MOVIE

Double
Issue
34/35

UK
£4.95

Abroad
$9.95

REVALUATION

Stills. Front and back covers: Marlene Dietrich in Josef von Sternberg's Blonde Venus. *Above: Robert Mitchum in Vincente Minnelli's* Home from the Hill.

MUST WE SAY WHAT THEY MEAN?

Film Criticism and Interpretation

Leonora Eames, ex-waitress, has been picked up by millionaire Smith Ohlrig and is riding in his car. As he drives, too fast for her comfort, she answers his mocking quiz about her studies at the Dorothy Dale School of Charm. (This is in Max Ophuls's *Caught*, 1948, with Barbara Bel Geddes and Robert Ryan, screenplay by Arthur Laurents.) Leonora lists some of the skills she has learned, ending with:

'. . . posture and social usage.'
'Social what?'
'Usage. You know, conversation, etiquette, how to pour tea, how to listen to music, how to . . . please watch the road.'

When she speaks of pouring tea and listening to music, she makes two swift gestures. First she raises her right hand daintily to lift an imagined teapot, then she opens her hand and shifts it earwards with two fingers extended, meanwhile tilting her head and disconnecting her gaze from any supposed object of attention. In a different context, this second gesture could signify that the thought of music reminds Leonora of some old enchantment. By showing what music now means to her, it could help the film affirm the value of Leonora's education and of her achievement in working her way through school. Note that the gesture evokes music of a particular kind – Leonora does not snap her fingers or drum on her knees here. The kind is one she associates with a world of wealth, refinement and esteem accessible only in dreams or by magic. (American readers will know whether to confirm my sense that pouring tea – as distinct from coffee – may also have connoted an alien world of Europeanised pretension.)

The two gestures displayed for Ohlrig ('This is what I've learned') are also part of a reverie for Leonora ('This is how it could be if . . .'). But their succession, immediate and without differentiation, exposes something else – the belief that listening to music is, like pouring tea, a matter of the appropriately graceful gesture, a question of self-presentation. Leonora has learned that 'how to listen to music' means how to assume the posture in which it is advantageous to be seen while (posh) music is being played.

Further aspects of context help to point the meanings. In the face of Ohlrig's sarcasm, Leonora is defending the Dorothy Dale regime, so these are what she understands as the best claims she can advance. She has not been made aware of anything that a woman might derive from music beyond an occasion for looking delightful. Leonora's exposition of the value of her education also shows her ignorance of its shallowness. Had she made her gestures while in eye-contact with Ohlrig, she could have been sharing a knowledge of their falsity. The lack of depth to her fantasy is confirmed by the abruptness with which she can switch back to a concern with Ohlrig's driving. 'Please watch the road' entails 'Please look away from me' and thus suggests Leonora's unease in her performance.

The passage I have described lasts less than fifteen seconds. My description is far from exhaustive but I believe that it is accurate and illuminating. In order to describe Leonora's gestures I have had to interpret them. The image would not be evoked, or properly spoken of, by a more extensively physical account. (A moment-by-moment plot of the intricately patterned and unavoidably meaningful eye movements performed by Bel Geddes and Ryan would be tedious and unrevealing.) It is necessary to reflect on what the gestures mean and where they come from. The camera cannot directly show what is in Leonora's mind, but her aims and feelings are as much a part of the narrative of *Caught* as the fact that she is sitting in a millionaire's car. Films like this are made on the premise that audiences can see the implications of the acts, words and silences of movie characters. When, towards the end of our sequence, Leonora tells Ohlrig 'I know that you've never been married before,' our understanding of the wish betrayed by 'before' has to be at least the equal of Ohlrig's if we are to comprehend the hostility in his response. We must be alert to both the wish and the hostility if we are not to be baffled by the twenty seconds without interaction that the film holds before the image dissolves.

No neat distinction can be drawn between the meanings that Leonora offers to Smith Ohlrig, that

Barbara Bel Geddes offers to the camera and that the film offers to its audience. An appreciation of this sequence should encompass all three. The aptness of the writer's invention in having Leonora include 'how to listen to music' in her catalogue of social usage; the skill of Bel Geddes in enacting, via a tiny beat after each 'how to', the split second of recall that betrays Leonora's gestures as unspontaneous and insecurely learned; the precisely graded camera position that gives prominence to the listening gesture while allowing us to see enough of the tea-pouring (partially obscured by the steering-wheel in the foreground) to supply the informing context: these are all achievements in the construction of meaning.

This assertion has its place at the head of an issue of *Movie* given over to essays in revaluation, where questions of artistic method, structure and effect are regularly posed as suggestions about meaning. But it is also directed at some of the arguments and more of the attitudes in David Bordwell's *Making Meaning* (Harvard University Press, 1989), a book whose animus against interpretation seeks justification in a claimed concern for form and style. Criticism that tries to explore what films express, it insinuates, 'does not exist on a sensible footing' (p.255) and should now give way to the work of the 'film poetician'.

It gives an early indication of the tact with which it will present the interpretive process when it suggests (p.8) that the 'point' of *The Wizard of Oz* might be found to be explicit in its last line of dialogue, 'There's no place like home'. Such a reading presents film as a mere relay for meanings and requires an imperviousness to the complexity of cinematic expression. It involves a refusal to balance the affirmation in the words spoken by Dorothy Gale (Judy Garland) against the anxious entreaty in her tone and against other information that the film supplies: that the Kansas farmyard was indeed a place not remotely like home, a place lacking in courage, sensitivity, hope and colour, where the only singing that could be done was a lonely cry of yearning for something better. It also involves both blindness to the way that 'There's no place like home' follows another more obviously mistaken affirmation – Dorothy's 'I'm not gonna leave here ever, ever again' – and deafness to the backing musical sequence where a brief snatch of 'Be it ever so humble . . .' gives way to a complete and emphatic restatement of 'Somewhere over the rainbow . . .' In order to understand the kind of ending this is you have to find at least some place for these aspects: 'Kansas' – which relevantly resembles 'Oklahoma' in the following year's *The Grapes of Wrath* – has equivalents for all the major inhabitants of Oz except the good witch; there are no indications that Kansas has found so much as the guts to confront, let alone the resources to defeat, Miss Gulch; Dorothy has had to put great effort into following the spell's requirement that she repeats – as if hypnotising herself so as not to resist – the formula 'There's no place like home', and she was explicitly reluctant to leave a world in which she had found not only mirrors to the confusions and malign authority of home but also experiences of joy and companionship unique to Oz; although it is stated that her death had seemed likely, no-one in Kansas is sufficiently moved by Dorothy's recovery to do more than pat her hand – for any warmth of contact she can still turn only to her dog. My understanding of all this involves a sense – mindful of the actress at the centre of it – that it is a far from merry thought that a child can be emotionally dependent on, and relieved not to be separated from, an environment answering so meanly to her needs for closeness and comfort. So I suggest that tears at this conclusion are not tears of unmitigated joy and that our emotions are gravely misrepresented in allegations of an uncomplicatedly 'happy ending'. I think the contrary claim is most likely to be advanced out of a false view of what a 1939 MGM family musical would have been obliged to serve up by way of resolution.

To contend that a critic might usefully take a cosy homily as the 'literal' meaning of *The Wizard of Oz* would be only a grain less misleading than to say of *Psycho* that 'you might take its explicit meaning to be the idea that madness can overcome sanity. You might then go on to argue that *Psycho*'s implicit meaning is that sanity and madness cannot be easily distinguished' (p.9). If you went on thus, you would surely deserve one of Mrs Bates's best collusive/derisive grins, not just because it's rather late in the century to be trying to tag *Psycho* with a single 'point', as if it were an unnecessarily elaborate candidate for Aesop, but also because the explicit/implicit distinction is so patently vacuous: we see Marion Crane lose and regain control over the relationship between her aims and her actions; equally, we share as well as see the failure of a range of characters to realise that Norman Bates is other than an overly devoted Mother's boy. The difficulty of distinguishing sanity from madness is a meaning in *Psycho* because it is several times a fact in *Psycho*. It is no less or more 'explicit' in the film than the sense that it would be awkward for a bashful young man to be unable to complete the concealment of a stolen car and more severely embarrassing if the owner's corpse happened to be in the boot.

I say these things so as to suggest alternatives to some of the claims and definitions in *Making Meaning*. The book's sub-title, *Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, indicates the reach of its ambition. It sets out to explore first the processes by which we arrive at our understanding of the non-obvious meanings of movies, then the ways in which this understanding is developed and expressed in forms adapted to the requirements of a particular audience. The book aims to contribute to the development of critical theory and to widen the rather limited circuits of Marxist/Freudian reference within which *théorie courante* preferred to operate. Bordwell wants to oblige film studies to take note of stimuli available both from relevant disciplines like cognitive psychology and from other outstanding bodies of cultural scholarship

like the work of the art historian E.H. Gombrich. He draws on searchlight-not-bucket approaches to perception in order to build an alternative to those notions of the film spectator's passivity that have served to glamorise the actively-reading critic and the habit-busting art film. These designs would suffice to suggest a significant intervention from the co-author of two books – *Film Art* and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* – whose acceptance has been impressive on both sides of the Atlantic. But *Making Meaning* is not alone in declaring its opposition to *théorie courante* while being continuous with some of t.c.'s more dubious features.

The book is stuck in the familiar scepticism that constitutes a major and dispiriting strain in critical theorising. Thus it deals happily in the notion that interpretive criticism 'produces a model film', but it offers knowing signals of the distance from which it feels required to contemplate 'that posited entity the "film itself" ' (p.143). The model film is 'inevitably an approximation', but nothing suggests what the model could approximate to, in a world which might or might not contain films themselves.

The clarity of Bordwell's argument is asserted and enacted rather than achieved, largely because two of the book's main aims are incompatible. First, it wants to survey what critics do when they produce interpretations – rather than what they imagine or declare themselves to do – and to conduct the survey 'holding partisan debates in abeyance' in a posture that aspires to an 'ethnographer's calm curiosity'. The book's preface asks us to suppose that 'in order to study critical practice as such, we must pretend that all theories are correct, all methods are valid, and all critics are right' (p.xii). Once convinced that a study of critical practice is worth having at the price of such a pretence, we have further to accept that the processes of interpretation are the same across all films and without respect to the quality of the outcome. It is a nice point whether this would be an achievement of calm or of catatonia. We can know that we are surveying appropriately selected instances of interpretive practice only if we know what to count as an interpretation, as against a synopsis, a delusion or a parody. That is a matter of judgment. It involves issues of value by logical necessity rather than because the surveyor is unavoidably subjective. To suppose that the meaning-making processes which yield the illumination in the best work of (to take only recent American examples) Stanley Cavell, William Rothman or George M. Wilson are the same as those that grind out some of the poor specimens cited by Bordwell demands a great leap, but who would envy the faith?

Internally contradictory as it is, this value-freed project is quite at odds with another goal. Bordwell wants to show that his survey has ended up providing support for his 'belief that the great days of interpretation-centred criticism are over' (p.xiii). In this cause he props up many of his ostensibly representative samples of critical product in the Aunt Sally frame. They are required to demonstrate critical routines, but also to show 'what a routine activity criticism has come to be.' Bordwell's practice runs counter to his precepts, since at each major stage his procedure presupposes what he aims to prove. There is an uneven contest between some of the book's claims and the tendency of its structure and rhetoric continuously to demean and diminish the work of criticism. Its most consistent and probably intended effect is to portray interpretation as a boringly repetitive impediment to our understanding of cinema.

Bordwell's account is absolutely bound to a view of the interpreting critic as a propounder of hidden meaning. It allows interpretation to bother itself only with meanings held to be 'implicit' or 'symptomatic', and these it opposes to whatever a film 'directly states'. It does not specify what it would mean for a fiction film to 'speak directly', even though it is constrained to put quotation marks round the words and can give only two instances: 'There's no place like home' from *The Wizard of Oz* and 'a stereotyped visual image such as the scales of Justice' (p.8).

Taken seriously, this would involve the belief that the 'literal meaning' of a film is the literal meaning of any statement spoken in it, or the conventional meaning of any stereotyped visual image shown. My remarks on the end of *The Wizard of Oz*, even if regarded as applying a few splashes of depression to the picture's uplifting finish, illustrate the problem here. Statements always come in a context which guides the assessment we can make of them. When they occur in a movie, what we make of them (how literally, so to speak, we take them) depends on the way we understand them to function in a context that has been elaborately constructed. If *The Wizard of Oz* secures conviction for Dorothy's last words, it must have found ways of characterising them as authoritative – minimally, they need to be heard as sincere and sensible and not substantially qualified by the film's other data. Compare (as Bordwell does not, though he mentions it only a few lines later when defining the category of implicit meaning) the psychiatrist's performance at the end of *Psycho*. The irony here is in part achieved by presenting the spokesman-figure not as the indifferently embodied voice of expertise but as a personality with a conceited sureness of his understanding, in a film in which the last of a series of similarly convinced statements was Lila Crane's (Vera Miles's) 'I can handle a sick old woman'. When we regard any statement ('Madness! Madness!', say) as an attempt to subsume everything in a film under a single rubric, we are responding to indications no more 'direct' than those that give Lila's claim an ironic inflection.

To take any character's assertion as unmediatedly representing the film in which it occurs is to hallucinate figure without ground. Bordwell avoids recognition of the absurdities here by ignoring the problem of the terms in which a movie could be reckoned to offer 'direct meaning', to 'state' or to 'say' and rushing on to construct the special category of the implied in opposition to the stated

rather than, where it would make more sense, to the shown. Though he sneers a little freely at critics who personify the camera (as if the image might Ho Ho sometimes be taken to indicate a human viewpoint), he is apparently unabashed by his construction of the film with a tongue.

I suggest that a prime task of interpretation is to articulate in the medium of prose some aspects of what artists have made perfectly and precisely clear in the medium of film. The meanings I have discussed in the *Caught* fragment are neither stated nor in any special sense implied. They are filmed. Whatever else that means (which it is a purpose of criticism and theory to explore) it means that they are not hidden in or behind the movie, and that my interpretation is not an attempt to clarify what the picture has obscured. I have written about things that I believe to be in the film for all to see, and to see the sense of.

Such a view is greatly at odds with the notion that 'broadly speaking, all criticism is "allegorical" in looking for another meaning than the one overtly presented' (p.195). I claim that a meaning presented is a meaning made overt within the chosen medium. A process like story-making in transmitted images develops as a medium because artists explore its possibilities for 'making overt', which in large degree means its capacity to imply. In other words, implication is a form of expression, not of concealment.

The Bordwell version of criticism depends on a travesty of 'the dominant framework within which critics understand interpretation. The artwork or text is taken to be a container into which the artist has stuffed meanings for the perceiver to pull out' (p.2). When we progress from stuffed meanings to hidden meanings we lose a relatively advanced concept of form'n'content that pictures the container as a jam-jar, since it offers a limited display of the goodies within. The container becomes rather more like a vault that withholds access to meaning and keeps sense out of sight. Under this conception, it is hardly surprising if interpretation involves doing violence to form, since the viewer is required to act as a safe-blaster in order to get within reach of anything significant.

It can be useful to point out how we mislead ourselves with confused notions of content. But if there is a general tendency to fall into a particular kind of error, it is not helpful simply to stage a celebration of (others') obtuseness. The error is likely to indicate a real and shared problem. Some of our difficulties over form and content run in parallel with difficulties over the relationship between the film as a whole and the particular aspect that, at any one time, is our centre of attention. (Just such a difficulty would, I suppose, lead one to mistake the words of a character for the voice of a film.) Other hazards are presented by the relationship between the understanding of a film manifested in our response and enjoyment and the understanding that is expressed in an articulated appreciation. Bordwell writes as if there is only a problem of public rhetoric here, a problem of making one's articulation acceptable and persuasive to others, but there is regularly a more important problem with oneself, of finding the words that fit one's sense of the moment or the movie.

Opposed notions of critical rhetoric relate to opposed views of what interpretation may be. For Bordwell, rhetoric functions to render an already formed argument persuasive. That depends on seeing interpretations as intended proofs, designed to achieve internal coherence and to be assessed on the page or in the lecture theatre. Some of Bordwell's discontent with interpretation seems to originate in his belief that if its operations had any merit they would be rigorously logical. Thus some of David Thomson's remarks on *Lola Montes* (which deserve the greatest credit for their early contribution – in *Movie Man*, 1967 – to our understanding of Ophuls) are deemed eligible for reduction to a mock syllogism (p.113). A lordly footnote then remarks, 'As I have laid it out the chain of inference is formally invalid.' Laying criticism out with an assault of that kind is easy but pointless. Thomson's understanding of the film at no moment posed as a proof. No intra-textual interpretation ever is or could be a proof. Most often, it is a description of aspects of the film with suggested understandings of some of the ways they are patterned. Rhetoric is involved in developing the description so that it evokes a sense of how, seen this way, the film may affect us, or so that it invites participation in the pleasure of discovering this way in which various of the film's features hang together. But the ultimate appeal for conviction is to the reader's memory and renewed experience of the film.

That is why I reject Bordwell's market-oriented view that plausibility and originality are the criteria by which the practice of interpretation is governed. Originality matters very little except as a sales point. A claim for the novelty of one's view can very quickly become an assertion of its outlandishness. Plausibility is fine as the charlatan's measure of credulousness in the audience, but plausibility that persists through a renewed and alerted contact with the data is something else again. That will mean that the critic's account was accurate in respect of the elements of the film that it invoked. As I illustrated with *Caught*, those elements can never constitute a description of the whole. So there is a further judgment to be made, of the degree to which the whole is illuminated by the critic's account of the parts and the logic of their configurations. Once I have seen some meanings in a gesture, I have taken one step forward. My understanding of the film may continue to grow but completion cannot be more than an aim. That is because completion would have to consist of accounting for all the data, but what will come to count as data cannot be known. I cannot now tell what may in the future come to notice as needing to enter into my understanding.

The same goes, too, for the whole of any part because, no matter how small the part, it can never in itself be exhaustively – wholly – described. Nor could one ever be done with the possibility of

discovering material elsewhere in the film that stands in a qualifying relation with some disregarded feature of the chosen moment. Perhaps there is an important pattern in *Caught* connecting the occasions when its characters are shown sitting in enclosed and/or mobile spaces; there certainly is a structured series of moments in which, as here, Leonora submits herself to hostile interrogation by a man. Indeed, a key question for our broader understanding of the film is how far it presents its other main character, the liberal doctor Quinada (James Mason), as offering Leonora an alternative to or another version of Ohlrig, since the doctor's questions, gifts and accusations strikingly parallel the millionaire's.

That suggests another important dimension of meaning. The demand that interpretation follow formal rules of inference results from understanding the critical process as extracting from the movie statements which are hidden but which otherwise resemble messages such as 'There's no place like home'. Most often, the interesting meanings of films are not like this at all. They consist rather in attitudes, assessments, viewpoints – balances of judgment on the facts and behaviour portrayed. As I see *Caught*, Ophuls – for it is he! – offers us neither contempt nor indulgence in reflecting with caustic humour on the limited understanding that Leonora has developed in her severely limiting world. The ability to work in this way depends on the resources that can be discovered in film to shade information and grade effects, to suggest the weight that is to be attached to any particular observation.

In this area, Bordwell's account of interpretation has been derailed by his drawing on cognitive psychology in some of the more mechanical forms that have developed – as one psychologist puts it – under the spell of physics envy. In particular, he arrives at a picture (as well as several diagrams) in which the items of information on which the critic draws to construct a reading exist in the film as 'cues', some of which the critic picks up and some of which are ignored. I am not at all convinced that the quest for meaning is a narrow and concrete enough goal to be compared with, say, the perception of depth – and even there I understand the notion of a cue to be under some stress. But I am sure that the screened data can not usefully be represented as pre-packaged with a determination of which items are to serve as cues. A cue is not a cue unless it is picked up, but if we retreat to speaking only of potential cues we are then talking of everything that the film contains. Moreover, shading and grading are such crucial devices for establishing the relative importance of data, none of which is totally without meaning, that it seems destructive to represent all the cues as having the same size and weight, and standing immune from interaction.

Film-makers continuously develop the repertoire of devices through which to adjust the prominence with which they present an item of information to its importance in the film's scale of values. (But we should observe that there is no level of prominence that could constitute concealment.) Ophuls judged that the succession of Leonora's gestures was worth including in the performance and in the image. It was worth the space it would occupy in a glancing moment in which the second gesture only would be presented to our unobstructed view, within a medium shot favouring Leonora. The image's prime concentration is on the faces and voices of the characters, with Ohlrig dominating the foreground but with Leonora the more clearly and fully visible. The hand gestures thus de-emphasised nevertheless attract notice because, at the moment of happening, they provide the largest movement on screen. They were not judged to merit isolation in a close-up, or in a closer shot of Leonora which lasted only for the duration of the gestures. These are decisions against using the moment to see Leonora derisively. The framing and editing procedures offer the gestures as supplementary information, relevant but without the key significance of the dreamy, bedazzled and throatily sexual response Leonora has to the other main thing she knows about Ohlrig: 'and you're rich . . .' ['How rich?'] '. . . Oh, very rich.' That needs a big close-up, the only image in the sequence completely excluding Ohlrig even when he speaks, edited so that the shot starts immediately before 'And' and ends right after 'very rich'.

I want to develop this point by looking at an earlier section of *Caught*, one whose delicacy will not be apparent in a description since it depends precisely on the balance of prominence between various elements. It is in the opening sequence, where Maud Eames (who has not yet assumed the name 'Leonora', nor been given that of 'Lee') is speaking to her bed-sit-sharing mentor Maxine (Ruth Brady) of her hopes of escape from car-hop drudgery via the Social Education available from Dorothy Dale. Maud has been washing her feet and is sprawled across her bed towelling them while Maxine washes up at the sink in the background. During an extended take the camera moves in on Maud, excluding Maxine (who becomes the off-screen voice of practical cynicism) as she indulges a fantasy of working as a model in a fashion store. When she has finished drying her feet, and while the conversation is still of mundane matters, she reaches out idly to take hold of a flimsy metal fly swat. She fiddles with this throughout her daydream, turning it in her hand, rubbing it against her thigh and tapping it on her knee. '. . . And then one day in walks a handsome young millionaire . . . And he's standing at the perfume counter, and then suddenly he turns round and sees me . . . and we don't say a word for a long time . . .'

At no time during this does Maud pay attention to her gestures. She is not swatting an imaginary fly. Indeed, her fiddling with the swat seems to indicate boredom and aimlessness rather than a killer instinct. But on '. . . sees me . . .' she makes the most forceful of her taps with the swat and then, in the pause as she bites her lower lip with pleasant thought, holds it still in a way that would indicate – if she were attending to her actions –

that she had achieved or imagined a hit.

The fly-swat gestures are a particularly brilliant invention whereby the film suggests what is calculating and predatory in Maud's innocently naive reverie. Note that a different character would be constructed for Maud in this exposition, if she saw what she was doing and made a connection between her thoughts and her gestures. The effect could, too, be a great deal cruder. Maud could be shown in pursuit of a real fly, with a killing made on the word 'millionaire'.

But Ophuls has shaded the moment with complex cross-meanings. That Maud's fantasy is, at an only just unrecognised level, one of exploiting her sexuality is indicated by showing her on the bed with her legs open. However, the bed also relates to material circumstances – it's the apartment's one comfortable seat – and neither Maud's posture – across the bed with her head propped against the wall – nor her working girl's dress of rolled-up jeans and plain shirt strongly conveys allure, or any attempt at it. Similarly, the camera's track in to construct an isolated image of Maud-at-dreaming is counterbalanced by the noises off: not just Maxine's harsh interjections but also the grubbily material sound of clattering plates and sloshing water from her dish-washing. Ophuls's chosen sound-balance is emblematic of his precisely tuned effects, since he uses the relative loudness of the impacts of fly-swat on trouser-leg to characterise the relative force, and establish the relative prominence, of Maud's gestures.

