countries, they were seen as cinema, films?

As to the existence of a National Cinema Plan, let's hope this plan, or another, really be applied.

# *The Times they are A-Changin': An Approach to Contemporary Filmmaking*

Interview With João Mário Grilo

Interviewer: Hermínia Sol

Translation by Rui Vitorino Azevedo

*Periods of economic recession are normally considered as being propitious for artistic creation since they stimulate the critical/interventional side of art. Can the same be said about cinema?*

Cinema is particularly sensitive to economic contexts given that it is a very expensive art form. Therefore, as Gilles Deleuze used to say, it is very easy to prevent a filmmaker from working. For that reason, my answer to this question is somewhat ambiguous since it is not possible to address the question in such a general manner. However, some issues: the means at the film makers' disposal and the entities that holds sway over production media, are always of paramount importance. For that reason, before deciding which film to make, it is essential to understand how this project is located within the general economic context of the film industry. If economic recessions “do” anything, it is the way they highlight the importance of the aforementioned issues, as these are often forgotten or obliterated at other periods.

*Going back to the current economic context, (contradicting the previous question a little), during times of extreme economic and social instability it is common for audiences to go to the cinema primarily for entertainment, as cinema may offer a “reality”, that is different from their own. In this context do you consider cinema (as an artistic expression) capable of conciliating a critical-interventional role with a recreational one and at the same time avoid a doctrinal and/or condescending approach?*

I don't know if we can talk about behaviors in such a direct manner, especially as the cinema ceased to be a “cheap” form of entertainment a long time ago. Also as Godard said many years ago, the difficult thing is

not taking people to the cinema, but rather encouraging them to leave their homes. I think that television today, especially with the programming schedules offered, fulfills the role of an alternative reality in a much more immediate way. I believe that this explains, at least partly, why, box office revenues are falling so dramatically in Portugal despite the increase in ticket prices. During World War II a myth was created and held for decades that at times of crisis people seek fiction particularly in cinema theatres, but I am not sure if this still holds today. Fifty years have passed since this period and in reality nothing that has happened in the world since can be compared to the brutality of that conjuncture.

Clearly, it is possible for cinema to conciliate (or, at least, articulate) the different elements mentioned, otherwise it wouldn't be an art of montage. However, I am not sure that we can demarcate those fields (recreation and criticism) in such a rigid way as for the majority of people (that is, the majority of spectators), the "recreational" is a condition of the "doctrinal" and vice-versa. One only has to consider the case of American cinema which is the most doctrinal (and colonizing) of the world to see evidence of this.

*In your opinion, which filmmaker today best makes that bridge between the recreational and the interventional in a non-doctrinal way?*

If I understood the question, I would answer giving the examples of Almodovar and Tarantino. Still, affinities of principle should not be inferred because these filmmakers are fairly irregular, perhaps as a result of the strength of those "bridges".

*Cinema and literature have gone hand in hand for many years now.*

*However, contrary to what happens in the USA, European cinema has mainly opted to explore original screenplays instead of adapting sources and literary works to cinematographic language. How do you explain this tendency in relation to European cinema, in general, and your own filmography?*

There has always been a tradition of buying "literary property" in Hollywood, even before novels are published. There are cases where books take decades to become films because studios hold the rights but won't decide on how to produce the movie. In Europe, there has always been

a lot of adaptation but this occurs in a more “classical” mode because the literary market is more subtle in its relationship with cinema and boundaries are maintained. The American and European contexts offer very different environments since the American industry of entertainment generally covers cinema, books, and fiction. In Europe, and in my view, fortunately, that ecology does not exist and the relationship between literature and cinema is much more “critical” and less “functional”. Because of this I believe European filmmakers have much better conditions than American filmmakers to assume a personal and “free” perspective about the literature they adapt.

*If you were asked to make the film adaptation of a literary work, which work would you choose and why?*

I’m currently adapting *A Revolução Paraíso*, by Paulo M. Morais, for two main reasons: it’s an excellent novel about a period of recent Portuguese history that interests me greatly (the *Prec*, or Ongoing Revolutionary Process) and it is a contemporary work. I consider that cinema should pay attention to contemporary literature because this can encourage a “natural” and desirable solidarity between writers and filmmakers.

*Still on the relationship, somewhat dichotomous, between American and European cinema, and entering an area of primary importance, do you share the opinion transmitted by the Executive Committee of the International Council of Dramatic, Literary and Audiovisual Creators, supported by the Portuguese Writers’ Association that “cultural exception is not”, in fact, “negotiable”?*

I absolutely share that opinion, although Americans know quite well how to overcome the problem through their European agencies. In reality, I think that American films should pay as much tax in Europe as any other American product. That isn’t, however, what happens since all American studios have European branches that register their films in Europe as if they were European. For that reason in Portugal there are practically no commercial screening opportunities for films that are not American and we can easily imagine that an assiduous movie-goer may have never seen any other type of film except those produced by the big American studios.

*Over the last few years, indie/independent films have become more important compared with Hollywood cinema which seems to be going through a crisis of ideas. A similar case is that of Portuguese cinema which is increasingly gaining audience. In your opinion, what is the reason for this phenomenon?*

I don't know if the situation can be generalized that way, but I think today heterogeneous and differentiated pockets of audiences exist in the cultural landscape that did not exist a decade or two ago, the success of festivals like Doc Lisboa or Indie Lisboa exemplify this. In Portugal today, there is actually an alternative culture offer sustained by consumption thus these interests are also represented in the media and in information outlets, in general. These channels may help to consolidate an audience that is more critical and better informed and maybe a bit tired of the American business which is built up differently, and has other presuppositions being increasingly geared towards other sectors (children and adolescents).

*Finally, do you consider new technologies, especially the Internet, to have a positive or negative effect on the diffusion and/or production of cinema?*

Initially, I believe it has a positive effect, even if just for the creation of more extensive and solid critical opinion around cinema. Evidently, there are always "perverse" effects and we must recognize the fact that piracy frightens large businesses. But, it is undeniable that the Internet permits access today to a range of information that was unimaginable a few years ago. It has increased the access to cultural goods, in general and cinema in particular exponentially.

**NOTES ON CONTRIBUTORS**  
**NOTAS SOBRE OS COLABORADORES**





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