I have to recognise that I have little idea what in all this could be identified as a cue or as a 'unit of meaning'. Nor can I see any way for the subtleties of the scene to be comprehended within Bordwell's mechanism of interpretation which requires the application of pre-formed arrays of concepts ('semantic fields') to itemised signifying data ('cues'). As in many other efforts to put work in the humanities on a Sensible Footing, the task is assumed to involve drawing criticism closer to the natural sciences but according to an all-clocks-and-no-clouds model that scientists themselves reject. Bordwell would have to ask what it was about my concept of 'naively romantic day-dreaming' that made me see relevance in a fly-swat. His systems (endlessly recycling old information) cannot account for the metaphorical process whereby what I know about fly-swatting may be used to show me something new about romance. I see no reason for theory, or poetics, to deny the reality of those aspects of our understanding that psychology cannot currently explain. Nor has any good reason been advanced for preferring the development of grand schemes of 'interpretive practice' to improving our understanding of a single great movie.

How much of what I say about *Caught* is true and useful can be known only by checking against the film, particularly so as to see if you find that my description gives these moments valid meanings in their appropriate weights. You might discover aspects of the car scene to convince you that I have missed the point of the musical reference and that, say, one of its effects is to show how the Dale school has equipped Leonora to use masquerade so as to resist recruitment into the regime of bourgeois culture.

Remote as that possibility seems to me, it usefully illustrates the way that intra-textual understanding depends on extra-textual information not only about facts but also about values. I have assumed *Caught* to address an audience that could relate Leonora's gesture to its conviction of the benefits of musical understanding and thereby share an assessment of her absorption of music into the department of airs and graces. So my interpretation of the moment tries to define a set of internal relationships in the light of beliefs about the appropriate viewing perspective which are grounded inevitably in history (about which I have said nothing) and values. The image characterises what Leonora has learned about music, but offers the characterisation for assessment within even more complex terms of judgment. My reading depends on the sense that the moment draws on, and to varying degrees activates, notions of social pretence, true feeling, musicality, attentiveness, spontaneity and control, but does not strongly invoke what Leonora may have gained by being taught how to avoid the more humiliating kinds of concert-hall gaffe. In respect of both the characterisation and the valuation, judgments are made for which one could offer support but not proof.

We are all fortunate that it is not often necessary to go into this degree of detail in order to specify the grounds of our understanding. This musical reference might be invoked only to connect with the way another character uses a piano rendition of a Strauss waltz as a weapon against the heroine, or to support a broad understanding of the film as reflecting on the relationship between materialism and an impoverished cultural life.

An interpretation will be adequate or not in relation to the particular purposes for which it is advanced, and in relation to the particular aspects of the film that it claims to cover. Insofar as it hopes to illuminate a whole film or body of work by drawing attention to overall patterns and representatively eloquent detail, an important test of its validity and usefulness will be the degree to which we can internalise it and use it to enrich our contact with the film. That is one reason why response is of critical rather than merely sentimental importance. Films are constructed so as to address our minds in the knowledge that mind is much faster and more comprehensively perceptive than intellect. The starting point for my inspection of the *Caught* fragment was a desire to figure out what it was in the moment that made me smile. The evidence of feeling demands an acknowledged place in the process of interpretation. Without it, learning to construct readings of films becomes as empty an achievement as learning about music at the Dorothy Dale school.

V.F. Perkins

BLONDE VENUS

(1932)

Gender and race

Much of the critical acclaim accorded to Josef von Sternberg's work has rested upon the perception of him as, above all, a stylist, with illusion and artifice seen as central to his films, transcending and even parodying what are seen as the melodramatic limitations of their plots and thematic material. This critical view of von Sternberg is remarkably persistent, despite recent revaluations of the melodramatic mode. Thus, Rudolf Arnheim commented, in 1934, that 'this preciosity does not serve events, but instead is sought as a means of compensating for the poverty of the action – in which the intelligent director gives a good account of himself – with formal values' ('Josef von Sternberg', reprinted in Peter Baxter, ed., *Sternberg*, British Film Institute, 1980, p.40). This is echoed by Eric Rhode's 1976 remark that von Sternberg's 'plots and characters defer to a sumptuous flow of images and his slender, tottering stories bear a rich swag' (*A History of the Cinema: From its Origins to 1970*, Allen Lane, 1976, p.299). Nowhere is this attitude more pronounced than in the response to *Blonde Venus*: as recently as January 1988, when the movie was shown on BBC2's Film Club, the Belgian director Harry Kumel, who introduced it, acknowledged the tendency to dismiss it for its melodramatic plot, but defended it as 'no less a work of unsurpassed abstract beauty than [Sternberg's] other works.'

Although I do not deny the importance of its elements of formal play, I wish to argue for the film as a complex and sustained feminist work. Indeed, there is an intimate relationship between these two aspects: the move from film (and life) as artifice to life (and film) as ideological role-play seems, in their shared assault on notions of 'the natural', an easy and logical progression. My second, if somewhat subsidiary, motivation is to clarify the treatment of race in the film and its connection to the film's feminist project. Much of the writing on blacks and Hollywood has rightly emphasised the absences and distortions of black experience in Hollywood movies. In doing so, however, these accounts have often seriously misrepresented the few genuinely progressive treatments that have emerged (e.g. Jacques Tourneur's *I Walked with a Zombie* and Douglas Sirk's *Imitation of Life*; I would want to defend Vincente Minnelli's *Cabin in the Sky* as well). I see *Blonde Venus* as belonging in this progressive tradition, as a film that does not merely present thoughtful but discrete accounts of both gender and race but (like the Tourneur and Sirk films) shows them as fundamentally allied.

Illusion/Disillusion

The centrality of the theme of illusion and disillusion is underlined by its use as a framing device for the movie as a whole. The first scene shows us Ned Faraday (Herbert Marshall) meeting his future wife Helen (Marlene Dietrich). On a walking tour in Germany with a group of fellow students, Ned notices Helen among the naked women in a sunlit pool when she swims forward to berate the young men for their unwanted attention; Ned refuses to leave until she agrees to meet him again. The image then dissolves from a woman's legs to the kicking legs of a young boy in the bath, as Helen, now married to Ned, bathes their son Johnny. Soon after, at Johnny's request, Helen and Ned jointly enact a fairy-tale version of their meeting as a bedtime story, clearly a familiar ritual. At the end of the film, this ritual is repeated, but with Ned's cynical commentary appended, further transforming the story into an explicit evocation of a world forever lost.

By this point, of course, a lot has happened. In order to get money to send Ned to Europe to be cured of an otherwise fatal disease, Helen has both returned to the stage and gone to bed with Nick Townsend (Cary Grant), a rich politician; she has taken Johnny on the run from Ned, who, on discovering her infidelity, had threatened her with loss of custody of the boy; she has eventually given up her son, become a cabaret star in Europe, and returned to the States with Nick, who engineers her restoration to Johnny and Ned. The telling to Johnny of the tale of Nick and Helen's meeting, now heavy with irony, is the instrument of their reconciliation, and Johnny, in the film's final moment, reaches through the bars of his crib to push the cupids going round on a music box, as Helen leans against Ned in a posture of defeat.

Still: Blonde Venus – *Helen (Marlene Dietrich), Johnny (Dickie Moore) and Ned Faraday (Herbert Marshall). Ned leaves his family but not his illusions.*

The project of the film implied by this trajectory from illusion to disillusion, however, is less simple and linear than it may at first appear, and in any case the terms have a certain ambiguity depending on whose point of view we presuppose. Clearly, Ned is disillusioned at the end, though not in the sense that he sees the past as illusory, but rather as irretrievably gone. 'As I remember it,' he tells Johnny during the final recounting of the bedtime story, 'I was very happy.' But he adds, 'I was very sentimental in those days and very foolish . . . I didn't know much about women . . .' From Ned's perspective as the wounded husband of a faithless wife, his past happiness (and its ideological underpinnings) was real enough, but Helen ('women') destroyed it. Thus, he is disillusioned with Helen as ideal wife, but not with the concept of 'ideal wife' itself. In these terms, he remains an idealist – if an embittered one – right to the end, and his final words – 'That's where you belong, Helen' – reinstate her, with Nick's complicity, as wife and mother. He has no real purchase on his own ideals or behaviour, which includes spying on the naked women, manipulating Helen into seeing him again, situating her in a life of household drudgery by his refusal to allow her a career on the stage, and finally driving her to destitution in her flight from his relentless pursuit.

Helen, on the other hand, is a realist from the start, perhaps partly because, as an actress, illusion is her stock-in-trade, but more fundamentally because, as a woman, she is aware of the lived consequences of Ned's ideals. Whereas Ned's stolid sense of self is fairly consistent throughout, Helen easily moves through a variety of roles as circumstances demand, trading in her domestic duties with a remarkable lack of soul-searching and fuss to return to the stage and to take up with Nick Townsend. If anything, she displays a disillusionment with married life, from which (implicitly, at least) she seems only too happy to escape. The gap between Helen's meeting with Ned and their marriage, which we join half a dozen or so years on (conveyed by the dissolve to Johnny in the bath) is filled in only by the bedtime story, which Ned presents explicitly in fantasy terms (complete with princesses, a dragon, and a magic pool), although Helen's contributions to the narration avoid such false embellishments. When the story is first told, of course, Ned and Helen already know he is dangerously ill, and it has a strong element of anticipatory nostalgia even then for what may already be doomed. Ned's wishes, as expressed in the story, arise from a source which, though ideologically determined ('I couldn't think of anything better to wish'), he (mis)construes in magical terms, passing on his illusions to Johnny as an unacknowledged ideological inheritance in the face of Ned's probable death (this is not negated by Ned's cynicism about Helen at the end, since the larger frame of illusion remains intact). In the bargain struck with Helen, his wish to see her once again effectively cancels her own wish that he stop looking at her and leave. If he stops looking now, he can see her later; if he goes away, he can come back, and Helen will have gained only a temporary reprieve.

Bodies and bargains

So far, I have argued that the film presents us with two main points of view: that of Ned, which sees Helen as monstrous (or, at least, 'unnatural') in terms of a set of unquestioned assumptions (themselves taken for granted as 'natural') about gender and roles, and that of Helen which (as a result of her lived experience rather than of a set of fixed ideals) reverses the terms of Ned's point of view. These perspectives can be extended to other characters in the narrative and used to map out the film's ideological terrain in ways suggested by a series of parallels and oppositions, echoes and shifts, all of which collude to pit the movie's women against its men.

The first explicit connection (conveyed by the dissolve) is that between the naked women in the pool and the boy in the bath, though its point is to emphasise the differences rather than the links between them: women made vulnerable by the uninvited gaze of men in contrast to a boy aggressively at play, actively inviting his mother's gaze ('Look, Mommy, I'm a crocodile'); Helen as 'water nymph' against Helen as household drudge (women at play displaced by boy at play and woman at work).

The scene shifts to the doctor's office, where Ned reveals that he has been poisoned as a result of his work as a commercial chemist and offers to sell his body for medical research. Here there are echoes from the first scene of the film, as well as anticipations of later ones. In the first scene, one of the students on the walking tour finds out that it is another ten miles to the next town and remarks, 'It's no use, boys, I'm through. Just cover me with leaves and tell my mother I died with her name on my lips.' A friend comments, 'Hang on while we watch Joe die,' and gives him a cigarette. Joe accuses the donor, 'And you're the guy who said this was going to be a pleasure trip . . .' This parody of bodily suffering and incipient death is linked to Ned's apparently fatal illness, his body corrupted as a result of his job, and, in particular, his ambition to make his fortune through developing the formula on which he is working. Married life, which for Ned implies his role as sole provider through work, is no more a 'pleasure trip' for Ned than for Helen. Further, Ned is linked not only to Joe (by the latter's feigned suffering) but, through the equally parodic reference to the loving relationship between mother and son, he is also linked – via Joe – to Johnny.

Finally, in bargaining for money for his body, Ned is also apparently parallelled with Helen who, both as performer and in her relationship with Nick, strikes bargains – or has bargains struck over her, as when her agent (Gene Morgan) negotiates with O'Connor, the nightclub proprietor (Robert Emmett O'Connor) – which bring her financial gain. But again, the contrasts outweigh the links: Ned's body proves worthless (the doctor he approaches can give him nothing for it, though he offers him fifty dollars as a gift to help him out), whereas Helen's proves a valuable commodity indeed. Where Ned sees Helen's body (or, as he construes it, her virtue) as beyond price, for the other men in the film – Smith (the agent), O'Connor, Townsend – a strict economic reckoning can be made. This redefinition of Helen in economic terms is antithetical to Ned's mystification of her as an ideal, though underpinned by shared systems of value amongst the men: Ned, too, sees Helen as a source of pleasure – both visually and sexually – but what appears 'natural' to him on the walking tour in Germany (the young men's shared voyeurism and the pleasure it engenders as an antidote to male travail) is experienced as 'unnatural' when, later, its economic terms and possibilities are exposed. Again, Johnny is drawn into the male nexus by his commanding 'Go on, walk' to Helen, in the first telling of the bedtime story (answered by her equally aggressive squeezing of his cheeks and clutching of the hair atop his head, even as she complies), which is to be echoed by Smith's 'Get up and walk around a bit. Let's see what you got,' when he agrees to take her on as a client and exploit her potential.

I have already mentioned Nick Townsend's complicity with Ned in returning Helen to him (the shared sense that that's where she belongs); furthermore, both men require her to give up the stage when they enter her life. Their symmetrical positioning with regard to Helen is represented by Nick's offering of money (ten thousand dollars for ten minutes) – and Ned's refusal of it – to allow Helen to see her son, parallelling the earlier symmetry whereby Ned repays the money to Helen which she had obtained from Nick to save Ned's life ('It represents my life work. Had I been able to exploit it properly, I could have made a fortune').

Still: Blonde Venus. *'Let's see what you got' – Helen and her agent Smith (Gene Morgan).*

Still: Nick Townsend (Cary Grant) goes backstage – Helen as 'Blonde Venus'.

His actions in both instances are motivated by pride – the refusal to be in another man's debt – in sharp contrast to the actions of Helen who both gives away the money to a female vagrant on the brink of suicide (ironically repeating Ned's words: 'It represents my life work . . .') and accepts help from various women in her flight from Ned (the lesbian who remarks, 'Don't worry, I've got a kid of my own,' and the black woman, Cora). So there are clear links between the two men which set them up in opposition to the various women on the fringes of Depression America – black, destitute, or gay – with whom Helen is linked and aspects of whose respective identities she obliquely takes on in the 'Hot Voodoo' number (complete with blonde Afro wig), in the flophouse (destitute in spite of Ned's money in her pocket), and in the final number (dressed in white tuxedo appreciatively eyeing the chorines). When the detective whom Ned has set on her trail remarks, 'You don't look anything like these other women,' she replies, 'Give me time'. As she is well aware, it is not ideals but circumstances and consequences that make the woman (and consequences are all we see of Helen's relationships with men: first, Johnny, then Nick's cheque for three hundred dollars, then Helen's name emblazoned across a series of marquees).

Yet for all the links between Ned and Nick, and the opposition between their interests and Helen's (a structure common to a range of melodramas – e.g. *Brief Encounter* and *All That Heaven Allows* – where alternative men on offer to the heroine arguably turn out not to be so different after all), there remains a metaphorical dimension to Ned's illness, to the fact that he has been poisoned by his work. His bodily corruption, while analogous to Nick's moral corruption and pursuit of pleasure (that Nick is described as a politician with 'loads of jack' is suggestive enough; we also learn that he 'runs this end of town'), also separates the two men. While Nick's worldly success permits him to be generous, Ned's mean-mindedness is the fruit of disappointment. By ceding a space to Ned's pain, the movie leaves us with a sense of his unease with the values he espouses. These do not serve him as well, perhaps, as he would wish, his illness giving voice to an otherwise unspoken complaint, an unacknowledged desire to abdicate from what he sees as his responsibilities as a man. This is reinforced by the defeatism of Herbert Marshall's performance and by Ned's later returning to Helen of the money

with which he '*could* have made a fortune', with Ned thus justifying the choice *not* to be a success by an appeal to male pride. In this connection, the link with Johnny (via Joe's parodied association both with male suffering and with mother love) is of relevance, insofar as Johnny, although a potential patriarch, is also a dependent child. Counterpointing Ned's decline, of course, is Helen's ascent.

Performance as voice – Dietrich as Dietrich

The film's two hidden (and not so hidden) agendas – Ned's desire to relinquish the responsibilities traditionally associated with adult masculinity and Helen's to attain them – are, I would argue, common to a wide range of *films noirs* and melodramas respectively. The movie's interrelated musical numbers ('Hot Voodoo', 'You Little So and So', 'I Couldn't Be Annoyed') chart, among other things, Helen's growing autonomy as a performer. Just as various perspectives on the film's events are provided by the illusion/disillusion theme, it is similarly possible to take up a variety of positions as viewer of the numbers. Thus, one can certainly take what appears to be the most obvious position of identifying with Nick and the other spectators within the film for the extraordinary 'Hot Voodoo' act, which sees Helen as an object of heterosexual male desire, her costume focusing attention quite explicitly and without the least subtlety upon her sexual features. However, a number of strategies act against such a positioning: the sympathy developed for Helen and her predicament in opposition to the negative portrayals given of her agent and of O'Connor who has devised her 'Blonde Venus' persona and, presumably, the number as a whole; the fact that we have seen Helen offstage and are aware of the falsity of this construction; the foregrounding of artifice and illusion throughout the number. It is even more difficult to take such a stance for the later numbers, where the refusal to contain Helen within a conventional male definition is more overt.

It is revealing to place the 'Hot Voodoo' number in its narrative context. Just before the performance begins, an altercation breaks out involving an underling of Nick's, seated with him at his table, who has insulted another man by calling him by a name other than his own.

Drunken man: I told you once before, my name wasn't Georgie, and it ain't Oscar either.

Nick's pal: All right, Rudolph, have it your own way.

Drunken man: Are you gonna get up or are you gonna take it sitting down?

This affront to the man's dignity (and hurt male pride is a recurring theme in the narrative) points in its particulars back to Helen's having been renamed, first by her agent ('Jones' instead of Faraday), then by O'Connor ('The Blonde Venus'), and forward to the moment when Cora, the black woman who befriends Helen when the latter is on the run from Ned, is called 'Annie' (with total disregard for the inaccuracy) by the detective, Wilson (Sidney Toler). At this point, Nick stands up to take charge:

Townsend: Now, look, why don't you cool down and run along. We don't want any trouble.

Drunken man: Yellow, eh?

Townsend: Yes, maybe I am. As a matter of fact, I'm scared stiff. And being reasonably certain that someone's gonna get a punch in the jaw, I'm gonna make sure it isn't *me*.

Just as the man has been knocked out by Nick and removed, the drumbeat starts up as the number begins. A shot of the black conductor (one of several 'real' black people inserted in the sequence at the club) contrasts with the chorus line of obviously white women dressed up as black and chained together at the wrists. A gorilla, also chained, accompanies them, producing a somewhat uncertain response. 'Hey, Charlie, is that gorilla real?' the black barman is asked, to which he stammers a reply to the effect that if it were real, he wouldn't be there. In a materialisation reminiscent of that of the naked actresses in the pool who serve to counteract the feigned extremities of male suffering ('It's no use, boys, I'm through') in the first scene, Helen emerges from the gorilla's disguise to assuage the audience's 'fears'. The gorilla is chained and, in any case, is 'only' a woman. The pretence of being 'scared stiff' (indicated by Nick's remark to the drunk, but more suggestively applicable to the stage gorilla evokes a mild *frisson*, cloaking any deeper anxieties which women (and blacks) may arouse. As in the first scene, the audience within the film can now settle back and watch with pleasure, as Helen begins to sing.

The lyrics combine with the costumes and decor to call up fantasies which are familiar enough: those of a 'bad' (i.e. sexual) woman offering herself to the male spectators and inviting satisfaction. Thus

> Hot voodoo gets me wild,
> Oh, fireman, save this child,
> I'm going to blazes,
> I want to be bad.

To some extent, the fantasies embodied in the lyrics (woman as at the mercy of man, yet woman as actively sexual; woman as innocent, yet woman as guilty) contradict themselves – 'That African tango has made me a slave' and 'I'm really not to blame' versus 'My conscience wants to take a vacation' and 'I want to misbehave' – in ways which resound through the narrative as a whole. But even more significant is the way Dietrich puts over the song, her ironic smile and defiant hands-on-hips stance undermining any sense that the viewer is in control.

A number of strategies, then, give a cutting edge to the sequence: the constructed images of both blacks and blondes are strongly parallelled and shown to be racist and sexist illusions, respectively, though illusions unavoidably colluded in by the

'real' blacks (the conductor) and women (the performers) within the narrative, as they are given no alternative cultural space within which to create more positive self-images. This deprivation of a voice is underscored by the barman's stammer and by the renamings of Helen, though it is partially subverted by the details of Dietrich's performance which express her contempt and, to a lesser extent, by the black characters throughout the scene (the conductor who appears before and after the song, the barman, the delivery boy in Helen's dressing room after the performance ends) whose mere presence serves as a silent commentary upon the inadequacies of the myths – an extremely moving use of this device occurs in Minnelli's *Home from the Hill*, at the end of the party thrown for Theron (George Hamilton), when, feeling excluded from the festivities because of his date's refusal to turn up, he strolls by a group of black children watching the party from a distance; that single instant of black children on the outside looking in encapsulates the racist structure of the white society depicted in the film.

The second number – 'You Little So and So' – is performed when Helen is on the run from Ned and no longer attached either to him or to Nick, though she is still accompanied by Johnny, a circumstance which is quite overtly shown to inhibit her career, both in the practical arrangements his presence requires her to make and in the inevitable pursuit it provokes. 'You Little So and So' is a transitional number between the other two: divested of the jungle trimmings and worst excesses of the earlier number (save for the intervening plant fronds which threaten to obscure her throughout the song), she is more tastefully dressed in an elegant gown, and

Still: Blonde Venus – *Helen and Johnny on the run.*

Still: Blonde Venus – *her picture in the paper.*

the lyrics – if still concerned to a degree with heterosexual desire – offer exotic sexuality much less than revenge. Thus, the double-edged first verse:

> It isn't often that I want a man,
> But when I do it's just too bad.
> I know you're acting hard to get, and yet
> I've got the feeling you can be had.

As she moves through the room, Helen points accusingly even as she smiles. One line is a particularly apt retort to Ned's idealisations of her:

> You so and so, you little so and so,
> How did you get this way?
> Although you know that I have lost my control,
> You sit and talk about my beautiful soul.

This is followed by a chorus which reiterates the inadequacies of language to her needs:

> You this and that, you've got me you know what,
> Is that the way to be?
> The Greeks have words for almost everything I know
> But you little so and so.

The sequence is preceded by Johnny's recognition of her photograph as the Blonde Venus in the newspaper ('Oh, it was such a bad picture,' Helen explains as she tears it up, and he replies, 'I thought it was pretty good'). As the number ends with a repeat of the chorus, Helen's photograph is recognised by the manager of the club, from whom we dissolve to a policeman telephoning Ned. The symmetry of the sequence yet again links Johnny to Ned, to the men who manage Helen's career and to the forces of law and convention. Yet again, Helen's performance is 'caught' within this frame.

The final number in the film – 'I Couldn't Be Annoyed' – is the logical conclusion of the previous two. Now unencumbered by Johnny, as well as by Ned and Nick, Helen has become a star (as is conveyed by the montage of her name on the various

marquees and also by the vertical wipe which introduces her in white hat and tails, in contrast to the numerous left-to-right and right-to-left wipes which reflect her toings and froings elsewhere in the narrative both before and after this). Given the greater autonomy her new status implies, we are invited to see the number as her own construction. Several details specifically differentiate her present state from the Blonde Venus persona of the 'Hot Voodoo' number: in contrast to the simulated jungle heat, she is now described as 'as cold as the proverbial icicle', and Nick advises her to 'break that crust of ice around your heart'; in contrast to her shackles in 'Hot Voodoo', she tells Nick she now has 'no chains at all.' In place of whites disguised as blacks, we now have a woman dressed as a man, an aloof, apparently insouciant persona, singing about her indifference to conventional norms:

> If the hens refused to lay,
> Or if bulls gave milk someday,
> Do you think I'd care?
> That's their affair,
> I couldn't be annoyed.

There is a terrific pleasure of recognition in this number. What was only hinted at in the details of performance earlier on now emerges full-blown, and our delight makes us complicit in the overtly oppositional stance which accompanies it: now we have neither Helen Faraday nor Helen Jones, what we have is pure Dietrich.

Still: Blonde Venus. *Sisters under the skin – Helen and Cora.*

Key moments

It is too naive a reading of the film to see the transformation of Helen into Dietrich in the final number as triumph unalloyed. For one thing, the movie doesn't stop there, and some explanation must be found, if the narrative is to cohere, for Helen's return to Ned and Johnny at the end, given the obvious ambiguities of such a reunion. Does Helen have an ideological blind spot, despite her perspicacity elsewhere, towards her role as mother? This is certainly her point of greatest vulnerability, as Nick knows only too well, exploiting it mercilessly whenever it suits his needs. Thus, his final words to her before the start of their affair – spoken as he admires Johnny's photograph in her dressing room – are that 'this kid certainly looks like you' (we then go from Helen's face to the cheque for three hundred dollars in close-up as Nick signs it). Subsequently, when he tells O'Connor that she isn't going to work for him anymore, he explains to Helen, '. . . you've got Johnny to look after now. Who's gonna take care of him if you keep on working?' (though when he wants to spend time with her on her own, a maid is conveniently available to look after the boy for days on end). Finally, when he wishes to get Helen to leave her successful career in Paris and return with him to New York, Johnny is the lure. Despite the ubiquity of financial transactions in the film, Johnny is the implied currency Nick uses in his rather one-sided bargains with Helen.

Of course, Ned, too, knows how to hit her where it hurts. His assertion that she has been a rotten mother, when he discovers the affair with Nick, although countered by hers that she has been a good one, is nonetheless reiterated both by Ned (who later tells her when she returns the boy to him that she can only be a good mother to Johnny by forgetting him) and by other men: the judge who tells her she has no right to custody of a child (because she lacks visible means of support) and the detective, Wilson, who claims, 'Some people might call it mother love, but I don't,' again countered by Helen with the retort, 'What does a man know about mother love?'

The sequence with Wilson is a key one in providing answers to the related questions of why she gives Johnny up and why she returns to him and Ned at the end. The scene is set by a close-up of a typed report to Ned that Helen and Johnny have been spotted west of Galveston. From this we dissolve to Johnny's teddy bear juxtaposed with farmyard chickens, then to Johnny himself blowing bubbles, as Cora returns home and reports the presence of a suspicious-looking snooper. At Helen's request, she goes down to find out what he wants. In marvellous, paired moments, Cora and then Helen visibly alter before our eyes as they put on, like hats, the respective roles they know Wilson will expect them to play (Helen puts on a literal hat as well): Cora and Helen, sisters under the skin,

Still: Blonde Venus – *waiting for Wilson.*

enact racist and sexist stereotypes (the smiling black, the *femme fatale*) for this representative of the law in order to use him for their own united purpose, precisely because it is both what they know he expects and what is least likely to alert his supicions. This turning of his prejudices against him leaves him confused when Helen shows Johnny to him – he sees she's the woman he's after and realises that he has been had ('Say, is that your kid?' 'I'll give you three guesses, Sherlock Holmes . . . what a brain'). For us, though, the scene represents a satisfying clarification of issues.

Why, then, does Helen give Johnny back, and why, particularly in view of her previous self-defence as good mother, does she give the reason that she's no good? ('. . . and don't forget to tell that husband of mine that I'm giving the kid up, not because he hounded me into it, but because I'm no good, you understand? No good at all, you get me? No good for anything, except to give up the kid before it's too late.') The answer, it seems to me, is crucially determined by the way the line is *said* (the performance details, as before, giving voice to the feminist text): 'I'm "no good", you understand? "No good" at all, you get me? "No good" for anything . . .', her sarcasm enclosing the words in quotation marks. She is a good mother objectively, but 'no good' in terms of the myths of motherhood in which she is unavoidably inscribed. Only by refusing the role can she escape these myths. But this refusal also entails a real loss. To paraphrase Roland Barthes ('Wine is objectively good, and *at the same time*, the goodness of wine is a myth', *Mythologies*, Jonathan Cape, 1972, p.158), mothers often really do love their children, in spite of the fact that mother love is a myth. Abandoning the

ideologically contaminated role of mother to become 'Dietrich' in the film's final number transforms Helen into pure illusion, with no grounding in the realities of the narrative world (its pleasures as well as its pains), the baby well and truly thrown out with the ideological bilge ('If this is a dream, Helen, I hope I never wake up,' Nick tells her, though when she tells him later, in her dressing room, 'I'm not in love with anybody and I'm completely happy,' he rephrases it: 'All this is fake'). She appears 'as cold as the proverbial icicle' because she is reduced to a mere façade, although a self-defined one rather than the male-defined one of 'Hot Voodoo'.

So the return to Johnny at the end represents Helen's awareness that there is no alternative: her willingness to compromise in the face of Ned's absolutes is the fruit of her knowledge that no individual solutions exist, the possibilities of collective action being represented only by the moving but essentially powerless and marginalised efforts of Cora and the other women with whom Helen is allied. To live at all in the 'real world' of *Blonde Venus* (which, in some sense, is our own) is to live within a frame of bourgeois ideological norms. In such a context, love has a high price indeed, but the alternative is no love at all.

I make no claims that the attitudes and strategies in this film are unequalled elsewhere, and other movies (such as those to which I have alluded) overlap in intent and execution, despite the uniqueness of von Sternberg's orchestrations. In the main, though, von Sternberg got there first.

Deborah Thomas

Postscript: Since writing this, I have read Robin Wood's 'Venus de Marlene' piece in *Film Comment* (vol.14, no.2) which is a notable exception to narrowly formalist appreciations of *Blonde Venus* and to those which see the film as profoundly anti-feminist.

Still: Blonde Venus. *Putting on roles like hats – Helen as* femme fatale *with Detective Wilson (Sidney Toler).*

SECRET BEYOND THE DOOR

(1947)

Fritz Lang's *Secret Beyond the Door* (1947) was the second film made by Diana Productions, an independent production company formed by Lang, Walter Wanger and Joan Bennett. Lang thus had a great deal of creative control – his is the only name above the title – and the movie may be considered a *film d'auteur* with fewer qualifications than most Hollywood movies. In his article on Diana in *Velvet Light Trap* 22 (1986), Matthew Bernstein records that Lang collaborated extensively on the script, made the casting decisions and even requested the technicians he wanted: 'Diana Productions, Inc. may not have been Ufa, but it was about as close as an American company in the studio system could come to recreating Lang's most encouraging working environment' (p.43). And, although Universal retained the right of final cut, and shortened Lang's first cut – which had previewed badly – the release version was in fact an agreed compromise between Lang and the studio.

However, at the time of the film's release, critics dismissed it. James Agee's remark that it is 'a hopeless job and a worthless movie' (reprinted in *Agee on Film*, Beacon, 1964) is representative. Whilst this is of minor interest – that the classical Hollywood films were ahead of their critics is scarcely a new insight – more significant are the ways in which more recent essays on the film have discussed it, with the film being used primarily as a means to illustrate the critics' notions about certain aspects of the cinema. The discussions thus proceed selectively through the film, ignoring and even distorting, as suits their authors' arguments. The earliest and most reprehensible example is Noel Burch and Jorge Dana's use of *Secret Beyond the Door* (along with *Citizen Kane*) to attack the Hollywood cinema for not being deconstructive enough to satisfy their own aesthetic tastes which – since they fail to read the film at other than a completely banal level – they do not find difficult (*see* 'Propositions' in *After-Image* 5, Spring 1974). The main focus of their attack is the obviousness of Miklos Rozsa's score. I would largely agree with them on this point, but it scarcely seems a major issue in such a complex and multi-layered movie. A more developed piece is provided by Stephen Jenkins in 'Fritz Lang: the Image and the Look' (British Film Institute, 1981), but he, too, is highly selective. In particular, he devotes most of his energies to arguing how the film's apparent adoption of the heroine's point of view – in his words, 'a female discourse' – is 'undercut, (dis)placed, qualified' in order, finally, 'to fix the heroine in terms of the film's order': basically her place in patriarchy (p.104). Jenkins has a valid argument, but his dogged pursuit of this one line blinds him to much that is remarkable in the film, which he attempts to fix as thoroughly as he feels the film does Celia (Joan Bennett). Finally, the film is discussed by Mary Ann Doane in *The Desire to Desire: the Woman's Film of the 1940s* (Indiana University Press, 1987) within a chapter on the cycle of films, inaugurated by *Rebecca* (and, I would argue, the British *Gaslight* – both films date from 1940) to which *Secret Beyond the Door* belongs. Much of the chapter, like the book, is very theoretical and difficult to understand, but I feel that Doane, too, writes about the films of the cycle in a decidedly problematic way.

I have already referred to this cycle in discussing *Caught* in *Movie* 29/30. Since the line I intend to pursue on *Secret Beyond the Door* is primarily generic, the other films of the cycle are particularly relevant. These are, in chronological order, *Rebecca* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), *Gaslight* (Thorold Dickinson, 1940), *Suspicion* (Hitchcock, 1941), *Experiment Perilous* (Jacques Tourneur, 1944), *Gaslight* (George Cukor, 1944), *Dragonwyck* (Joseph L. Mankiewicz, 1946), *Notorious* (Hitchcock, 1946), *Undercurrent* (Vincente Minnelli, 1946), *The Two Mrs Carrolls* (Peter Godfrey, 1947), *Sleep, my Love* (Douglas Sirk, 1947) and *Caught* (Max Ophuls, 1948). Three further films with close links to the cycle are *The Stranger* (Orson Welles, 1946), *Under Capricorn* (Hitchcock, 1949) and *Whirlpool* (Otto Preminger, 1949). I have excluded from Doane's list *Sorry, Wrong Number* (Anatole Litvak, 1948) and the films in which the heroine is not married (although they, too, have links with the cycle) and have added a couple of titles. Certain earlier films, e.g. *Love from a Stranger* (Rowland V. Lee, 1937), made in the UK, and particularly, Sirk's *La Habanera* (1937), made in Germany, contain the same basic generic material, but it was clearly the films of Daphne Du Maurier's 1938 movie *Rebecca* and Patrick Hamilton's 1938 play *Gaslight*, that led to

the Hollywood cycle. And, as is well known, behind Du Maurier's *Rebecca* lies Charlotte Bronte's *Jane Eyre*, in which certain crucial features of the generic material are established, although the film of *Jane Eyre* (Robert Stevenson, 1943), which Doane includes, seems to me to be marginal to the cycle. *Sudden Fear* (David Miller, 1952) is a late addition to the cycle which still has key features of the material, e.g. the hasty marriage, the large house, and a version of the forbidden room. But, by the time of *Midnight Lace* (Miller, 1960), this generic material has thinned out, and there is less sense of the film belonging to a cycle with close family resemblances.

A minor problem here is that there is not, as yet, an agreed critical term that refers to the cycle. In his seminal essay 'Tales of Sound and Fury' (recently reprinted in *Home is Where the Heart Is*, British Film Institute, 1987), Thomas Elsaesser, in identifying the cycle, refers to the films as 'Freudian feminist melodrama'. In *Movie* 29/30, considering Elsaesser's term misleading, I speak of 'the wife-in-distress cycle'. In *Movie* 31/32, Andrew Britton prefers 'the persecuted wife cycle'. Doane puts forward yet another term, but, in doing so, makes an extraordinary error: 'This cycle might be labelled the "paranoid woman's films", the paranoia evinced in the formulaic repetition of a scenario in which the wife invariably fears that her husband is planning to kill her – the institution of marriage is haunted by murder.' (p.123). The wife most certainly does not invariably fear that her husband is planning to kill her: the heroines of *Rebecca*, *Gaslight* (either version), *Experiment Perilous*, *Dragonwyck* and *Sleep, My Love* fear no such thing. The institution of marriage may indeed be haunted by murder, but the wife more often than not *cannot* believe such a thing of her husband. And in the *Gaslights*, the wife even fails to perceive – or to admit to herself – what should have been obvious: that her husband is sadistically doing everything in his power to drive her insane. Whilst there are films in which the wife does fear that her husband is a murderer, only in *Suspicion* and *Sudden Fear* (and, to a lesser extent, *Undercurrent*) is this fear developed through a substantial part of the movie, as opposed to being sprung upon her at the climax. Much more fundamental to the films is the heroine's failure to understand what is going on: the paranoia is located not in the heroine's responses but in the film's structure. The difference seems to me crucial, and in henceforth adopting Andrew Britton's term for the cycle I am signalling my very different perception of the movies.

In discussing *Caught* as an example of the cycle, I emphasised its generic eccentricity – partly because of the mix of genres, but also because the marriage is deemed a mistake without making the husband into a murderer. *Secret Beyond the Door* is similarly unusual, because it yokes together material from two distinct generic groupings: the persecuted wife melodrama and the 'psychological investigation' movie. To my knowledge, no-one writing on the film has taken this into account. (Stephen Jenkins fails to make any reference whatever to genre, and very little to authorship.)

Considering the film as a persecuted wife melodrama, the following elements are relevant:

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *the first meeting. Celia (Joan Bennett) and Mark (Michael Redgrave).*

– the heroine's point of view;
– the whirlwind courtship and marriage to the hero;
– the return to his family mansion, arrival at which is traumatic;
– a past secret of the husband's, which causes him to behave strangely towards the heroine, and which relates to a dead wife, whom the husband may have killed;
– the heroine's investigation of this secret, which focuses in particular on a forbidden (locked) room, her penetration of which causes the husband to become murderous;
– a jealous rival of the heroine already inside the house, who sets fire to the house at the end, seeking to kill the heroine.

Virtually all these ingredients are present in *Rebecca*, the prototype of the cycle. *Rebecca* has two forbidden rooms (the boathouse and Rebecca's bedroom), but otherwise only one element – the husband's murderous reaction to the heroine's penetration of the forbidden room – is muffled: Maxim's reaction to the heroine entering the boathouse is confined to a petulant outburst. Instead, the murderous impulse towards her is invested entirely in Mrs Danvers. However, others of the cycle – including *Notorious*, *Dragonwyck* and *The Two Mrs Carrolls* – contain the feature clearly enough. At the same time, in its use of the seven rooms, the last of which, prohibited to the new wife, contains the 'secret' of her dead predecessor(s), *Secret Beyond the Door* makes explicit reference to Charles Perrault's fairy tale 'Bluebeard', and points to the links with the fairy tale in the other movies of the cycle that have a forbidden room.

In *Movie* 29/30, I refer rather vaguely to psychological melodrama, i.e. to those films which are centrally concerned with a character who is psychologically disturbed. The reference is vague in the sense that I do not look into the question of the generic identity of such films. However, only some psychological melodramas would qualify as 'psychological investigation' movies, and these can be seen as a generic sub-group. These films, which depict an investigation into the causes of a character's psychological disturbance, are necessarily informed by an awareness of psychoanalytical material and practice. This may, in the film's dominant discourse, seem 'popularised' – lacking in clinical rigour – but the films invariably generate a surplus of psychoanalytical material, and their sub-texts often reveal far more complex psychoanalytical discourses than are immediately apparent. Here *Spellbound* (1945) is the crucial generic prototype (signalling, once again, Hitchcock's extraordinary pre-eminence as a director of seminal works) and Andrew Britton's excellent analysis of the film in *CineAction* 3/4 discusses some – though by no means all – of the film's remarkable inventory of psychoanalytical material. The same sort of material is also to be found in *The Locket* (1946) – *see* John Fletcher's equally admirable analysis, 'Versions of Masquerade', in *Screen* (Summer 1988) – and, I will argue, in *Secret Beyond the Door*.

The psychological investigation movie, like the persecuted wife melodrama, possesses a generic structure. In *Secret Beyond the Door*, the relevant elements of this are:
- the psychologically disturbed hero,
– who suffers from a repressed, and therefore forgotten, childhood trauma,
– which has affected his sexual development and which threatens to erupt (the return of the repressed) under certain specific triggering conditions, *and*
– the committed and caring heroine,
– who believes in the hero's fundamental goodness/innocence, seeks to uncover the source of his trauma and eventually succeeds, enabling the hero to start on the road to psychological recovery, *despite*
– the figure from the hero's past, who contributed in a crucial way to his trauma.

Although, as the 'first Hollywood film to deal with psychoanalysis', *Spellbound* established the parameters of such movies, one needs, here, to refer to *Marnie* (1964), which, with the sexes reversed, contains to a large extent the same set of elements, to see the significance of the figure from the hero's past. In *Marnie*, the heroine's mother actively blocks off Marnie's memory of the childhood trauma; in *Secret Beyond the Door*, Caroline (Anne Revere) is apparently less obstructive, but is arguably even more responsible for the childhood trauma, which was precipitated by her locking the ten-year-old Mark in his bedroom. In *Spellbound*, it is a second traumatic incident, which has overlaid the childhood trauma, for which Dr Murchison – the figure from the past – is responsible, but his concern, like that of Marnie's mother, is that the victim should not remember. Each of the protagonists seeking to help cure the victim has, to a greater or lesser extent, to negotiate her/his way around this figure from the past. Thus we see why there are two women from the past of Mark (Michael Redgrave) in *Secret Beyond the Door*: they relate to the two distinct generic narratives.

In *Women's Film and Female Experience* (Praeger, 1984), Andrea S. Walsh seeks to explain what lies behind the persecuted wife melodramas. 'These films evoke the dark side of the feminine experience, the fear of annihilation – mental and physical – by men. On one level, these narratives are a powerful indictment of romantic love. In this wedding and divorce boom era, when many lonely and desperate women married men they hardly knew, these films possessed a great cautionary power . . . [they] warn against "love at first sight", and cautioned women against domestic isolation . . . Wartime separation brought fear and anxiety to millions of young women. Would their husbands, fiancés, and boyfriends return to love the women they are now? Would their men be the "same" – or would war have transformed them? Or would they find, like Paula [in *Gaslight*, 1944], that "nothing had been real from the beginning"? As the war drew to a close, newspaper articles revealed a fear of returning vets – would "blood lust" end when they came home? . . . It is as cultural undercurrent that these films convey most power. The Victorian or foreign settings, the mysterious characters, the ornate interiors, the shadowy

Still: Secret Beyond the Door. *The wedding, with Paquita (Rosa Rey) and Edith (Natalie Schaefer).*

lighting, like the unconscious, speak for the forbidden' (pp.183-185).

In other words, the films can be seen to be dramatising the fears of women during the wartime and postwar years partly through displacement (to Victorian and British settings; to upper-class characters) but also in part directly: warning of the dangers of being swept off one's feet by an attractive, charismatic man and marrying in haste. In fact, *Secret Beyond the Door* – untypically of the films – makes explicit reference to the war in a way that confirms Walsh's thesis: it was after Mark came home from the war that he stopped sleeping with Eleanor, his first wife. More generally, the films express in an extreme form a fundamental female experience: the often dramatic difference between the male as suitor and the male as husband. It is significant that, in a number of the films, the heroine pointedly rejects a 'traditional husband-figure' – Bob Dwight (James Seay) in *Secret Beyond the Door* (similar figures occur in *Undercurrent* and *The Two Mrs Carrolls*) – before marrying the charismatic hero. She is 'seduced' by the Cinderella-fantasy to which so many of the films refer: the hero's mysterious superiority in wealth or class or in the promise of romantic and sexual potency. And, not only does she know too little about the man she marries, but his reasons for marrying her may be suspect indeed. (Ed Gallafent's excellent article on *Rebecca* and *Gaslight* in *Screen*, Summer 1988, brings out this side of the films.) As critics have pointed out, the heroine's lack of knowledge is quite explicit in *Secret Beyond the Door*: when Mark comes forward to marry Celia in the church, he walks into shadow and her voice-over actually says, 'I'm marrying a stranger, a man I don't know at all.'

In fact, this is part of a more general rhetoric in the movie which markedly disturbs the traditionally romanticised experience of the wedding. As Celia walks down the aisle, her voice-over actually likens her state to drowning; at the altar, in the wake of her anxiety about 'marrying a stranger', she wonders if she should run away. This feature of the film is typical of the persecuted wife melodramas, where each of the films that includes the wedding finds some way of deromanticising it. In *Rebecca*, it is a) not shown and b) contrasted in spirit with the display and celebration of the church wedding procession which passes by as the hero and heroine come out of the registry office. In *Suspicion*, it is glimpsed, as if furtively, through the rain-spattered window of the registry office. In both *Gaslights*, *Experiment Perilous*, *Dragonwyck* and *The Two Mrs Carrolls*, it is elided completely. In *Undercurrent*, it is introduced via the father's chemistry demonstration, which likens the whole experience to a laboratory experiment, in which the heroine is 'poured into a tube' and 'the formula changed' by 'a drop of religious ceremony'. In *The Stranger*, it is framed by the husband committing murder before the ceremony and

burying the body afterwards. In *Caught*, it is condensed into a brief newspaper montage in which the husband is actually shown hiding his face – like a criminal – in the photograph of the couple exiting from the registry office. But only *Secret Beyond the Door* enters fully into the ceremony and renders it a problematic experience for the bride from within. However, the film subsequently differs from the others of the cycle in its sympathetic concern with the nature of the husband's 'unknownness'. This is where the generic narrative of the psychological investigation movie comes in, as Celia seeks to uncover the nature of Mark's problem. The film thus requires a far more courageous heroine than is typical of the persecuted wife melodramas, in which the wife is generally cowed and wounded by her husband's moods and outbursts.

The use of shadows to express Mark's 'unknownness' suggests *film noir*. Given that the film was directed by Lang, photographed by Stanley Cortez (a master of high-contrast black and white photography, e.g. in *The Magnificent Ambersons*, 1942, *Night of the Hunter*, 1955, *The Three Faces of Eve*, 1959) and made in 1947 when the influence of *film noir* was at its height, this is scarcely surprising. A *noir* use of shadows continues throughout the film: on the honeymoon, for instance, when Mark suddenly turns cold towards Celia, the ensuing scene between them is played out in shadows, as Celia tries to communicate with a husband who has incomprehensibly become an emotional stranger to her. In general, as is common in *film noir*, the lighting is used expressionistically rather than 'realistically'. When Mark leaves Celia alone in the honeymoon hacienda, she tosses in bed, looks at the clock (which registers 1.20), finally falls asleep, dreams and then wakes suddenly; at this point, the maid Paquita (Rosa Rey) enters the room with a cheerful message from Mark and the lighting becomes 'day'. That this is all filmed in one 75-second take underlines the visual artificiality. Similarly, Celia arrives at the Levender Falls station in daylight, and in the twelve-mile drive to Blaze Creek – Mark's family home – it becomes night. Here darkness is used to express the sudden change in Celia's feelings as she is about to enter the house for the first time. From within, Caroline, Mark's sister, casually mentions that he has a son: the statement is then followed by Celia's subjective shot of the black doorway into the house. The sudden revelation of a son (and therefore a previous wife) renders the experience of entering Mark's family home not at all what Celia had expected: the black entrance presents it, too, as unknown – and potentially dangerous. (Burch and Dana declare that there is no apparent reason for this shot, which therefore serves to suggest a generalised sense of 'menace hanging over the ogre's house'. This does not argue well for their understanding of the movie.)

Although *Rebecca* is the seminal film of the persecuted wife cycle, the *potency* of the dead wife is, to the best of my knowledge, unique to *Rebecca*. It is not the fact of the first wife that Celia finds disturbing so much as Mark's failure to mention her

Still: Secret Beyond the Door. *The honeymoon – Mark has become 'an emotional stranger'.*

and, later, the possibility that he may have killed her; in this respect *Secret Beyond the Door* is closer to *Undercurrent*, substituting brother for wife. (In *Rebecca* the husband did kill the first wife and the heroine never for one moment suspects this – a pattern repeated in *Dragonwyck* and, until late in the movie, *The Two Mrs Carrolls*.) In fact, from Mark's comment during his fantasy trial – 'Maybe unconsciously I wanted her to die' – we could deduce that, at some level, Eleanor died *for* Mark. And, although Celia reaches the same point of self-sacrifice, she does so in a spirit of challenge, risking her life to 'regain' her husband: it is a confrontation, not a surrender. The relative strengths of the heroine and the first wife are reversed from *Rebecca*. Whereas *Rebecca* develops the fantasy-scenario that the husband really prefers the plain, gauche, inexperienced, girl-like heroine to the beautiful, talented, charismatic Rebecca (superficially, this is achieved by making Rebecca monstrous, but Ed Gallafent's article analyses Maxim's motives at a deeper level), *Secret Beyond the Door* proposes that Celia triumphs where Eleanor failed because she is active rather than passive, courageously determined rather than weakly helpless.

Stephen Jenkins's piece on the movie is the most extensive that I have read, and I would like to develop my reading by considering aspects of the

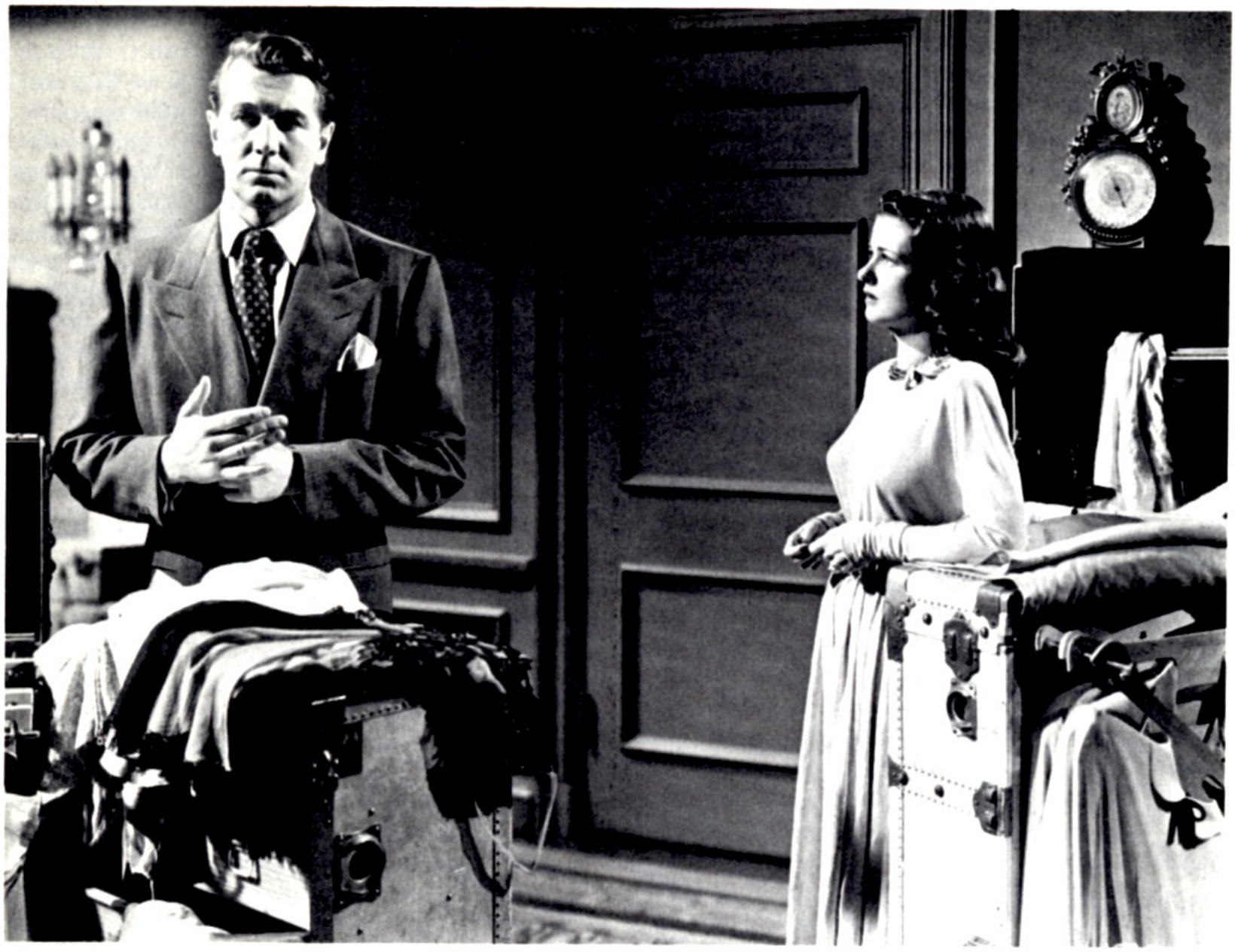
film that he fails to mention. In describing the first flashback, he notes that Celia does not contemplate marriage whilst her older brother Rick (Paul Cavanagh) is alive. But this regulation of Celia's sexuality is significantly paralleled by the equivalent regulation of Mark's by Caroline, his older sister. In Caroline's case, this extended to choosing a wife for her 'wild and unsettled' brother who, she decided, 'had to be married for his own good.' And Celia almost makes the same mistake, when she declares herself willing to marry Bob Dwight who, in effect, had been chosen for her by Rick just before he died. Both Eleanor, Mark's first wife, and Bob are the safe, family-approved partners, whereas the pairing of Mark and Celia is dangerous and explosive. Using one of the film's key metaphors, Celia speaks of marrying Bob as 'a door to a quiet, familiar room, where I'll be safe, with a warm fire burning' whereas Mark opens a door to 'wind . . . space, sun and storm: everything was beyond that door'. It is not difficult to see the secret beyond *that* door as the unleashing of a remarkable passion and sexuality.

Yet Jenkins completely ignores the strong sense of sexuality generated between Mark and Celia. For example, when he describes what seems to me a striking illustration of this – their reactions to the knife fight – he returns to his thesis that it is the 'male discourse' which is privileged and speaks of it in terms of Mark's gaze knowing 'the truth' about Celia. But what 'truth' does Mark see? He sees an American society woman who is 'strangely held' by the violence of a knife-fight over a Mexican gipsy woman (Celia's voice-over speaks of 'how proud' the woman must be to have two men fighting for her with 'naked knives') and who is seemingly unafraid when a knife flies through the air and thuds next to her, neatly pinioning a necklace. And the phallic threat of the knife (the film is saturated with Freudian symbolism) is linked immediately with Celia's sense of excitement/arousal at being watched: 'suddenly I felt a tingling in the nape of my neck.' Quite evidently, Mark is responding to Celia's fascination with the primitive violence of the fight ('You were living that fight; you soaked it all in: love, hate, passion') and his perception of that side of her excites her tremendously. He sees through the poise of the New York socialite to the passion underneath: 'a twentieth-century Sleeping Beauty' in the sexual sense, awaiting the prince whose 'magic kiss' will really arouse her. Officially regulated by the Production Code, the film nevertheless succeeds in speaking of sex and violence in terms forbidden by the Code: passionate sex is attractive, exciting and exactly what a Sleeping Beauty would wish from her Prince Charming. Whilst one accepts the film's inevitable surface qualification of this – 'marrying a stranger' is also dangerous – the implicit celebration of sex in these early scenes between Celia and Mark is quite remarkable. Celia's voice-over is indeed explicit about the consequences of their meeting: 'For the next few days we were together twenty-four hours a day.'

This failure to take account of the film's sexual audacity leads Jenkins to misread rather strikingly the moment when Celia, in response to Caroline's question of whether she's jealous of Eleanor, says, 'That would be foolish, wouldn't it?' Jenkins cites Celia's being in front of a mirror as 'a classic image of self-deception.' Even if Celia were looking at herself, such a reading would be debatable, but she isn't, which renders it simply arbitrary. Instead, she is concentrating, as she speaks, on playing with one of the glass pieces hanging from the candlestick on the mantelpiece. The gesture stands in for her thoughts: Eleanor is dead; she has access to the phallus/Mark's sexuality. Her tone of voice even suggests her barely suppressed amusement at the thought of sex, suggesting that Joan Bennett was fully aware here of what Lang wished from her.

In fact, Jenkins passes over the film's highly elaborate sexual symbolism in a brief comment: 'The suggestion of woman as uncastrated is jokily picked up by the phallic imagery (keys and candles) associated with Celia's assertion of self, her determination to know' (p.107). Even this, however, is a subtle misrepresentation: Celia's manipulation of phallic objects, such as keys and candles, later in the film, marks her as castrat*ing* rather than 'uncastrated'. For example, she chops a piece off the candle, and its shortened length then curiously disturbs Mark.

This takes us to the heart of the film's concern (as a psychological investigation movie), which is Celia's attempt to account for and cure Mark's 'problem', which manifests itself as a sudden, inexplicable aversion to her at certain moments. In its dominant discourse, the film gives us the sort of minimal information necessary for a basic understanding of the psychology of Mark's disturbance. Much of this is provided by a young woman (referred to in the credits as 'Intellectual sub-deb') during Mark's guided tour of his room collection, e.g. 'The murder of a girlfriend or wife often has psychological roots in an unconscious hatred for the mother' or, concerning Mark's theory that the room itself in some sense caused the crime, 'Something happened to him there in his childhood, such as a vow he made to kill someone.' However, it is the film's sub-text which provides the most remarkable inventory of such Freudian material. Whilst I am aware of the problem – mentioned by Peter Benson in *Movie* 33 – of speaking of fictional characters in psychoanalytical terms, *Secret Beyond the Door* positively invites such a reading. As much, indeed, is signified by the film's non-diegetic opening, as Celia's voice-over speaks of the meaning of dreams, and a self-consciously cinematic 'dream-like' effect is created using Rozsa's 'haunting' music over a strange, composite shot which includes water, a paper boat, animated ripple and light effects and superimposed daffodils. And, throughout the film, the multiplicity of psychoanalytical material is such that it elaborates a subtextual discourse around Mark which reveals far more about what the film is striving to say than the dominant discourse. Given his intellectual background, it seems reasonable to



Still: Secret Beyond the Door. *Mark tries to explain his 'incomprehensible' changes of mood.*

assume that Lang was aware of at least some, if not most, of the implications of this sub-text. One feels that the same could be said of the film's script-writer, Silvia Richards, who had just collaborated on the script for *Possessed* (1947) – a film which has strong elements of both psychological melodrama and the persecuted wife movies – and who later scripted *Ruby Gentry* (1952) and wrote the original story for *Rancho Notorious* (1952). Bernstein notes that Lang's enthusiasm for the project dated from the hiring of Richards, and that they worked together on the script very harmoniously for eight months.

In the dominant discourse, the 'explanation' provided to account for the source of Mark's disturbance is really no explanation at all. We merely learn that, when Mark was ten, his mother invited him to her bedroom to read to him before he went to bed, but, when he tried to leave his bedroom, he found that he was locked in. Unaware that it was Caroline who had locked the door, and so blaming his mother, he became frenzied with rage, first pounding on the door 'until there was blood on my hands and my nails were torn to the quick' and then, when he saw his mother leave with a man, seizing the lilacs that he and she had gathered: 'I crushed them, strangled them, killed them – I wanted to kill her.' He subsequently repressed the trauma, but, when the repressed memory is disturbed by something which unconsciously recalls the incident, he can re-repress the threatened upsurge of the murderous impulse only by flight.

This evidently invites a psychoanalytical interpretation. The ten-year-old Mark, it would seem, was still Oedipally attached to his mother ('She was my whole world'), and such a direct frustration of his Oedipal fantasy led first to self-lacerating violence and then a murderousness towards his mother, displaced on to the lilacs. But, read psychoanalytically, both acts of violence point to Mark's psychic castration, the former through the reference to 'blood . . . torn to the quick', the latter through the overtones – given the phallic shape of lilac blossom – of symbolic self-castration. (And so, in later removing all the lilacs from the garden, Mark rendered the family home 'sterile'.) Whilst the film's ultimate resolution of this problem is unconvincing, its nature testifies, once again, to the significance of the Oedipus complex – as if anxieties connected with it are forever demanding narrative expression.

The first manifestation of Mark's sudden, inexplicable aversion to Celia occurs on the honeymoon, when, deciding to make him wait whilst she beautifies herself, she locks the bedroom door. In the ensuing scene – played out, as mentioned, in shadows – when Celia questions Mark, he 'inadvertently' breaks a glass in his hand – a common 'melodramatic' motif which, as I mentioned in *Movie* 29/30, is usually readable from the contexts in which it occurs as expressing castration anxiety. Shortly afterwards, Mark leaves.

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *the broken glass.*

The hero's disturbance thus comes to the rescue of the ideology: the hero and heroine's sexual indulgence promptly ceases. From this point in the film, sexuality becomes problematic, and the sexual symbols do not operate simply as 'jokey' references to 'the woman as uncastrated' but suggest rather the *threat* of the castrating woman and the anxieties this generates in the male. The linkage of Celia's investigation and her castration threat is inspired: her attempt to uncover the source of Mark's disturbance arouses precisely the sorts of anxiety, resistance and defence associated with a psychoanalytical investigation.

Reading the film psychoanalytically, we can say that the locked door of Mark's childhood symbolises his blocked sexuality, and the key, taken possession of by the woman, his phallus. On the honeymoon, Celia's locking the door a) blocks Mark's access to her at a psychologically critical point and b) means that she possesses the key. This triggers the threatened return of the childhood trauma and, once more, psychically castrates Mark. When her questioning ('Didn't you come upstairs just now?' 'No . . .' 'But I saw the door handle move') causes Mark to break the glass in his hand, he wraps his handkerchief round the wound. He is defending himself from this threatening woman, possessor of the phallus. This ties in with the moment in the knife fight when one of the men (in fact, the one who eventually loses) tears the scarf from the woman and wraps it round his hand to protect himself from the other's knife. (A motif throughout the film, the scarf/handkerchief features at this stage as an object of defence. Later it becomes a murder weapon.)

When Celia arrives at Blaze Creek, she finds that the keys to the door have all been removed – part of Mark's defence against the arousal of his castration anxieties. In the same spirit, his extraordinary hobby of collecting rooms in which men murdered women (in the three examples we see, the victims are, respectively, a wife, a mother and three mistresses) may be seen as a substitute formation: an attempt to ward off the compulsion to murder his first wife. So far as Celia's investigation is concerned, however, the main focus of interest is the seventh room, which *is* locked, and which Mark refuses to open. Celia links the locked door to the room with the 'locked door' to Mark's mind and decides, 'I must open both for his sake.' Here, in the dominant discourse, the key is also a symbol, but with a significantly different meaning.

When Celia questions Mark about the seventh room, saying 'I want to understand you' he becomes aggressively defensive – 'Since I was a child I've been hemmed in by women. I want to lead my own life' – and stomps off. From Celia's comment to Caroline the next day ('I couldn't sleep') we deduce that she and Mark didn't sleep together and that it is at this point that he moves to sleep in his own room, next to his studio. Celia next encounters Mark attacking David (Mark Dennis), his son, for

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *Miss Robey (Barbara O'Neil), Celia, Mark and Edith outside the locked door of the seventh room at Blaze Creek.*

prying in his room. When she defends David, Mark once more becomes petulant – 'I wish you'd try and understand me as well' – and again stomps off. The strength of his resistance to her concern for him is shown in the contradiction between this statement and his angry rejection of her earlier 'I want to understand you'. When he feels threatened, he becomes a child again. Indeed, in this scene he behaves far more childishly than David, who keeps his poise and control.

When Mark has left, David makes the astounding claim to Celia that his father killed his mother. This locates David, too, in an Oedipal situation: projecting on to the hated father the blame for the loss of the beloved mother. And, although Celia cannot believe the accusation, she realises that she must find out how Eleanor died. Caroline says that Eleanor felt that Mark didn't love her and, when she became ill, she had no resistance left. (Here Celia's snipping the gladiolus as her voice-over wonders 'Can you kill by purposely denying someone love?' does seem a 'jokey' reference to the castration motif, but, again, marks her as 'castrating'.) But the maid then mentions that Mark always gave Eleanor her medicine when, towards the end, she was ill in bed. Celia's reaction to this suggests her thought: Mark *could* have poisoned Eleanor. (Poison is the commonest way for the husbands in the persecuted wife cycle to commit or attempt to commit murder: *Notorious*, *Dragonwyck*, *The Two Mrs Carrolls*.)

In order to obtain entry to the seventh room, Celia chops a piece off one of the candles in her bedroom and surreptitiously goes to Mark's room and obtains a wax impression of the key. (Very similar scenes of the wife secretly taking the husband's key(s) occur in *Notorious* and *Sudden Fear*, testifying to the 'difficulty' of this operation, a difficulty with obvious psychoanalytical overtones.) In the following scene, Mark comes to Celia's room and asks if she was in his room just now. Guiltily moving to stand in front of the drawer where she's hidden the wax impression, Celia says 'No'. Mark's question, followed by Celia's lie, links this moment precisely to that on the honeymoon, when Celia's equivalent question was followed by Mark's identical lie. Both lies are accompanied by an involuntary give-away gesture (Mark breaking the glass, Celia moving in front of the drawer) which speaks the psychoanalytical language of castration: Mark fears it; Celia threatens it. (It is not difficult to see the Freudian symbolism in Celia guarding her possession of the chopped-off candle – with its imprint of the key.) In their ensuing conversation, Mark and Celia discuss sending David away to school. Mark jokes 'And you'll have time to tame me,' then looks up and sees that one of the candles on the mantelpiece is shorter than the other. The fact that this disturbs him is as if the symbolism is speaking directly to his subconscious, hinting at what 'tame me' could mean.

When Celia finally penetrates the seventh room, she sees that it is a copy of the bedroom occupied first by Eleanor, now herself. But the room is not complete: it lacks any of Eleanor's personal things, such as her clothes. (Contrast Rebecca's bedroom.) And so, when Celia sees that the candles on this mantelpiece, too, are asymmetrical, she comes to the terrified conviction that the room is waiting for her. In the psychoanalytical sub-text, her conviction coincides with the moment when she is confronted with this symbolisation of what, to Mark, are her castrating activities.

In his fantasy trial (an overtly expressionist sequence in which Mark fantasises himself on trial for murdering Celia), Mark says that he built the

room out of guilt at Eleanor's death. But the room itself suggests a subtly different interpretation: its impersonality, coupled with the sense of it as a dungeon (the walled-up window) reflects rather the emptiness of Mark's sexual relationship with Eleanor. We note that he speaks of her in terms ('I couldn't give her love') which suggest impotence: 'the conscious equivalent of castration in the unconscious' (Ernest Jones, *Psycho-Myth, Psycho-History* vol. 2, Stonehill, 1974, p.20). And Celia certainly reads his statement this way: she says, with some surprise, 'But you had a son.' However, Mark can't discuss the undiscussable – impotence – and so he takes her comment differently: 'I was never close to him, either.' His altering of the candles indicates that the same feelings have now overtaken him with Celia. It is not surprising that he should be so disturbed at the thought of Celia, or anyone else, uncovering his 'secret': a feeling of impotence which impels him to murder.

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *Celia takes an impression of the key to the seventh room.*

As Celia flees from the room, she is pursued by the heavy tread of the husband-as-murderer. And Mark now carries the scarf which Don Ignazio, the murderer from the third room, used to kill his mistress. Mark's selection of it as his murder weapon – he holds it during his fantasy trial and advances murderously on Celia with it at the film's climax – is highly significant. It is not difficult to see Don Ignazio's compulsion to murder as deriving from impotence: seeking in vain 'the perfect love', he killed the 'girls of flawless beauty' who 'disappointed' him in his search. And the scarf is a brilliant symbolisation of phallic impotence: not hard and penetrating, like the knife which initially points Celia out to Mark, but flabby and flexible, a phallus that cannot grow hard but is instead fiercely manipulated as a murder weapon.

Although, at first, Celia flees from Mark, she subsequently returns. She goes to the seventh room once more and sets up the ingredients (as far as she understands them) which trigger his impulse to murder. She is courageous enough to face up to the necessity for a direct confrontation in order to break

through to the source of Mark's disturbance. But behind this there is a sense of her surrender to the risk of death, as there is in the equivalent sequence – skiing down the mountainside to the very edge of the abyss – in *Spellbound*. When Mark enters, Celia actually says, 'I'd rather be dead than live without you.' And so, I would partly agree with Jenkins that 'At this point the repressed memory can be released since the narrative has worked through [Mark's] fantasy wish to kill his mother, through the utter denial of subjectivity, to the point of death, on the part of Celia' (p.108). However, Jenkins's next sentence – 'Woman's "place" is firmly defined and equilibrium restored as Mark carries her from the house' – is a little too glib. Between Mark narrating his childhood trauma and his carrying Celia from the house, the film has to negotiate some problematic territory.

In entering the room, Celia has already performed one crucial act: she has relinquished the key by leaving it in the lock. This enables the film to displace the castration threat to Mark from Celia to another: Miss Robey (Barbara O'Neil), Mark's secretary and Celia's jealous rival. It is Miss Robey who, seeking revenge on Celia and not realising Mark is with her, locks the door and thus provides the final ingredient to release Mark's repressed memory. However, having narrated this memory to Celia, Mark is still impelled to murder her: remembering his 'childhood vow to kill' has not purged him. It is her announcement that it was Caroline, not his mother, who locked him in his room which finally checks him. He drops the scarf. The displacement from his mother to Caroline in his internalised trauma allows the displacement from Celia to the (as yet unknown) person who locked the door in this recreation of the trauma in the present.

However, it is not as simple as this. Dropping the scarf does not merely signify the loss of his impulse to murder but also, once more, his psychic castration. (Such a reading is reinforced by the prevalence of the motif in Lang's films. The frame stills on p.59 of Jenkins's book – Chris in *Scarlet Street* (1945) dropping a kitchen knife; the killer in *While the City Sleeps* (1955) dropping 'The Strangler' magazine – depict in each case a moment of symbolic castration in the film's narrative.) At this moment Mark is in a critical psychic condition. His childhood trauma has been recreated and, although his hostility has been projected elsewhere, he is, once again, rendered impotent. The film needs to rescue him from this condition, and effects this by introducing an external threat (Miss Robey has set fire to the house) which enables him to regain heroic potency. He breaks open the locked door (which he was too weak to do in his childhood) and then carries Celia across the threshold *out* of the house. This refers back to the moment when she said to him 'You don't expect me to carry you across the threshold do you?' and returns us to the 'normality' of the potent male, capable of carrying his bride across the threshold.

But, in carrying Celia out of the burning house, Mark is also escaping from all that the house stands for: his family and his past. With this, the narrative shifts to the two of them back in their honeymoon hacienda. It is as if the main body of the film functions as an interruption of the honeymoon, an

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *Miss Robey, David (Mack Dennis), Mark, Celia, Caroline (Anne Revere). The mail brings the copy of the key to the seventh room.*

interruption which works through certain areas, mainly relating to the hero's past, which have been designated as 'problems' in relation to the happiness of the hero and heroine. And the outcome of this can be seen to fulfil two distinct fantasy-scenarios. From Mark's point of view, the psychological disturbance which would suddenly block his otherwise abundant sexual energies (Celia's admiringly ironic 'Inhibited is certainly a word for you') has been identified and, we can assume, removed. (Despite the qualifying 'I still have a long way to go', Hollywood convention tells us that Mark will be all right.) From Celia's point of view, she has not only regained a sexually active husband, but Mark has been purged of the traumatic residue of his past (his mother; his first wife) and is detached from the people, from his past who still influence his present (Caroline, David, Miss Robey) so that he becomes exclusively hers. The burning of Blaze Creek can be seen as the final severance with this past.

In setting fire to the patriarchal mansion, Miss Robey is, of course, following her formidable predecessors, Mrs Rochester (*Jane Eyre*) and Mrs Danvers (*Rebecca*). In *The Madwoman in the Attic* (Yale University Press, 1979), Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar argue that Bertha Rochester functions as Jane's angry, dangerous other self, who does what Jane secretly wants to do (pp.359-360). The same argument may be applied to Miss Robey; it clearly serves Celia's fantasy-scenario quite nicely to get rid of all the trappings of Mark's inhibiting past so efficiently. Although, in contrast to *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, we don't know that the house has actually been burned down, the shift in locale and the lack of reference to the fate of the house is in itself significant.

But Miss Robey also has a crucial function in Mark's story: her role is not confined to the 'persecuted wife' discourse, but elaborated to contribute to the psychoanalytical discourse. She is already associated with fire: her face was scarred years ago when she saved David from a fire. In that this stopped her from being sacked (she claims that both Eleanor and Caroline had wanted her out of the house; now they were grateful), one can even imagine that she started that fire, too. Her scar functions symbolically as a sign of her unrequited love for Mark: her wound of suffering. But she conceals the scar behind a scarf. In view of the import of other scarves in the film, this merits further discussion.

Psychoanalytically, Miss Robey concealing her scar from 'the look' may be likened to Mark (on the honeymoon) protecting his cut hand from 'the phallic woman', and Mark's cut may be related back to his childhood trauma when, beating on the door, he lacerated his hands. And so, perhaps, Miss Robey being scarred serves as an unconscious reminder to Mark of his own childhood wounding. If so, one can see a rationale for keeping her on at Blaze Creek: doubly castrated (both a woman and scarred), she helps by her very presence to ward off Mark's castration anxieties. One of the most curious points in the film is that her bedroom is on

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *Mark rescues Celia from the flames of Blaze Creek.*

the other side of the studio to his, so that, when he stops sleeping with Celia, he moves to sleep next to Miss Robey. And the same thing happened with Eleanor. Now, there is no suggestion of any romantic or sexual significance to this; on the contrary, Mark seems to have very little to do with Miss Robey. Until he dismisses her, he is only once seen even talking to her: when he sends her to fetch bandages for an injured dog he has 'adopted'. But, if Miss Robey's presence does unconsciously reassure him, one can see why, when he feels sexually threatened by his wife, he should seek solace in being close to her. (Even the dog is incorporated into the film's complex psychoanalytical discourse, since a) Mark adopts it when he stops sleeping with Celia and b) he bandages its paw. In other words, Mark also seeks solace in caring for an animal whose injury mirrors his own childhood wound.)

Such a line of reasoning also shows that it would be in Miss Robey's interest to keep Mark in a dependent state – to guard his neuroses. Two moments hint at her doing this: when she opens the doors on the guided tour of the rooms, as if she were their custodian, and when she materialises to block Celia's incursion into Mark's room to obtain an impression of the key. In addition, she seems fully aware of Celia's plight when the latter flees from the seventh room, turning up in Celia's room to assist her in her escape from the house.

But Miss Robey also loves Mark. Celia realises this when she discovers that Miss Robey's scarf now conceals the fact that she had had plastic surgery to remove the scar. After Eleanor's death, she sought to win Mark's love by making herself 'beautiful'

Still: Secret Beyond the Door – *as Mark rescues Celia, Miss Robey reveals herself as the arsonist.*

once more. But his return from Mexico with a bride ruined this plan and, rather than have him perceive her designs, she continued to wear the scarf. Miss Robey's scarf thus conceals her secret: the transformation she has wrought to herself out of desire. She begs Celia not to reveal this. When Mark dismisses her, her assumption is that Celia has broken her word, and it is this which provokes her revenge: setting fire to the house with Celia locked inside. (Arson as an expression of female jealousy is a not uncommon melodramatic motif: *Foolish Wives* (1921), *The Shining Hour* (1938), *Johnny Guitar* (1954). As in *Jane Eyre* and *Rebecca*, it is characteristically aimed at the home of the hero/heroine.) Although there is no evidence that Celia has broken her word, Miss Robey's conviction of this aligns her 'disturbed behaviour' with Mark's: both react pathologically to the exposure of their neurotically guarded secrets. But, whereas her acting out of her revenge fantasies results in her expulsion from the film as deviant, Mark is taken in hand and assisted towards a cure. The film's project demands the contradiction of two conflicting ideological positions on the issue of pathological behaviour.

For all the sexist overtones to this, it arises primarily as a result of the subordinate status of Miss

Robey in the narrative. In general, like Caroline and David, she functions less as a character in her own right than as part of the (unanticipated) complex of relationships, tensions and desires around Mark which Celia has to disentangle, displace and penetrate in order to secure him both as his original, potent self and for herself alone. When Mark and Celia first meet, the Sleeping Beauty myth is invoked, with Celia's friend Edith (Natalie Schaefer) jokingly referring to herself as the dragon whom Mark has to 'slay'. But it is Mark who is the Sleeping Beauty in the deeper sense (who has 'fallen asleep' as a result of a childhood trauma in a room) and Celia who has the problem of 'slaying' a metaphorical dragon: a composite creature built up from the 'family trio' at Blaze Creek.

Even when Caroline and Miss Robey disagree about David, they're also disputing over Mark. The latter tells Celia that David was 'very much attached to his mother' and that he's 'nervous and sensitive' and 'resents domination'. Caroline interrupts with a peremptory 'That's ridiculous, Miss Robey: he's spoiled.' She elaborates on this to Celia: 'I know what David needs: love, of course, but a firm hand. Eleanor pampered him.' It is the bossy older sister who locked her 'spoiled' younger brother in his room years ago who is speaking. Later, when she tells Celia about the childhood incident, she actually prefaces it with 'As a child, Mark was very like David: emotional and over-sensitive.' But Caroline is denied insight into her behaviour. It seems never to have occurred to her that the incident could have left a permanent scar in Mark's psyche, and it seems not to trouble her that she is behaving the same way towards David. However, she makes a graceful exit, recognising that her continued presence would be a mistake, and that it is up to Mark and Celia alone to resolve their problems.

Caroline's departure at this point is motivated in the narrative by the fact that Bob Dwight, who was coming to collect David and take him to New York, fails to turn up, and so she takes David instead. Jenkins actually fails to grasp that the person Celia runs into on the lawn when she's fleeing from Mark is not Mark, but Bob. Coming for David, he's 'lost his way in the fog'. And she goes with him to Levender Falls: in other words, she spends the night with the other man. The shift in narrative at this point, from Celia to Mark – a crude suspense trick, to make us think that Mark has in fact killed Celia – delicately draws a veil over what happened at Levender Falls, but the outcome is a) Celia comes back to Mark: 'I married you for better or for worse' and b) Bob abandons his role as the good friend who had intended to help out with David, and goes away. Were Bob not so asexual, this would be potentially suggestive.

In that Celia does spend the night at Levender Falls with Bob, we could say that she is tempted to leave Mark, but her return shows that she has resisted the temptation. We have no real doubt that she returns with her honour intact, and the film rather touchingly reinforces this in the way she reappears before Mark dressed like a little girl, symbolically signalling her purity. Nevertheless, whilst one cannot imagine that anything untoward went on between Bob and Celia, the scene's location at this point (on the night Celia enters the seventh room) relates fascinatingly to Bruno Bettelheim's analysis of Charles Perrault's *Bluebeard* in *The Uses of Enchantment* (Penguin, 1978). Bettelheim argues that, in giving his wife the key to the forbidden room whilst simultaneously instructing her not to enter, the husband is testing her faithfulness. Bettelheim uses her punishment (execution) as support for his argument: 'In certain parts of the world in times past, only one form of deception on the female's part was punishable by death inflicted by her husband: sexual infidelity' (p.300). However, I'm extremely suspicious of Bettelheim's analysis: it seems to me that the secret of the forbidden room in *Bluebeard* is that the husband is a compulsive murderer, responsibility for which is then projected on to the wife. And this is much closer to what we find in *Secret Beyond the Door*, which is like a psychological reworking of the Bluebeard fairy tale. It is only *after* Mark turns murderous that Celia 'runs off with' Bob. A further point here is that, as Celia runs from the house, Lang cuts so that we see her flight from an upstairs window. Now, there is no obvious motivation for this: no-one is shown watching her. However, the shot could be seen as a repetition of Mark's childhood view of his mother leaving with another man. It's as if the repressed childhood memory is striving to 'return' into the narrative of the film, triggered by Celia's entry into the forbidden room.

If we look at the significance of the forbidden room in the other films of the persecuted wife cycle, further points emerge which support my suspicions of Bettelheim's interpretation of *Bluebeard*. First, the forbidden room logically contains the *husband's* secret, which he is anxious for the new wife not to discover. In *Rebecca*, for instance, the forbidden room (the boathouse) was indeed associated with adultery, but on the part of the previous wife, and it is the husband's 'murder' of her on this account which is the secret he cannot bear the new wife discovering. Even in *Undercurrent*, in which the wife's visit to the husband's brother's ranch (one of the film's equivalents of the forbidden room) does have overtones of an adulterous impulse, the husband's hysterical response does not simply derive from his fear of his brother's sexual attractiveness. He, too, is concealing a secret murder, which he is fearful that his wife may dicover. In *The Desire to Desire*, Doane argues that, in certain of the films, including *Secret Beyond the Door*, 'what the woman confronts on the other side of the door is an aspect of herself' (p.137). But one needs to be careful here: it is the husband's view of the wife/wives that is paramount beyond the door in Lang's movie, as it is in *The Two Mrs Carrolls*.

We can pursue this further by considering the forbidden room psychoanalytically, as a representation of the husband's unconscious and thus containing the key to his neurosis/psychosis. In *Movie* 29/30, I discuss the boathouse in *Rebecca* as 'the site of the

repressed' (pp.58-60), a notion which can also be applied to the stables in *Undercurrent* (the film's other equivalent of the forbidden room) in which the husband's attempts at repression of his brother – and the crime of murder that lies behind that repression – are registered in his neurotic attempts to master his brother's horse. In *Notorious*, the forbidden room (the cellar) contains the bottled uranium, which, as William Rothman among others has pointed out, symbolises 'the secret [of the husband's] intimate relationship with his mother . . . that [he] is sexually not really a man, that the wine bottle in his cellar is dry, containing not liquid but dust' (*The Georgia Review*, Fall 1975, pp.908-909). In *The Two Mrs Carrolls*, the room contains the husband's painting of the heroine as a 'witch': he has converted her into 'the madwoman in the attic' – a projection of his paranoid fantasies, indicating his impulse to murder her. And, as one adds to the list of forbidden rooms – the attic in *Gaslight*, the tower-room in *Dragonwyck*, the husband's vault-like safe in *Whirlpool* – a pattern emerges which focuses on the husband's sexuality.

In *The Madwoman in the Attic*, Gilbert and Gubar speak of the forbidden room in *Jane Eyre* as containing 'the secret of male sexual guilt', presumably along the lines that Bertha, the prototypical madwoman in the attic, symbolises Rochester's dissolute past (p.354). In *Rebecca* and *Undercurrent*, in which the husband has carefully chosen a wife whom he can master, the neurotic need to dominate can be referred back to the forbidden room, with its repressed material which threatens to resurface and threaten this domination. In *Secret Beyond the Door* and *Notorious*, the forbidden room symbolically indicates the husband's impotence, and in *Dragonwyck* it's a variation of this: since his defective genes produced a misshapen heir who promptly died, the husband's retreat to opium smoking in his tower-room can be read as a Hollywood cover for a different form of self-abuse. The portrait in *The Two Mrs Carrolls* reveals the husband's misogynistic use of women as mere instruments to inspire him as a painter. He is only sexually aroused during this 'period of inspiration': after it, he paints the woman as a monster and sets out to murder her and find a replacement. In *Gaslight*, the husband's nightly excursions to search the belongings in the attic for the missing jewels indicate a compulsive quest for the lost fetish-object without which he, too, is 'not really a man'. In all these cases, 'the promise of romantic and sexual potency' that the hero seemed to offer turns out to be at best fraught and difficult, at worst an illusion, as, after marriage, the heroine is subjected to his fantasies and psychoses. *Experiment Perilous* is one of the most explicit in this respect, with the impotent husband turning his beautiful wife into an art object for other men to admire, even fall in love with. And, when she shows signs of reciprocating, he murders the prospective lover-figure. The film even suggests that it is only after he has committed the murder that he makes love to and impregnates his wife: sexual potency is literally achieved through murder. Finally, *Whirlpool* reworks the generic material by projecting the murderous impulse on to a rival of the husband's, but uses other elements in a highly productive way. Thus, the forbidden room houses the recordings of the husband's patients (he's a psychoanalyst) which represent to the heroine a closeness of communication she feels is lacking in the marriage: hence she seeks, unconsciously, to become one of her husband's patients. But this is only the starting point: the film moves on to a fascinating analysis of the husband-wife relationship in which the villainous rival is more perceptive about the heroine and her problems than the husband.

In *Sleep, My Love* and *Sudden Fear*, the equivalent of the forbidden room is much more conventional: the mistress's studio or apartment. Here, the ancestral house belongs to the heroine and the underlying fear is that the husband, who is indeed potent, is after her wealth. But the significance of the forbidden room is much less developed than in the other movies. In the Sirk, the contents of the photographer's studio are of considerable psychoanalytical interest, but the heroine does not enter this; in *Sudden Fear*, the heroine explores the apartment obsessively, but the contents reveal little of interest.

There is no doubt that *Secret Beyond the Door* raises too many problems to resolve them all. This applies in particular to the attempts to process the Oedipal material. The film seems to suggest that it is Caroline from whom Mark belatedly accepts his 'symbolic castration', i.e. that she comes to occupy the place of the father in the Oedipal triangle. But the implications of this, or of any difficulties surrounding the form of the somewhat bizarre 'resolution', are not entered into. And there is no attempt whatever to effect a father/son reconciliation betwen Mark and David. The latter simply leaves home, his hostility towards and fantasies about his father apparently still intact. The film is only able to deal with such problems by forgetting them, and ending with the hero and heroine alone, free from all family ties and relationships. At the same time, *Secret Beyond the Door* is generically rich, and deals with some complex psychoanalytical material in an unusual and challenging way. Its 'difficulties' are a testament to its ambitions.

As Miss Robey is associated with fire, so Celia is associated with water: the opening 'dream image', the drowning metaphor (which triggers the flashback from the church), the wishing-well (it is she who throws in a coin and wishes), and the fountain in the honeymoon hacienda (lovers who drink from it 'will thereafter speak only from their hearts'). Miss Robey sets fire to Blaze Creek: Celia 'almost floods' it (when she leaves the bath water running). It thus seems significant that the name of Mark's family home should unite the motifs of fire and water, that it should be destroyed by fire and that Mark should finally retire, with Celia, back beside the honeymoon fountain. If fire ultimately purges, water ultimately soothes and heals.

Michael Walker

ALL I DESIRE

(1953)

Sirk and the critics

Since the publication of Jon Halliday's invaluable *Sirk on Sirk* (Secker & Warburg, 1971), Douglas Sirk has attracted a great deal of critical interest, and a number of useful articles have been published on his films. Nevertheless, there are still major omissions in this critical coverage, and *All I Desire* (1953) is a particularly glaring example. It has not exactly been ignored: Jeanine Basinger compares it with *There's Always Tomorrow* (1955) in 'The Lure of the Gilded Cage' in an issue of *Bright Lights* devoted to Sirk (no.6, Winter 1977/78), and Michael Stern discusses it briefly in *Douglas Sirk* (Twayne, 1979). However, neither of them does justice to what seems to me a very considerable film indeed. The only account I have read which brings out some of the extraordinary richness and complexity of the movie is encompassed in an excellent series of notes produced in 1987 by Michael O'Shaughnessy to accompany a British Film Institute slide set on the film. Although the substance of this article – the product of using the film in teaching many times over the last ten years – dates from some time before I read O'Shaughnessy's notes, I will mention his arguments where relevant.

All I Desire is a relatively optimistic example of Sirk's work at Universal, closer in this respect to the preceding comedies than to most of the subsequent melodramas. Robert E. Smith's article in the Sirk issue of *Bright Lights*, 'Love Affairs that always Fade', traces the darkening of Sirk's vision through the 1950s, an important insight grasped by too few of Sirk's critics. Jeanine Basinger, for example, writes about *All I Desire* as if it were much the same in tone and perspective as *There's Always Tomorrow*: 'Both movies are populated with Sirkian children: selfish, interfering, domineering, and just generally nasty.' Whilst that is a not inaccurate description of the children in the later movie, it dramatically misrepresents the complexity of the characterisations in *All I Desire* which are particularly good examples of what Richard Dyer calls 'novelistic characters' – those with genuine psychological depth.

It was Sirk himself who initiated this misrepresentation. In *Sirk on Sirk*, not having seen *All I Desire* for many years, he remembered it as like the later works: 'A woman comes back with all her dreams, with her love – and she finds nothing but this rotten, decrepit middle-class family.' By the time of the interview with Michael Stern in *Bright Lights*, he has reseen the movie and no longer speaks of it in this way. (I would still wish to argue with what he says, but this is a matter of differing interpretations, whereas the original remarks simply seem inaccurate.) But both Basinger and Stern (and virtually everybody else who has written on the film) basically echo Sirk's original view: thus Stern, in his book on Sirk, refers to the film's 'vicious and small-minded American family'. This view of *All I Desire* not only distorts the complexity of Sirk's vision of the family here, but also blocks off discussion of just how extraordinary the film is.

Sirk and Universal

Sirk's early films for Universal were mostly comedies. For the last of these, *Take Me to Town* (1952), the producer was Ross Hunter. The teaming was auspicious: through Hunter, Sirk was able to switch to directing melodramas (*All I Desire* was the next film for both of them), and Hunter found in Sirk a highly reliable director who could deliver films on (or sometimes under) budget and produce a fair number of box office successes. Because of this mutually beneficial relationship, Sirk was given a reasonable amount of freedom with his films and, for all the compromises with the ending on *All I Desire*, it is clear that the *mise-en-scène* is entirely Sirk's: 'Universal didn't interfere with either my camerawork or my cutting' (*Sirk on Sirk*, p.86).

Universal was one of the smaller studios, and thus lacked a significant complement of top stars: Rock Hudson and Tony Curtis were on their way up, but otherwise Jeff Chandler and Maureen O'Hara were probably the studio's top contract players at this time. Accordingly, it became studio policy to sign up major stars for one or two picture deals. This was mutually beneficial: Universal would acquire a top star; the stars themselves would be billed above the less prestigious contract players and would have the projects 'tailored' to their own particular talents. It was under these conditions that Barbara Stanwyck came to Universal to make *All I Desire* and, later, *There's Always Tomorrow*.

Since the break-up of her marriage to Robert Taylor in 1951, Stanwyck had made only two films in two years, and she was now anxious to return to full-time film-making. While her star status had diminished – Sirk has said that she was not a big enough star at this point to persuade Universal to make the film in colour, as he wished – her considerable talents had not. Her professionalism in the film is undoubtedly one reason why it works so well as a team effort: she galvanises the whole cast to excel themselves.

The loss of colour is not a problem: Sirk's eye works just as well in black and white, and the film is full of stunning images, beautifully composed and executed. (With the slides to refer to, O'Shaughnessy can concentrate on this aspect of the film, and does so admirably.) The weakness of the film (which I assume stems from Universal's economies) is the lack of a specially composed score. The music credit is 'Musical direction: Joseph Gershenson' and, apart from one musical theme, the score is cobbled together from bits of previous scores in a crude and irritating way. We hear not only the Liszt piano theme used in *Letter from an Unknown Woman* (1948), but, more disconcertingly, parts of Frank Skinner's score for *Black Angel* (1946) and parts of Miklos Rozsa's score for *Secret Beyond the Door* (1947) at various points in the movie. As for the three 'melodramatic' chords that accompany Lyle Bettger's appearances as Dutch, they are at a level of banality one associates with the crudest B picture. Whilst I am sure there are those who would point to the chords as an example of Sirk's use of parody to distance us from the melodrama, I find them so heavy-handed that they significantly undermine the delicate play of identification and distanciation elsewhere in the film.

Genre

The film deals with the return of Naomi Murdoch (Barbara Stanwyck) to the family she deserted ten years earlier after her affair with a man – Dutch Heinemann – threatened to become a small-town scandal. At least, she says to her friend Belle (Lela Bliss) at the beginning, she left before there was a scandal, but the figure of Clem, the town gossip, serves to show that the affair was well-known and that she is still remembered as a 'notorious woman'. The film thus encompasses three major categories of melodrama.

1) It is a woman's film insofar as it is the story of Naomi, her problems, concerns and aspirations. That Stanwyck is the only star accentuates this: as O'Shaughnessy notes, there are significantly more close-ups of her, and she even introduces the non-flashback narrative with voice-over. Although *All I Desire* treats the other members of the family in more depth than other Sirk melodramas, it is still predominantly a woman's film, with Naomi as the character who drives the narrative forward.

2) It is a small-town melodrama in its use of Riverdale, Wisconsin, with its *petit-bourgeois* morality, as the background against which the central characters' behaviour is defined. In the past, Naomi was the girl from 'the wrong side of the tracks' who married into bourgeois respectability – Henry Murdoch (Richard Carlson) was a school-teacher – but who later became frustrated and began an affair. Although confined here to past references, such tensions are common to many melodramas, among them *Stella Dallas* (1937), *Cass Timberlane* (1947), *Beyond the Forest* (1949) and *Clash by Night* (1952). In each of these films, as in *All I Desire*, the lower-class heroine has an energy and drive – and, in most cases, a sexuality – which middle-class marriage has great difficulty in accommodating. In *All I Desire*, the barometer of small-town opinion is represented by Colonel Underwood (Dayton Lummis), a local councilman and the film's representative of patriarchy. In his first appearance with Henry, now the school principal, Colonel Underwood demonstrates both his power and his reactionary politics: Henry will get his promotion to Superintendent of Schools for the County provided he doesn't go in for 'that progressive nonsense they're spouting in Washington.' Later, Colonel Underwood twitches at the mere thought of Henry coming to the Senior Play with 'that woman'. Towards the end of the film, after Naomi has accidentally shot Dutch and and propelled herself back into notoriety in the town's eyes, Colonel Underwood warns Henry, 'everything's at stake: your whole career'. And so, when Henry defies this warning and goes to ask Naomi to stay, he is taking a positive step against the repressive small-town ethos.

3) It is a family melodrama in the sense that it treats each of the five members of the Murdoch family with insight and understanding. Unlike *All that Heaven Allows* (1955) and *There's Always Tomorrow*, in which only one member of the family is viewed with genuine sympathy (the mother in the former, the father in the latter), *All I Desire* views all the members of the family both critically and sympathetically. Each of the children – Joyce (Marcia Henderson), Lily (Lori Nelson) and Ted (Billy Gray) – is a fully-developed, complex characterisation, and each is capable of change in a way that is quite foreign to the frequently appalling children in the later movies.

In addition, as O'Shaughnessy points out, the film has links with the western. It is set in 1910 (as indicated by Lily's reference to Halley's comet) and points back to 1900 (when Naomi left home), spanning the period of transition from the western to the melodrama. In particular, O'Shaughnessy mentions the iconography of the opening shot, which is very like the western small town, but with 'modern' elements such as the motor car.

Structure, narrative and the set

All I Desire has a neat overall structure: a prologue (Naomi as a vaudeville actress) followed by three acts (her three days in Riverdale). Equally, it has a very sophisticated narrative, in which every scene

Still: All I Desire. *Naomi (Barbara Stanwyck) after the success of her Browning recitation, with Joyce (Marcia Henderson) and Lily (Lori Nelson) on the left and Sara (Maureen O'Sullivan) on the right.*

in these three acts contributes to a complex pattern of connections, echoes and transformations. Finally, it has a highly effective set for the Murdoch house. In *Sirk on Sirk*, Halliday writes: 'The "liberated" zone of the house is the kitchen' (p.163). One can extend this idea and divide the house into three zones: upstairs, downstairs front (the living and dining rooms) and downstairs back (the kitchen). The downstairs front is open plan, with the stairs sited centrally, between the living and dining rooms. And, in going from the living-room to the kitchen, members of the family tend to go up the front stairs and down the back – rather than through the dining-room. The stairs thereby become a place of transit between two paired zones: the public world of the living-room and the private world of upstairs, the formal, respectable world of the living-room and the 'liberated' kitchen. In our first introduction to the house, Sirk establishes its unusual geography immediately, as Joyce enters at the front door and, seeking Lily, goes up the front stairs and then down the back into the kitchen. This enables Sirk to dramatise (and delicately ironise) her bossiness, as she sweeps down the back stairs, ordering the cook, Lena (Lotte Stein), around and censuring Lily's self-indulgent behaviour (eating honey with a spoon, legs up on the table). In the 'liberated' kitchen, she is a mildly irritating intruder.

The formal/liberated opposition within the different downstairs zones of the house may be illustrated by considering Naomi's return home. When she enters the house for the first time, it is through a side door: she is not yet confident enough to arrive at the front door. She enters the dining-room, interrupting the family's evening meal: Lena and Lily are delighted to see her, Henry and Ted stunned, and Joyce both perturbed and annoyed. Her entrance breaks up the meal, leaving her rather awkwardly marooned, but she relaxes immediately when Lena takes her into the kitchen. Now Naomi feels she's 'really home' and she celebrates by high-kicking the match-box fastened on the wall. As she does so, Joyce appears at the top of the back stairs and looks down in strong disapproval at such extravagant behaviour. Just as Joyce censured Lily's self-indulgent behaviour earlier, here, too, she seems like the Superego figure in the home, reversing the archetypal mother/daughter roles.

Shortly afterwards, Naomi goes up the back stairs to the front part of the house. Immediately, she and Henry have their first row – on the front stairs. The row ends with Naomi fleeing upstairs, where the film has yet to allocate her a place. (Only at the end of the evening does Joyce surrender her room.) But the flight expresses Naomi's problem in coping with the world represented by the front part of the house. The party after Lily's play changes all this. First, Naomi converts the formal space of the living-room into one of fun and excitement (the dancing); then, surrounded by admiring young men and women, she celebrates her triumph by reciting Elizabeth Barrett Browning's 'How do I love thee?' Significantly, this is done on the stairs, her admirers grouped below – she has converted a zone of conflict into a zone of triumph. It is at this point that Sara Harper (Maureen O'Sullivan), the drama teacher who loves Henry, looks at him and

Frame: All I Desire – *Naomi recites Browning; Peterson (Fred Nurney) and Lena (Lotte Stein) in the background. (Frames are captioned only where not directly referred to in the text.)*

realises that he, too, has been captivated. Naomi has begun to breathe life back into the family home. She stays on in Riverdale not simply because Lily surreptitiously alters the clock to make her miss the last train, but because, by the end of the evening, it has become both her secret desire and Henry's that she should stay. Joyce's feelings, though, are quite different. Earlier, feeling usurped by her mother's dancing with Russ (Richard Long), her fiancé, she had even retreated temporarily to the kitchen, obliging Lena to reassure her and encourage her to enjoy herself. But, when all the guests have gone, Joyce again appears at the head of the stairs (the front stairs on this occasion) and acts like a stern parent-figure, interrupting a particularly tense moment between Henry and Naomi – he has just asked her why she left him – and, in effect, sending the two of them off to bed. She reasserts her control.

The set, then, is integral to the film's *mise-en-scène* not only providing a range of perspectives on the action, but also establishing a series of patterns and associations. *Imitation of Life* (1959) makes similar use of its set (Lora's split-level mansion) in its distinction between the front parts of the house and the back – e.g. the way Annie (Juanita Moore) and Sarah-Jane (Susan Kohner) are 'confined' to the back. But the use is not as sophisticated as in *All I Desire*, in which even the windows and doors of the house are integrated into the *mise-en-scène*, with Sirk repeatedly shooting from outside so that we see characters and actions through different 'frames'.

The three-day structure of the film charts the three distinct phases of Naomi's effect on town and family. On the first day, she is a celebrity, and excites the townspeople as well as charming the world immediately around the family: Russ, Lily's schoolfriends, even Sara.

The second day is more intimate and family-orientated. At the beginning of it, the action shifts upstairs, to the private part of the house. This introduces much more difficult problems for Naomi to cope with: the private worlds of her children. Lily's declaration that she's going to leave town with Naomi, Joyce's hostility and prudishness, the thirteen-year-old Ted's concern to have Naomi share some of his world (his invitation to her to go fishing with him) – all are problems which Naomi must begin to confront. Naomi works through these problems with different degrees of success, but with the two most repressed family members, Joyce and Henry, she effects a remarkable transformation. By the end of the second day, as I will argue, both have been 'seduced'.

The third day is the day of traumas. Henry's announcement that Naomi is staying on 'for quite a long time' (the fruit of their night together) breaks up what promised to be a happy family breakfast. Dutch's gunshots – his old signal to Naomi of 'two shots and then one' – interrupt Henry and Naomi's kiss. Then, as Naomi sets out to see Dutch and 'stop this once and for all', Ted sees her drive by and, assuming she's looking for him (following up his fishing invitation), sets out after her. He arrives at the lakeside just after she's shot Dutch.

Ted's trauma is private, and its significance is complicated, but Naomi's trauma is public: her scandalous past catches up with her at the very moment she attempts to 'reform' and disavow it. Here the doctor, in such a character's usual role as the voice of authority in the small town, points out that 'those maggots' (the townspeople) have spread their version of what happened all over town. He advises Naomi to 'go back to Chicago – for Henry's sake and the children's.'

Following the doctor's advice – as Cary (Jane Wyman) does in *All that Heaven Allows* – Naomi sets out to leave town. But Dr Tomlin also allows Henry the opportunity to confront the wounded Dutch, which thus enables a different ending: Henry is enlightened about Naomi's reasons for seeing Dutch again and goes to Naomi to ask her to stay. That this happy ending was imposed on Sirk by Ross Hunter is well-known, but it needs to be considered in the context of the film's structure.

The narrative's pattern of connections, echoes and transformations is a particularly good example of the highly structured quality of Hollywood movies. Characteristically, it is based on paired scenes: two scenes in which Joyce censures self-indulgent behaviour in the kitchen: two scenes with Henry, Sara and Colonel Underwood at the school; two scenes in which Naomi takes the key

Still: All I Desire – *Colonel Underwood (Dayton Lummis) reassures Henry (Richard Carlson) about his impending promotion; Sara looks on.*

from the hanging basket and then returns it as she hears someone coming; two scenes in Joyce's bedroom in which the question of Lily's going with Naomi is discussed; two scenes with Ted upstairs; two scenes with Dutch at the lakeside – there are probably twenty or more examples of such links across the movie. But most of these links include changes of which Naomi is the instigator. A typical instance is the pair of scenes betwen Henry and Naomi on the front stairs, which are the setting for their first row and, at the end of the second day, for a crucial scene of reconciliation ending with them spending the night together.

The highly structured quality of the film enables one to deduce its original ending, the one Sirk preferred, in which Naomi left town. The graduation ceremony is clearly set up to be another linked scene, echoing Lily's play. It would have had the same setting (the school hall), the same choreographer (Sara), the same star (Lily), and the same dignitaries (Henry and Colonel Underwood) in attendance. But, of course, Naomi would not have been present, which would have symbolised Colonel Underwood's power: the absence he wanted at the play. From the graduation ceremony, the film would then have cut to Naomi's departure.

Although I prefer the ending as it stands (*see Movie 29/30* pp.26/27), there is no question that altering the structure at a late stage weakened the film. Once it was realised that, with Naomi staying, the graduation ceremony was dispensable (cutting it would also save money), I feel that Sirk and his writers should at least have considered some of the loose ends. Lily's yearning to leave the small town and go on the stage, for example, is simply forgotten about. Although she is disqualified by her immaturity from one option – leaving in place of Naomi – it would not have been difficult to have scripted a scene in which, looking to the future, Naomi indicates to Lily that she'll give her all the help she can when it seems right for her to leave. Naomi's voice-over as she watches the play enthuses about Lily's talent in a way which certainly doesn't seem to be ironic or misguided, but the film ends leaving this talent blocked and frustrated.

One assumes that Sirk – unhappy with the imposed ending – was content to leave the film in this unresolved state. And, of course, twenty years later, film scholars could then come along and talk about the 'progressiveness' of such lack of closure.

Theatre and spectacle

At the beginning of the film, we learn that Naomi is a fading actress in vaudeville: 'Not quite at the bottom of the bill yet; nor at the end of my rope.' In the first shot in which we see her, she is coming

off stage; we never see her perform on stage, and thus we do not learn until close to the end – in the crucial scene in which Naomi finally tells Lily 'the truth' about her career – just how humiliating it has been for her to survive in the theatre. The story she has been relaying, via Lena, to her family is rather different: 'I'm supposed to be in Europe doing Shakespeare.' However, when she gets Lily's letter inviting her back to Riverdale for the Senior Play – in which Lily herself is to star – she responds to Belle's encouragement and decides to go back and *play the part* of the 'perfect lady and big star' she has been pretending, *in absentia*, to be. She can do it because she's played such parts on stage. She uses her savings to buy a couple of outfits as theatrical props; her only concession to her earlier, non-theatrical persona is to let her hair 'go back to natural'.

Naomi thus enters the town as a star, as a spectacle. We know it is a performance: the townspeople and her family assume it is 'real'. But one of the points the film is making here is that all stars, when on public display, are 'performing'; it cannot be otherwise. Notions of theatre and performance abound in Sirk's films, from the complex cultural references of *Schlussakkord* (1936) to the ironies of *Imitation of Life*, but in *All I Desire* what particularly excites the town about Naomi is her past notoriety: 'Won't the ladies be talking tonight!' She is seen as the sort of person whose passions are too great to be accommodated within small-town society, as someone who is larger than life: both spectacular and, implicitly, dangerous. Unlike equivalent star appearances in westerns (Joseph H. Lewis's *Lawless*

Still: All I Desire – *Naomi makes her entrance at Lily's play escorted by Henry and is greeted by Sara.*

Street, 1955, has just an echo of Naomi's return in Angela Lansbury's actress coming to the small town in which her husband is marshall), Naomi doesn't even have to appear on stage to be the centre of attention. Merely the news that she will be in the audience for Lily's play is sufficient to cause the townspeople to flock there. This is ironically contrasted with the way Naomi describes the vaudeville audience at the beginning: 'They're like ice out there'.

When Naomi shoots Dutch, from the townspeople's point of view she is doing little more than acting out their fantasies about her. She becomes an even more gratifying spectacle: a woman they can not only get excited about (for such a striking demonstration of her wicked passions) but simultaneously condemn. The film shows two extreme reactions to the shooting – Colonel Underwood's icy dismissal ('It's pretty evident what kind of a woman she is') and Lily's delight ('Mother will be even more famous') – but it is clear that the townspeople in general are enjoying both sorts of reactions.

Naomi as spectacle is thus used to comment on the small-town ethos: to expose its prurience, voyeurism and hypocritical moralising. It is because Henry asks her to stay at the end in defiance of this set of attitudes that the film as it stands has a positive ending: 'They'll have us to face; the two of us together.' Two Hollywood conventions are violated here: Henry is risking his whole career and putting love before duty (such recklessness would normally be punished), and Naomi is going against the woman's film creed which says that, as the heroine, she is expected to sacrifice her own happiness for the sake of those she loves, i.e. she is supposed to follow the doctor's advice and go back to Chicago. On the other hand, since she is still Henry's wife (and, above all, the children's mother), the standard ideological position would be that she should be recuperated into the home. In other words, there are conflicting imperatives at work: neither ending resolves these.

In fact, by the time of the Stern interview, Sirk admits that Naomi's leaving 'would have been very sad – perhaps too pessimistic.' He now speaks of the ending as 'an unhappy happy ending', unhappy because he cannot imagine that 'the old love' between Henry and Naomi could return. But his position has changed since re-seeing the film: this is a qualification of the ending, not a rejection of it. His critics, by contrast, have stuck to his old position: e.g. in Basinger's words, 'the only logical ending is to have Naomi leave . . . Naomi finds a "happy ending", but no real change. She has returned to what she ran away from in the first place.' Here, I disagree completely: Naomi's return has transformed and revitalised the family. Were she to leave, it would be a defeat, with both her and the family brought down by small-town gossip, malice and prejudice. By staying, she joins with Henry in defying this. Whether they will succeed is, of course, unknown, but one can scarcely deny their courage in trying.

Naomi's profession as an actress 'in the great big outside world' (Henry's slightly ironic phrase) is balanced by Sara's profession as the drama teacher in the small town. Whereas Naomi *is* a spectacle, Sara, self-effacingly, *creates* a spectacle: Lily's play. Sara is important to the film's complexity of design. Just as she has taught Lily, and brought out her talents, so she takes over the education of Naomi, suggesting that Naomi recite Shakespeare at the graduation ceremony so that 'the nicer people of the town' will come to see her as the young people did at the party. When Naomi wonders why Sara, who loves Henry, should wish to do this, Sara asks 'Are you afraid, Naomi?' At this point, Joyce runs in, exhilarated after her horse-ride. Now, Naomi

herself had used exactly the same challenge to Joyce in getting her to come riding in the first place. And here, in one of the film's many examples of brilliant timing, we see the beneficial consequence of Joyce having risen to Naomi's challenge. The Shakespeare recital does not occur – structurally, Naomi's frantic ride through town with the wounded Dutch is its melodramatic substitute – but the import of Sara's challenge remains: it is Naomi's not being afraid to face the town that is crucial to her future place in it.

The family

The way in which the family in *All I Desire* is not at all like those in the later Sirk movies can be seen by contrasting its representation with that of the family in *There's Always Tomorrow* (on the first evening in each case). In *All I Desire*, they are eating together and doing something together – going to Lily's play – and, despite Ted's teasing Lily, there is a genuine family atmosphere. Inevitably, Naomi's return disturbs this, but the return of a mother after a ten-year absence would disturb any family, and what seems more remarkable is that the family actually copes, and continues with its plans to go together to Lily's play. The family in *There's Always Tomorrow* is similar in structure – parents and three children: Vinny, Ellen and Frankie – but the way they behave towards each other is quite different. As in the earlier movie, one of the children, Frankie, is appearing on stage, but only Marion, the mother, is interested enough to want to go and see her. Cliff, the father, doesn't even know about Frankie's recital and has bought tickets for himself and Marion

to go to the theatre. Inside the home, Vinny's first act is to bully Ellen off the telephone and then monopolise it, shushing his father when Cliff comes in. Cliff's conversation with Marion is repeatedly interrupted by the insistent demands of Ellen and Frankie. There is no question of a family meal: everyone else scrambles to get out of the house as fast as possible once Cliff is home. Ellen demands money from him, Vinny refuses to give Ellen a lift and Frankie gets quite irritated with her mother when she pauses for a moment to talk to Cliff. Cliff is left alone, disconsolately eating a solitary meal.

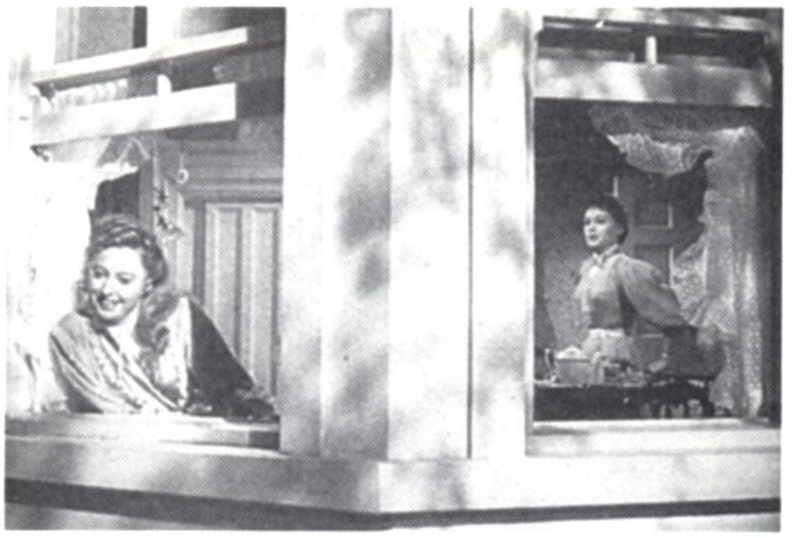
Sirk's representation of the family in *All I Desire* is far less narrow and one-sided. Indeed, in opposition to the critical views quoted earlier, I would maintain that *All I Desire* is one of the great films about a family: the togetherness and the tensions, the affections and disaffections, the rows and reconciliations, the joys and the frustrations, the generosity and the jealousy, the pretensions and the honesty, the moments of exuberance and the moments of repose. There is a vitality to the family scenes in particular – a constant play of movement, looks and interactions – that makes the film extremely compelling to watch, as well as testifying to Sirk's talents as a director of ensemble acting. And whereas in most Hollywood melodramas of passion, one or two characters are explored in depth and the rest are more or less 'typed', each family member in *All I Desire* is viewed with a similar complexity, and merits separate consideration.

Joyce: In the absence of Naomi, Joyce has assumed the role of 'mother', but in an organising sort of way, and seems secretly to resent it: 'Only since I've had to.' She sees it as her duty: 'If I didn't look after Dad, Ted and Lily, who would?' Henry has happily surrendered such organising to her, but nevertheless views it with a touch of irony: as he says to Sara, 'I think we can trust Joyce to see that Ted and I are politely early and properly combed.' Joyce's role as surrogate mother also leads to her being possessive of Henry. Indeed, one feels the presence of a repressed Oedipal fantasy on Joyce's part towards her father: although she is engaged to Russ, Colonel Underwood's son, it is apparent that Henry and the family come first, Russ second. Joyce has even internalised her father's speech patterns. During their row on the stairs, Naomi angrily tells Henry, 'I won't laugh too loud or make jokes or speak to the riff-raff I used to know before I married you.' In response, Henry snaps, 'That's very good of you!' And, as Naomi goes off to dance with Russ at the party, telling Joyce how much she approves of him, Joyce uses the same phrase and intonation.

At the same time, Joyce is close to Sara, whose similarity to Joyce in personality is signalled in her similarly modest, respectable dress. One of my students, Duncan Reekie, has interestingly suggested that her identification with Sara enables Joyce to express her repressed desire for her father 'safely'. My feeling is, rather, that Joyce's closeness to Sara is possible because she doesn't see Sara as a threat to her relationship with her father. Naomi, on the other hand, is such a threat. Over the space of the first evening, Henry and Joyce exchange a series of quick glances. Before Naomi's entrance, rather like a married couple, they share an indulgent smile at Lily's insistence that she isn't nervous about her impending performance. Then Naomi enters, and the harmony of Henry and Joyce's shared responses is disturbed. Now their exchanged glances (as Lily asks if Naomi can move her things into the house and as Naomi dances with Russ at the party) show, rather, a concern for each other's feelings as Naomi moves, by stages, back into the house.

Joyce resents Naomi's return – 'As far as I'm concerned, we aren't your family and you're not our mother.' In part, this is because she genuinely blames Naomi for the hurt she caused Henry (and Joyce, one assumes, is old enough to have learned of the scandal), but it is equally apparent that Naomi and Joyce are very different personalities. When Naomi kicks the match-box, the way in which the matches fly all around Joyce, causing her to flinch, is a striking expression of Naomi's vitality exploding in the home and of Joyce's puritanical reaction.

In effect, Naomi de-puritanises Joyce. This begins when, on the second day, Russ arrives to take the two of them riding and Joyce is reluctant to go, feeling outclassed by her mother (from her bedroom, she has just witnessed Naomi flirting with



Russ). She admits to Naomi that she loves Russ, but that she would offer no resistance to her mother commandeering him. It is here that Naomi challenges Joyce ('Afraid of my competition?') and, accusing her of having 'no guts', virtually orders her to get ready.

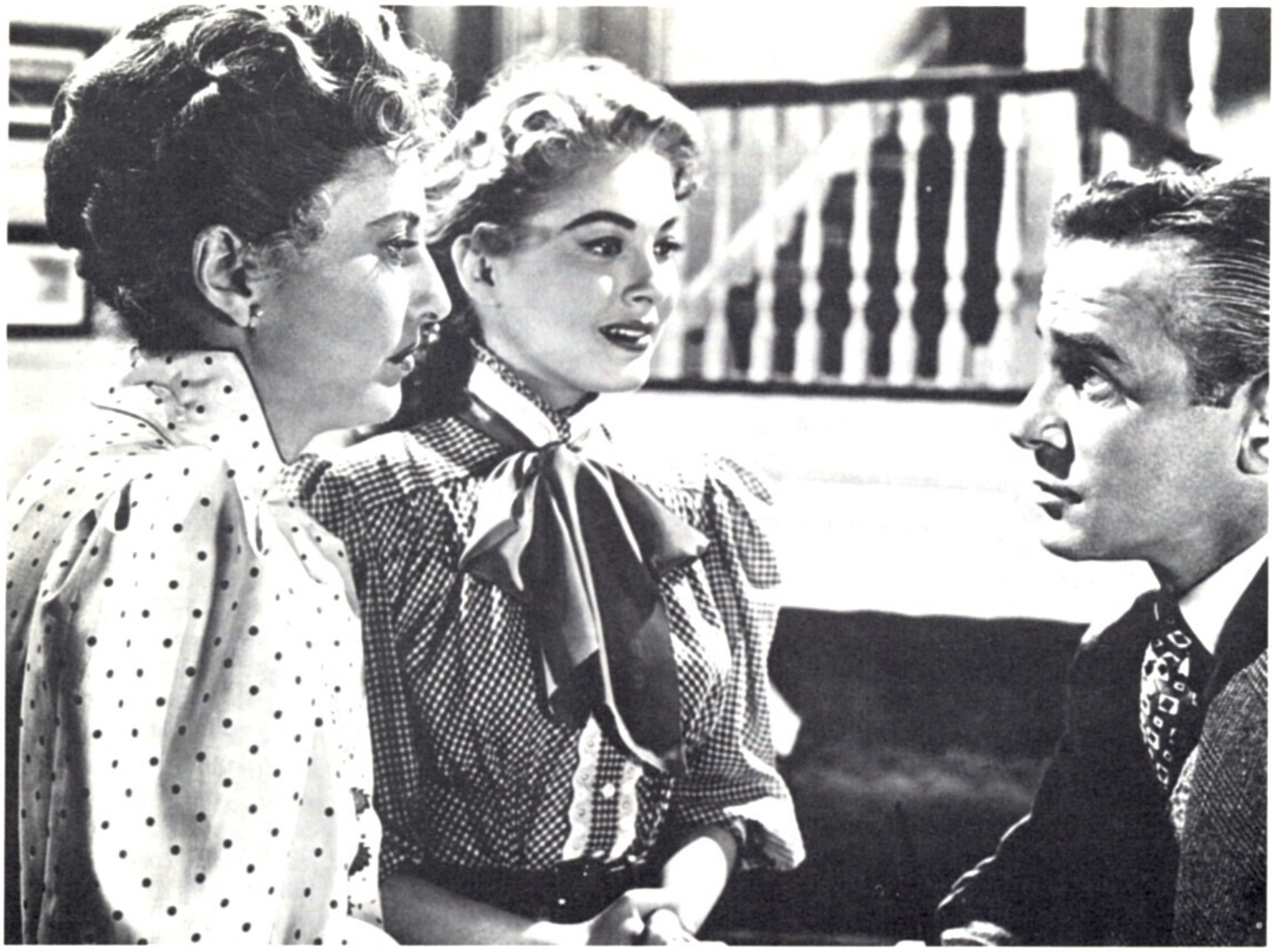
The sexual overtones of horse-riding are capable of many different inflections in the cinema: in *All I Desire* they are unusually to the point. When, at the party, Russ asks Naomi if she ever has a 'yen to go horse-back riding', her reply – 'I used to if the horse was good' – unambiguously carries a double meaning. But the sexual meaning is not just metaphorical: Naomi used to go riding to meet Dutch. (The same overtones are present in Clem's conversation with Dutch: 'Do you do any riding at all now, Dutch?') The innuendo ripples through the adults present: Sara looks quickly at Henry who looks quickly at Joyce.

As they ride out of the town, Naomi actually leads Joyce and Russ to the place by the lake where she used to meet Dutch. The couple have not been there before, which indicates the 'innocence' of their relationship. And even more remarkable than a mother taking her daughter to the site of her sexual transgression is that the 'prim and proper' Joyce immediately takes a fancy to the place: 'It would be a wonderful spot for canoeing.' At this point, rising to the challenge that she has 'no guts', Joyce takes and rides Naomi's much more lively horse. Aware of the usual consequences of such folly, we expect her to be thrown. The film not only avoids this cliché but shows Joyce returning from her ride with her hair down and quite exhilarated by the experience. Accepting Naomi's challenge has already started to transform her, releasing her suppressed sensuality and taste for excitement. That evening, she and Russ go canoeing, and, from their conversation on the porch afterwards, it is clear that their relationship is now on a rather more romantic footing. (Lily notices the difference in Joyce the next morning: 'You should spend more time in canoes.') Although we wouldn't suppose that Joyce and Russ have gone quite so far as to have sex,

nevertheless, within the constraints of a 'fifties Hollywood movie, Naomi has actually brought out her daughter's sexuality. This is, quite simply, extraordinary.

Lily: Where Joyce is fussy and practical, Lily is easy-going and dreamy; Joyce rather stern and proper, Lily self-indulgent and sensuously uninhibited; Joyce is 'like her father', anxious to fit into small-town society, Lily is 'like her mother', yearning to escape. (The first encounter between the two sisters in the kitchen, with Joyce censuring Lily's self-indulgence, encapsulates the differences.) And, just as the film perceptively analyses what lies behind Joyce's attitudes, so it is acute about Lily. In her concern for the family, Joyce suggests

Still: All I Desire – *Russ (Richard Long) and Naomi at the lakeside. Frame (above): the shadows of Russ and Joyce after they return from canoeing; inside, Henry works, and Naomi is at the phonograph.*



Still: All I Desire – *Lily persuades Henry to let her leave with her mother; Naomi is troubled.*

something of the air of a martyr; in her devotion to Naomi, Lily is conspicuously self-seeking. Lily identifies herself with a romanticised image of Naomi: her mother as 'great actress'. Although Naomi may have helped fabricate this image, Lily is the only one of the family to speak of her mother in such terms (and since, of course, there are no play bills or newspaper clippings as evidence for this view), we can assume that Naomi's reported career has undergone a definite glamorisation in Lily's eyes. Certainly, when Lily says of Naomi's almost hesitant entrance into the house, 'What a dramatic entrance you made,' we are amused by the theatrical exaggeration. Lori Nelson's performance conveys the stagestruck quality of Lily quite beautifully: forever posing, declaiming and generally playing to the audience.

Lily sees in Naomi her means of escape from the small town. Writing to her mother, moving her into the house, ensuring that she misses the last train and so on can all be seen as an extremely effective strategy to win Naomi to the position where Lily can say 'I'm going with you'. When Naomi traces this wish back to Lily's letter – 'Did you count on me taking you with me?' – Lily replies, evasively, 'I always wanted to be with you, darling, always.' As she says this, we see her insincerity: questioned about her motives, Lily escapes into a generalisation about daughterly affection which she cannot but reveal is selfishly motivated.

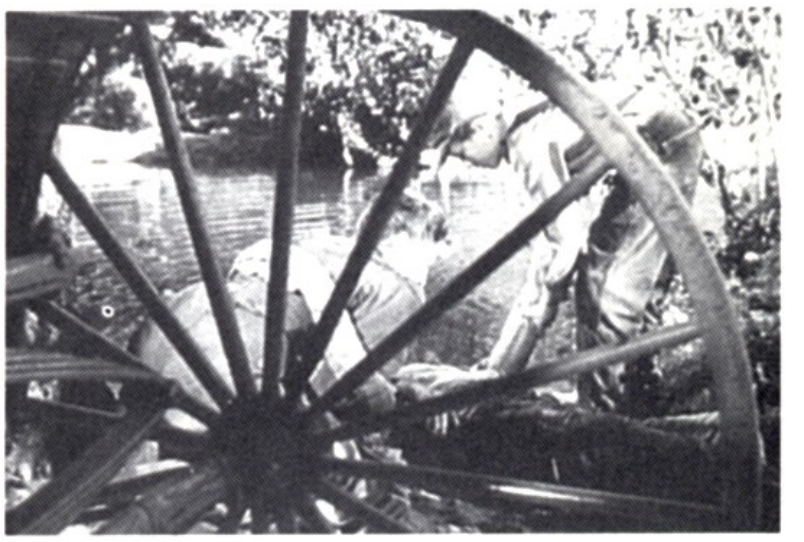
Crucial to Lily's project is that there should be no time for a serious discussion of her plans and that everything should simply happen. Hence, having made her point, she is quick to escape from Naomi in this scene, just as she is in the scene that evening when she persuades Henry to agree to her leaving. Lily's tendency to run away rather than stay and listen to Naomi leads ultimately to irony: when Naomi finally disillusions Lily about her career, Lily flees before she finishes and thus never hears 'I'd love to have you with me.'

As with virtually everything in the film, however, this final scene between Naomi and Lily demands a more complex reading. In his final scene with Joyce (in the doctor's waiting-room), Henry suggests that Naomi was deliberately making Lily 'hate her' to 'keep Lily from making the same mistakes she made.' This would require that Naomi consciously held back saying her last line until Lily had fled. (The line is delivered to a photograph of Lily: a common device which allows a character to address someone in fantasy with desires inexpressible in reality.) But what Naomi is really doing in this scene is make Lily face reality: the theatre is indeed 'a tough jungle'. Although Naomi's disillusioning of Lily is not as revolutionary as her effect on Joyce, it is important in forcing Lily to grow up and set aside girlish dreams of entering the theatre as the daughter of a star. On the other hand, returning Naomi to the home at the expense of Lily's desire to escape opens up the possibility of Naomi's pattern of frustration being repeated in Lily. (Indeed, in earlier giving Lily permission to leave with her

mother, Henry was recognising the importance of avoiding such a repetition.) Whilst Henry's last scene with Joyce effects – by proxy – *her* reconciliation with Naomi, and Ted and Naomi are given an extremely moving scene of reconciliation, Lily is virtually forgotten.

Ted: The film devotes less time to him than to the other members of the family, but this detracts little from the excellence of his characterisation or of Billy Gray's 'natural' performance. There is no sign here of the whimsy that creeps into his better-known performances in the two Doris Day vehicles, *On Moonlight Bay* (1951) and *By the Light of the Silvery Moon* (1953). As befits his age (Billy Gray was fifteen during filming, but Ted is clearly meant to be younger: I have assumed about thirteen), Ted spends most of his time outside the home, either with Dutch (with whom we first see him) or roaming with his dog. But his place within the family is not ignored, and here a range of responses typical of the film's complexity may be noted. Thus, on the first evening, we see Ted first of all tease Lily about her actressy ambitions, then go off uncomplainingly when she tells him to fetch Naomi's things from the hotel (the lack of complaint is more praiseworthy when we realise that Ted has not had time to eat anything) and finally show genuine, if naive, appreciation of her performance in the play.

Ted's somewhat ambiguous position in relation to the home derives partly from his relationship with Dutch. Dutch is much more of a father-figure to him than Henry, and the film clearly suggests that Dutch could indeed be his father. (This is a point that students have never failed to notice when I've shown the film, but neither Basinger nor Stern makes any reference to the possibility. Not until O'Shaughnessy's notes did I read a critical account which mentions this crucial aspect of the movie, although I note that Jean-Loup Bourget mentions the possibility in *Douglas Sirk*, Cinémathèque de Toulouse, 1984.) On the surface, the film neither confirms nor denies the suggestion, but there are a significant number of hints. First, there is the adult-child symmetry of the film: Joyce takes after her father, Lily after her mother and Ted after Dutch. Second, there is a definite unease in the way Henry introduces Ted to Naomi – 'You're too young to remember your mother' – and we note that, very shortly afterwards, Dutch's name comes up, with Ted saying 'He's the greatest.' But the strongest evidence for Dutch as Ted's father is contained in the film's sub-text. As Dutch enters the school hall during the play, he, Ted and Naomi are grouped in one shot. Ted waves to him and Naomi turns to exchange a hastily averted look. During this, on stage, we hear Lily's voice: 'I shall never reveal what is locked in my heart – it is a sacred trust.' It is as if she is speaking for Naomi and the film: the matter – Ted's conception – which can never be revealed. Elsewhere, there's also a more psychoanalytical hint. Dutch's 'two shots and then one' can be taken symbolically to indicate his sexual potency with Naomi. And, in the image that introduces



Frames: the introduction of Dutch (Lyle Bettger) and Ted (Billy Gray), just before Naomi's carriage passes behind, and (below) Sirkian distanciation – Naomi and Ted over the wounded Dutch.

Ted and Dutch at target practice in Dutch's store, Naomi's carriage drives past in the background in such a way that, as Dutch's first gunshot is heard, the carriage is aligned with them.

Of the family, Ted suffers the most traumatic consequence of Naomi's return home: he arrives at the lakeside just after she has shot Dutch. And, although the initial shock is dissipated in the frantic drive to get Dutch to the doctor, a point is reached when Naomi has to talk to Ted about the incident. Here the film has a problem. Naomi can tell Ted that it was an accident, but his angry response – 'Why'd you go and see him?' – is, of course, unanswerable (to a thirteen year-old boy in a 'fifties Hollywood movie, that is), and so the doctor interrupts and sends Ted home.

Nevertheless, the fact that Ted does go home, rather than run away, is a positive sign. In two earlier Sirk films, *The Lady Pays Off* (1951) and *Meet Me at the Fair* (1952), a child runs away in protest at adult behaviour, which emphasises Ted's maturity in not doing so. And, although Naomi can't explain to him, and is obliged instead to generalise about disillusionment and being hurt, their final scene together is nevertheless probably the most moving in the film. It depends for its effect on Naomi being able to communicate her love, so that she breaks through Ted's tense defensiveness. She thus releases his suppressed emotional side: with a mother, he can cry, rather than conform to

Still: All I Desire – *Naomi's reconciliation with Ted.*

the macho notion that boys don't cry. This 'feminisation' of the son is also a crucial feature of *La Habanera* (1937), undermining in that film the rather disturbing Hitler Youth overtones of Juan's beautiful blonde boy.

The shooting of Dutch is one of those highly charged melodramatic moments that begs a psychoanalytical interpretation. It can be read in a number of ways, depending on the point of view. From Naomi's point of view, it is a fairly simple example of the return of the repressed: her past liaison with Dutch erupting into the present with a violence which makes everything public in a highly dramatic way. From Ted's point of view, it is considerably more complicated. He is confronted with a double event which is both shocking and incomprehensible: his mother and Dutch together; Dutch himself shot by Naomi. Given both that he had invited Naomi to come fishing by showing her a photograph of himself and Dutch holding up a bass they have caught and that, when he sees Naomi drive by on the buggy, he assumes that she's looking for him to fulfil their date, it's as if, in some sense, he *caused* the violence. And the violence can be read in two ways: either as the consequence of Dutch's violation of the rendezvous between mother and son (an Oedipal fantasy, in which the intruding father is violently expelled) or as Naomi's violation of the happy duo of Ted and Dutch holding the bass. The latter, in fact, has the more resonant implications for the film: Naomi as the destructive intruder who can only enter Ted's world at the expense of the violent expulsion of Dutch.

But the shooting of Dutch can also be read from the *film's* point of view. If we can take it that Dutch is indeed Ted's father, then the incident looks like a form of the return of the repressed in which the repressed – Ted's conception – is violently disavowed. This reading gains plausibility from the setting, which is, in the film's terms, the site of the conception.

Whatever one's reading of Ted's trauma, the fact that there is no reconciliation between him and Dutch (the film cannot permit it) leaves further unresolved problems at the end. Naomi's reconciliation with Ted soothes his fears by allowing him to re-embrace his mother. But can we possibly believe that Dutch, hitherto so important to Ted as mentor and father-figure, has been definitively expelled, and that Henry will, in future, assume the full paternal role? At the naturalistic level, we cannot imagine that Henry will take up hunting and fishing; does this mean that Naomi will take over Dutch's role with Ted? The future seems fraught with potential tensions – tensions which would enable a recovered Dutch to return into the life of the family.

Had the ending been thought through, there would have been a potential solution to this problem in Russ, who is clearly suitable to be a future mentor to Ted. But we last see Russ being prevented by his father from going to Joyce: the beginnings of the small-town ostracism of the family. And, although we cannot imagine that Colonel Underwood's prohibition will last – it can be seen as his

weak attempt to assert some of the authority which has been denied him by the changed ending – it leaves the matter of Russ's future relationship with the family unresolved, too.

Henry: Seen in the course of the film in only two locations, school and home (until he goes to confront Dutch at the doctor's and symbolically breaks the pattern), Henry seems a classic example of a settled husband-figure in opposition to Dutch's lover-figure. (Dutch, of course, possesses most of the film's phallic symbols – guns, fishing-rods, etc. – and it is he who is instructing Ted in their use. The photograph of the two of them with the bass is a standard example of the father benevolently sharing the phallus with the son.) But the very fact that Sara (whom Naomi describes, without irony, as 'the woman he needs') has made no headway during the years of Naomi's absence testifies to a stubborn romantic streak in Henry. Naomi is his lost love, whose photograph he keeps discreetly out of sight but readily available in his desk drawer.

In the Stern interview, Sirk says that Henry doesn't make a move with Sara because he wants his promotion. But that is not the way I see the film. It is true that, in the first scene between Henry and Sara, both of them are delighted with Colonel Underwood's assurances about Henry's impending promotion: 'After all these years.' Sara even goes so far as to put her hands on Henry's shoulder. But, from the way that Henry responds to this with 'If you ever decide to stop school-teaching, you'll make somebody a very wonderful wife,' I would say that he is not referring to himself, and that this is, in effect, a gentle rejection. (Basinger reads this quite differently, as the two of them talking 'warmly of their future together.') Immediately (the timing is as precise as in the 'interrupted kiss' between Henry and Naomi later) a train whistle is heard from the train that is bringing Naomi 'home'.

Still: All I Desire – *Henry and Sara's discussion of the graduation ceremony arrangements is interrupted by Russ with the news of Naomi's shooting of Dutch.*

Thus, 'after all these years' refers equally to Naomi, and her return is structurally in response to Henry's rejection of Sara.

Now, this is an unconventional use of the interruption device so fundamental to narrative in general and melodrama in particular. Dutch's gunshot interrupting Henry and Naomi's kiss, for all its superb concision, is a conventional use of the device: the interruption as threat. Equally, had Sara's advances been a threat to Henry, the use would, again, have been conventional: the interruption as a response to a threat. (This occurs, for example, in *Desire Me*, 1946, in which the kiss with which Marise surrenders to Jean is followed by a dissolve to Paul's train returning home – he arrives in response to this sexual threat to his wife.) But here Naomi enters into the space between Henry and Sara: she returns in response to his secret wish. This realigns the significance of the scene. It is Henry's inability to 'settle down' with Sara, his secret yearning for Naomi, which disturbs the equilibrium of his social position. It allows Naomi to return and thus to threaten the very status which Henry, in this scene, apparently so much desires.

Henry's stubborn refusal to forget Naomi also marks the film, on Robert Heilman's model, as melodrama. Were he to have readjusted, divorced and contemplated remarriage, this would have been material for comedy: *My Favorite Wife* (1940), *The Philadelphia Story* (1940), *His Girl Friday* (1941). (I discuss Heilman's ideas on comedy, mentioning *All I Desire*, in *Movie* 29/30, pp.35-38.)

Playing the role of the glamorous actress, Naomi re-enters the family. Shocked and disturbed by her return, Henry soon provokes a row. But the row is in fact triggered by Sara's phone-call, which informs Henry of the effect on the *town* of Naomi's return: there's been such a demand for seats for the play, they'll have to move in extra chairs. It is thus not surprising that Henry's anxiety should find a focus in the potentially harmful effect on the children of the interest (and gossip) generated by Naomi's return: 'We've lived down the talk, the scandal.' And it is surely for the children's sake that Henry decides to play his role and go with Naomi to the play: 'we'll make everything seem perfectly normal.' (We can see from Colonel Underwood's twitching that Henry's decision here does not exactly help his position.)

Thus, for an evening, both Naomi and Henry act out a fantasy for the sake of the children and for the benefit of the town. But the fantasy reflects what Henry, at an almost conscious level, and Naomi, at a deeper level, really desire. Thus, although Henry can be ironic to Sara about Naomi ('She can even charm a Yale man'), there is a sense in which Naomi's take-over within the home – greeting Sara as if she, Naomi, were the hostess; acting the life and soul of the party – however selfishly motivated, is a reflection of Henry's unexpressed desires.

By the second evening, this is quite apparent. Earlier in the day, Joyce had suggested that it really would be better if Naomi left as soon as possible, but when Naomi puts the idea to Henry, he rejects it. Then, later, after Lily and Ted have gone to bed, the two of them begin to reassess their lives. Henry admits his past failings: his lack of patience and understanding, his excessive concern about what people said. Naomi admits that her career has not exactly proved a success. They say that they've missed one another. Henry then confesses that, for a long time, he wanted Naomi to come back. The scene moves towards a harmonisation of their feelings and the intimation of the possibility of a future together. By siting the scene on the stairs, where they first quarrelled, Sirk symbolically reconciles their differences. And the fact that the stairs lead

Still: All I Desire – *after the horse-riding, Joyce tells Naomi that it would be better if she left early; Lena (Lotte Stein) in the background.*

to the bedroom is suddenly of vital import. As we discover in the next scene – the family breakfast – Henry and Naomi have celebrated their new-found togetherness by sleeping together.

Something else contributes to this resolution: the change in Joyce. In interrupting Henry and Naomi at the end of the first evening, she obliges them to go their separate ways. As a consequence, Henry spends 'nearly the whole night pacing the floor'. But, as Henry and Naomi are sitting on the stairs, Joyce is outside on the porch kissing Russ: the fruit of their romantic evening 'canoeing'. In other words, the liberation of Joyce's repressed sexuality stops her from coming in and interrupting her parents on the second evening. And so here there is a very different consequence: Henry and Naomi sleep together and the joke at the family

breakfast the next morning is that everyone has had a wonderful night's sleep.

Eventually, Henry has to choose between commitment to Naomi and conforming to Colonel Underwood's notion of what he should do. In the light of what the latter stands for (morally, educationally), one can only applaud Henry's decision. But Henry's confrontation with Dutch – a necessary intermediate step before asking Naomi to stay – is more ambiguously handled. It is supposedly a demonstration of Henry's new-found manhood: he knew about Dutch in the past, but this is the first time he has confronted him. However, we note that Dutch, incapacitated in bed, is in an unusually weak position. Equally, that Naomi has shot Dutch seems to suggest nothing to Henry except that she's seen him again. He seems to have no suspicion that Naomi may have changed. It is ironic that the person who enlightens him is Dutch.

Nevertheless, the film offers the possibility of a happy ending. Like the children, Henry, too, grows up as a result of Naomi's homecoming: he even says at the end 'Some people just grow old; others grow up.' He admits that he was a coward in the past and speaks of his changed attitude in terms of his commitment to Naomi: 'A husband . . . who has faith in his wife, believes her, loves her.' Sirk in his seventies may well have felt that there was little hope for Henry and Naomi, but I feel that the younger Sirk who made the film was able to give to this final scene a fair degree of promise for the couple's future.

Naomi: In the past, being the wife of a small-town school-teacher had been too little for Naomi: her drives and appetites wanted more. But her career as an actress has foundered, and we can see her decision to return to Riverdale as prompted by a desire not just to see how they all are, but to 'test the possibility' of returning home. There are obvious links here with Fritz Lang's *Clash by Night*: in both films, the heroine is played by Barbara Stanwyck and she returns to her small town after a ten-year absence. (In Lang's film, too, the heroine's appetites were too great to be accommodated in small-town society.) But Mae returns home and then marries: in her own words, marriage becomes a refuge from 'the blizzards and the floods'. By contrast, Naomi has a family to return to – the emotional (and ideological) pull is far greater.

Nevertheless, Naomi returns home with a fair degree of caution. She puts up at the hotel (it's Lily who moves her into the house) and intends merely to stay long enough to visit the family and see the play. But the experience of the evening changes this: it is not just that she breathes life back into the home, but that the family – with the exception of Joyce – are so responsive. With her transformation of the family continuing throughout the film's three-day period, it is Naomi's effect on them all, including Joyce, which is the strongest argument for her staying at the end: with her, the family offers a challenge to the stuffiness of the small town; without her, life would return to its former state. The film is still pessimistic in that motherhood and a career are seen as mutually exclusive: only when her career is virtually exhausted is Naomi able to return to the role of mother. But it is equally highly radical in its notions of what motherhood may entail, as shown in particular in Naomi's effect on Joyce.

A standard pattern of 'fifties melodramas dealing with a 'homecoming' is that the character who returns home is faced with a choice of partners: one sexual, one domesticated – among the films with this structure are *Ruby Gentry* (1952), *Clash by Night*, *Human Desire* (1954) and *Some Came Running* (1959). The choice is presumably meant to reflect the 'split' in the character between the opposing pulls of wandering and settling. As spokesperson for the town, Clem assumes (I think) that Naomi's return to Riverdale will naturally take in Dutch, and in this he is half right. Naomi's excursions out of the house on the second and third days both take her to Dutch, and, on the first occasion, she waits by the lake, knowing he will turn up. She needs to see him to find out how she still feels about him, and, for all that she says 'We can't go back,' she is fully aware of his reawakened desire for her and she knows the past consequences of that.

But, by the afternoon of the third day, she has slept with Henry, and it is this that decides her to stay. Accordingly, Dutch is now seen as an obstacle to her reintegration into the community, and she decides to go and confront him. Each of the homecoming films builds to a scene of violence, in which the sexual figure in the main triangle (three of the

films possess two sexual triangles) is either killed or violently attacked. But only in *All I Desire* is the character who returns home the instigator of the violence. On the one hand, the film allows Naomi to take control of her own destiny; on the other, it refuses to make things easy for her. However, in the other films – except *Ruby Gentry*, which has a tragic ending – the violent climax smooths the way for the reintegration of the homecoming figure into the community, whereas *All I Desire* ends with the town's hostility towards Naomi unresolved.

Just as the house is symbolically divided into different zones, so (as O'Shaughnessy notes) there is a significant inside/outside structure to the film. Naomi returns to the home an outsider. One of the most powerful sequences occurs on her arrival,

when she looks in at the family at their evening meal, seeing an idealised representation – framed, like a picture – of the world from which she has excluded herself. But, however problematically, the family do accept her into their world for a few days. Later that night, her place outside the house looking in is assumed by Dutch, who waits for her to leave and return to her hotel.

The film poses the question: can Naomi change from an outsider to an insider and re-enter the home other than temporarily? The key would seem to be a significant symbol here. Naomi takes it out of its place of concealment (a hanging pot plant) when she first returns home and when she is about to leave at the end. But, on each occasion, she then quickly returns it and hides from a person who is at that moment returning to the house: Ted at the beginning, Henry at the end. Then, at the very end, Henry takes the key and gives it to Naomi.

This clarifies the meaning of the key in the dominant discourse: it was waiting for her and there is no longer any need for it to hang outside. Equally, we can see that symbolically the key is Henry's phallus, waiting, unused, for Naomi's return (compare Paul's rusting gun in *Desire Me*). But the repeated actions at these two critical moments – Naomi's crossing the threshold – are more difficult to decode. The Dutch-Ted relationship provides an intriguing line of speculation. If Dutch is Ted's father, then Ted, rather than anyone else, represents the deepest level of obstruction to Naomi's harmonious re-entry into the family: so deep that the film cannot consciously acknowledge it. But, unconsciously, the linkage between these two moments could be seen to testify to the blockage. Both Ted at the beginning and Henry at the end have come from a scene with Dutch. Ted's arrival at the moment Naomi first takes the key thus seems like a symbolic statement of the blockage that inhibits Naomi's return. In contrast, the later scene seems like the final stage in the disavowal of Dutch: as if the film is saying that Henry now has the power to take over the roles of father to Ted and of lover as well as husband to Naomi. That Naomi hides in both cases links her visually with Dutch, who hides from the departing guests as he waits outside the house for Naomi. At the end, however, Henry is able to bring Naomi out of hiding (to detach her from this link with Dutch), declare his faith in her

and give her the key hitherto denied her. When they enter the house, they go immediately upstairs.

The novel

Responding to Sirk's declared preference for the title of the novel, *Stopover*, and its ending – Naomi leaves – critics sometimes echo these points about it. To my knowledge, however, no-one has actually discussed the novel in relation to the film. In fact, Carol Brink's novel provides only the basic outline of the story: in detail, film and novel are completely different. None of the features that I find extraordinary in the film is to be found in the novel. Extrovert and self-centred, Naomi in the novel returns home, crashes around in the life of her family for a few days, fails for the second time to persuade Dutch to leave with her (as had been her plan ten years before) and decides she'll go out with a bang by doing a strip-tease-cum-dance at the graduation ceremony. Far from encouraging Joyce to be less repressed, Naomi happily exploits her own effect on Russ – a more frivolous, volatile figure than in Richard Long's excellent characterisation – to turn him away from Joyce. It is Russ alone whom she takes to the lakeside haunt, and it is Russ who is shot – by a jealous Dutch. And Naomi has no intention of taking Lily with her – for which she has any number of rationalisations – although it is not until Lily reacts to the vulgarity of the dance that Naomi succeeds in putting her off an acting career. Whilst Joyce passes into the more worthy hands of her college professor, Lily inherits the

wounded Russ, who sees in her something of the vitality of her mother. In the meantime, Ted realises the truth about the affair between Dutch and his mother and asks Dutch if he is his father. He isn't, of course: Ted is older than Lily here and the affair began after Lily was born.

There is no Colonel Underwood in the novel: Henry is so dull that he doesn't need a Superego figure. The novel's most interesting male figure is Seth, Henry's younger brother, and, although his part is cut for the film, his role as Naomi's sympathetic ally is given to Lena, who is a minor, negative figure in the novel.

The narrative thrust of the novel is towards demonstrating the complete incompatibility of Naomi and the family. In the novel, the only logical ending is indeed that Naomi should leave. The film is considerably more complex and interesting. It is also a brilliant piece of adaptation. Gina Kaus is credited with adaptation, James Gunn and Robert Blees with the script – all three have one or two other interesting titles in their credits, but nothing of the quality of *All I Desire*.

Sirk and authorship

Perhaps to a greater extent than any other Sirk movie, *All I Desire* contains a concentration of his themes and motifs. I have already mentioned the representative quality of the *mise-en-scène*: in this respect, the BFI slide set and O'Shaughnessy's notes are highly recommended. There is the same representative quality to the film's themes: it relates back to the comedies as well as forward to the darker melodramas that followed. Some of the thematic connections with other films are as follows:

1) From *Take Me to Town*, the notion of the scarlet woman (show-girl/actress) entering and shocking the prudish small-town society, but having such a beneficial effect on a family that she is asked to and chooses to stay. Indeed, the two films are essentially the comedy version and the melodrama version of the same structure.

2) From *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?* (1951), the notion of an 'outsider' moving in to stay with a small-town middle-class family, shaking them up to see life differently. The thrust of the earlier movie is anti-money (the windfall 'corrupts' the family) but conservative (they were happier as they were); the thrust of *All I Desire* is radical. Each film forces key members of the family to redefine how they see themselves in relation to the small-town society; each outsider, linked to the family through a past association (never revealed to them in *Has Anybody Seen My Gal?*), scandalises small-town society.

3) In common with *There's Always Tomorrow*, an analysis of the family: mainly negative in the later movie, much more balanced in *All I Desire*. The films have very similar character relationships (only Dutch is without an equivalent figure in *There's Always Tomorrow*), and Basinger's article discusses some of the many structural connections. (A link she does not mention is the strong similarity between the roles of Russ as Joyce's fiancé and Ann as Vinny's girl-friend. Each is the most balanced and sensible member of the younger generation.)

4) In common with the majority of Sirk films from the German movies (especially *Zu neuen Ufern*, 1937, and *La Habanera*) on: the heroine's movement from a charismatic, dangerous, usually sexual man to a safe, domesticated one. *All That Heaven Allows* is one of the few major works not to possess this structure, although I feel that it is because the structure is so central to Sirk that he disables (and so domesticates) Ron for the ending.

5) In common with *All That Heaven Allows*, a critique of small-town bourgeois society. Both films introduce the small town with the same establishing shot from the church steeple, a link which is strengthened in that in both cases it is the same backlot town set.

6) In common with some of the strongest melodramas – *There's Always Tomorrow*, *Written on the Wind* (1956), *The Tarnished Angels* (1957), *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1957) – the sense of characters caught in a circular structure, forever repeating patterns of behaviour, or being returned to the point from which they started. In the more pessimistic works, the only way out is death. In *All I Desire*, the film holds out the possibility that the pattern can be broken by a changed set of attitudes.

7) In common with *Written on the Wind*, an accidental shooting behind which, at some level, lies a disputed conception and the issue of paternity. (It's the actual father, who, in both instances, is shot.) The lake in *All I Desire* and the river in *Written on the Wind* may also be partially aligned in their overtones: the site of erotic liberation in the former and childhood innocence in the latter. Dutch is shot at the lakeside; as Kyle is shot, he regresses, seeking to return to the river.

8) An anticipation of some of the major features of *Imitation of Life*. Lena is a less developed version of Annie in the later movie: a servant who acts as a sympathetic, caring mother-figure in the absence of the heroine on the stage. (The radical transformation of Lena's role from the novel brings her close to the later characterisation of Annie.) Joyce and Lily loosely anticipate Susie and Sarah-Jane. Naomi, however, is a far more sensitive and intelligent heroine than Lora: despite her neglect over the years, she is able to understand and help Joyce where Lora conspicuously fails to understand and help Susie.

This concentration of Sirkian themes is typical of the extraordinary density of *All I Desire*. It is a film in which everything locks together, so that each moment could be explored backwards and forwards for its resonances elsewhere in the narrative. In addition, it is packed with incident: so much happens, so quickly, and above all with such concision that it is extremely compelling to watch. At 79 minutes, virtually a B-movie, *All I Desire* is one of the great Hollywood films of the decade: a melodrama of exceptional insight and intelligence.

Michael Walker

ALL THAT HEAVEN ALLOWED

Another Look at Sirkian Irony

Like Thomas Mann, his contemporary for a while in American exile, Douglas Sirk has been predominantly discussed as an ironist. But unlike Mann, Bertolt Brecht and other German literary exiles, Sirk had come to terms with the constraints of mass popular culture in the Hollywood film industry. Increased critical awareness of the films he made in Germany up to 1937 – working within, but not aligned with growing constraints – has strengthened the disposition, initiated by auteurists, to discover in his American films the double vision of ironic art. This tendency seemed further validated by Sirk's retrospective statements of intent, for instance, comparing his American strategies with Euripides's two levels of meaning for his Athenian audiences (Jon Halliday, *Sirk on Sirk*, Secker & Warburg, 1971, p.119).

The ironic mode, presupposing privileged knowledge and attendant detachment, has two sub-types. In the first, a character in the diegesis possesses knowledge denied to others. In the second, the audience alone possesses it. It is the second type which defines the Sirkian world, in which there are few controlling, comprehending characters, but many victims. Here ironic meaning can be offered to the audience only through effects generated, either overtly or covertly, in the text. These effects may or may not be taken up by the audience. Wayne C. Booth's *A Rhetoric of Irony* (University of Chicago Press, 1974, p.220) analyses cogently, though in much less ideologically aware terms than much recent film criticism, reasons for the reader's or spectator's failure to understand the workings of irony. With certain kinds of irony, it is possible that the whole audience might take up the subtext – Jonathan Swift's *A Modest Proposal* is Booth's example of overt irony, which it is difficult to imagine any reader not grasping (Booth, p.106). Sirk's irony, however, has rightly been thought of as mostly covert and ambiguous. The original case for Sirk postulated a 1950s majority audience understanding the surface meanings of the films, while a minority audience responded to less obvious ones, which were embodied in a series of textual effects relayed through the combination of melodrama and highly, even hysterically, wrought *mise-en-scène*: effects readable through the audience's picking up of the concatenation of repeated effects, excess, over-statement, incongruity, etc. – devices that have become familiar to later audiences.

This, then, is the basic case for Sirkian irony, developed through auteurism, and then through neo-Marxist criticism in the early 1970s, which emphasised the subtext's critique of American bourgeois ideology.

In studies including the most recent major publication on melodrama and the woman's picture, *Home Is Where the Heart Is: Studies in Melodrama and the Woman's Film* (edited and with a preface by Christine Gledhill, British Film Institute, 1987), this view comes under attack in the following ways: i) the emphasis on authorial coherence is disputed, and instead the inconsistencies and contradictions of the genre itself are highlighted, with an assertion that incoherence (the neurotic symptom erupting unconsciously in the text) is of more positive value than coherence, which is associated with bourgeois closure; ii) in the view of some neo-Marxist critics, even this 'neuralgic' incoherence is dismissed as a mystification of real social relations (e.g. by Chuck Kleinhans, 'Notes on Melodrama and the Family under Capitalism', *Film Reader 3*, 1978); iii) in a feminist view, the films and critics have been seen as having a 'misogynist edge', in that the colluding naive audience is presumed to be female, and the superior ironic one male (as in Tania Modleski's remarks in *The Women Who Knew Too Much: Hitchcock and Feminist Theory*, Methuen, 1988; on Sirk as a male director working in a female genre: 'Sirk immerses himself in the feminine element . . . in order to master and control it').

View ii) can be dismissed for its naive belief in the privileged position of realism as an antidote to the mystifications of less literal modes. (The premise of Expressionism, for instance, is that realism does not go deep enough.)

View i) is a reminder of the ways in which auteurism's more naive mechanisms were undermined by structuralist and deconstructionist reconsiderations. Yet, taken to an extreme, such arguments fetishise the unconscious and the incoherent as much as unrestricted auteurism fetishised conscious design and coherence. A reasonable theory of art has to accommodate the duality of unconscious

Still: Written on the Wind – *the female protagonists, Lucy (Lauren Bacall) and Marylee (Dorothy Malone).*

forces and conscious workings. The limitations in even radical practice of the 'death of the author' approach are nowhere better exposed than through the way certain exemplary authors (Bertolt Brecht, Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub) are contradictorily allowed full consciousness to a degree hardly equalled in the excesses of auteurism. Our claim is that Sirk's highly self-conscious films are often best explained by conscious ironic intent. An illustration: Christine Gledhill suggests that unconscious patriarchal designs in *Imitation of Life* turn an apparently woman-centred film into one built around 'a problem of the absent husband and father' (Gledhill, p.12). There may be cases where Sirk's films collude with patriarchal ideology, but it is hard to see this as one of them, for not only are the various quasi-patriarchs unappealing, but the pseudo-hero (John Gavin) is both unprepossessing and marginalised. If the question is why bother to assert a conscious design, the answer is that not to claim it (with all reasonable qualification) for Sirk denies the historical actuality of a film-maker's critique of accepted norms.

Some of the most useful writing in Gledhill's collection (and in Mary Ann Doane's *The Desire to Desire: The Woman's Film of the 1940s*, Macmillan, 1987) addresses the recently much-debated question of gender difference in audience response. Such writing has sharpened awareness of the female spectator's dilemmas given the patriarchal emphasis of much popular cinema, but the gains have been made at the expense of simplifying the male viewer's response and ignoring the experiences of male and female viewers who identify themselves with the protagonist, regardless of sexual difference. (Do we really believe that all male viewers refuse the identification with Cary/Jane Wyman that is insisted on by *All that Heaven Allows?*) Such theorising is revealing where the necessity of female resistance can be plausibly postulated, but runs into difficulties with films that cannot reasonably be said to be dominantly patriarchal. It is difficult to see how one could fail to acknowledge Sirk's sensitivity to female questions, so that to read the films' 'progressive' aspects as simply contradictions, or the unintended victory of the resistance implied in 'women's circuit' material, distorts as much as the desire to see them as patriarchal – which is shown again by Gledhill in her claim that the price of the critique of white values in *Imitation of Life* is turning Lora (Lana Turner) into a bad mother (Gledhill, p.12). This ignores the complexity of the view of motherhood and child-parent relations in a film where mothering by the good mother, Annie (Juanita Moore), turns out even more disastrously.

Another simplification of the 'Sirkian system' is implicit in any model of response to melodrama which hinges on an either/or (tears/intellect) division, whether or not the female spectator is identified

with the tears and the male with the intellect. The complex nature of audience responses to melodrama and the woman's picture demands a model in which empathy and detachment exist in a mutually qualifying relationship, whatever secondary differences and similarities between genders are identified in their responses. Thus, when the dying Annie gives Lora the gift for Susie's bridal outfit and says, 'The day we are married and the day we die, these are the great events of life,' is the division in response between genders really illuminating? Rather, the response of both female and male spectators (irrespective of whether, as the studios believed, women are actually drawn more to such films) might be termed critical pathos, empathy qualified but not destroyed by critical understanding. (This is largely the position formulated by Thomas Elsaesser in his ground-breaking article, 'Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama', 1972, reprinted in Gledhill and agreed with by her when she notes: 'Pathos, unlike pity, is a cognitive as well as an affective construct,' p.30).

Obviously there is a spectrum of possible responses to this moment, wholly emotive (too naive?), wholly critical (too unsympathetic?), or mixing both – we empathise with Annie's transparently felt emotion (especially in a context where the feelings of most of the other characters are so shallow), her search for ritual and meaning, her desire for the kind of 'sacredness' and 'significance' of which Peter Brooks talks in his much quoted *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, James, Melodrama and the Mode of Excess* (Vintage, 1976,). On the other hand, the more distancing, analytical mechanisms of the film provide the space and the pressure, given the total failure of Annie's own marriage, not only for astonishment at her capacity for uttering such a remark, but also for reflection on its inherent contradictions. But only an extreme spectator would lose empathy for Annie who, through the specific circumstances of her situation (Black, female, menial) activates a complex of longings and aspirations shared by many (most?) viewers, even the allegedly 'insignificant' male spectator of the female-inflected genre.

The aspects of Annie's death scene that also play upon the audience's feelings of fatality, pessimism and masochism raise one last important issue. As Brooks argues in *The Melodramatic Imagination*, melodrama in the nineteenth century provided a way of dealing with various taboo areas, especially those areas of experience repressed by post-Enlightenment conceptions of order. This might suggest that as well as looking at how Hollywood melodrama exposes the contradictions in the taboo areas of bourgeois ideology (the family, female sexuality, etc.), we should also investigate another area that seems taboo for the 'progressive' critic – melodrama's entropic play with Thanatos, its pessimism that things are 'All that Heaven Allows', 'Written on the Wind' or an 'Imitation of Life'.

Stills: overt ironies in Written on the Wind *– the degradation of Kyle (Robert Stack) through alcohol; Marylee and the humiliations of desire. Robert J. Wilke as the bartender, John Larch as the pick-up.*

Sirk, the paradigmatic director of melodrama as social criticism is also its paradigmatic pessimist. According to Wayne C. Booth's categories, Sirk's ironies often move from 'local', 'stable', 'finite' ones to 'unstable', 'infinite' ones, which ultimately offer the viewer no clear perspective (Booth, p.240).

To explore this aspect of Sirk, we shall concentrate on two films, *Written on the Wind* and *All that Heaven Allows*.

Written on the Wind

The two films deploy situational irony in rather different ways. In *All that Heaven Allows*, what Booth calls 'covert' irony is frequent, while in *Written on the Wind*, where the pathos is generated by greater emotional turbulence, degradation, excess and violence, 'overt' irony predominates. In considering two aspects of *Written on the Wind*, the conceptualisation of Mitch's father, Hoak Wayne (Harry Shannon), and Marylee's (Dorothy Malone's) first visit to the river, we shall seek to show typical processes of the film's irony, working over and above the capacities for self-knowledge, desire and action of uncomprehending characters trapped in the conflicting strategies of dominant ideology and social critique.

Hoak Wayne

Much is made by both Jasper (Robert Keith) and Kyle (Robert Stack) of Hoak Wayne's heroic stature. If they are to be believed, he is a throwback to pioneering days, a kind of mid-'fifties Daniel Boone. Yet the film places him through appearance and dialogue as a well-intentioned but somewhat nondescript, even reluctant, country-dweller. This discrepancy between reputation and actual presence creates an inconsistency that cannot simply be explained as incompetent casting.

Restricted to two brief appearances – something which in itself underlines an ambivalence towards a character so highly esteemed by the film's other patriarch, Jasper Hadley – Hoak is nevertheless vital to the film's patterns of subversion. He parallels Jasper not only functionally – Mitch (Rock Hudson) is a son for both patriarchs – but physically as well. Both men are considered powerful (Jasper the tycoon, Hoak 'the great white hunter'), yet both are played by actors whose physical appearance hardly suggests authority – one looks slight and wasted, the other unimpressive. Hoak's dishevelled look is matched by a morosely exhausted expression and a droning monotone of a voice which compound the aura of rather shabby banality surrounding him. He reveals embarrassing ignorance over the whereabouts of Iran, Mitch's proposed destination and solution to his emotional problems. 'Africa . . . Asia. Asia, I guess,' he mumbles, dredging his memory for some dimly recalled piece of elementary knowledge. His colourless performance

matches the subdued tones of the *mise-en-scène* associated with him in his two appearances; this visual dullness in the first scene is set off by the luxurious pinks of Lucy's (Lauren Bacall's) bedroom in the preceding scene and, in the scene following it, the profusion of vivid colour both in Marylee's outfit and in the surrounding flora in her daydream by the river. By contrast, Hoak's environment is notable for its toning down of colour. Only the autumn browns on the carefully placed bushes by the porch steps are conspicuous, and these are readable as signs of the approaching demise of Hoak and of the values associated with him. These values, connected with Thoreauesque ideals of the self-sufficient natural life, are so sparsely and negatively embodied (they are much more emotively stated in *All that Heaven Allows*) that they provide no real alternative to the materialistic squalor of the declining Hadleys.

The issues raised by Hoak's function as a character all suggest fairly overt irony. Without self-awareness and lacking insight and superior knowledge about the other characters, Hoak (though introduced in such a way as to identify him with wisdom) is as far removed from an *eiron* (the self-aware, illusion-free stock type of classical Greek drama) as it is possible to be. He himself confesses to having made the wrong decision in remaining a backwoodsman, speaking of his regret at not having escaped back into civilisation. Only by sending his own son, Mitch, to the Hadleys has he found some consolation for his disappointments. But the *pièce de resistance* of irony (a 'covert' detail introduced without emphasis) is that no self-respecting latter-day Daniel Boone would attach a telescopic lens to his rifle, the rifle which links him in a further patriarchal relation to Kyle and Jasper, both of whom reach for guns at moments of crisis. In their ambivalence towards the natural life and the subversion of solid images of patriarchy, Hoak and Jasper are mirror images of each other, both gesturing at Thoreauesque ideals (Hoak remaining for Jasper the symbol of a nobler life), both wasted and morally exhausted, their power of the phallus displaced on to the gun and the oil derrick, the ironic icons (the latter definitely overt) of the triumph of nurture over nature.

Like father, like son: Mitch appears in various costumes, sometimes to suggest an affinity with nature, as during his first visit to his father when the two are dressed almost identically, or when he visits Jasper in geologist's gear. But he is predominantly dressed in business suits, and these mark his innate preferences for the anti-pastoral ideals of consumerist, industrialised living.

The nostalgic evocation of the values of the wilderness, as seen through their depiction in Hoak and indeed Mitch, seem too compromised and distant, too unreal, to offer an alternative to the corruptions of the Hadley world.

Marylee

In Hoak and Mitch, the option of a return to nature is made to seem an illusion, a dream of returning to the national childhood, parallelling the constant regressions obsessively enacted by Kyle Hadley and his sister.

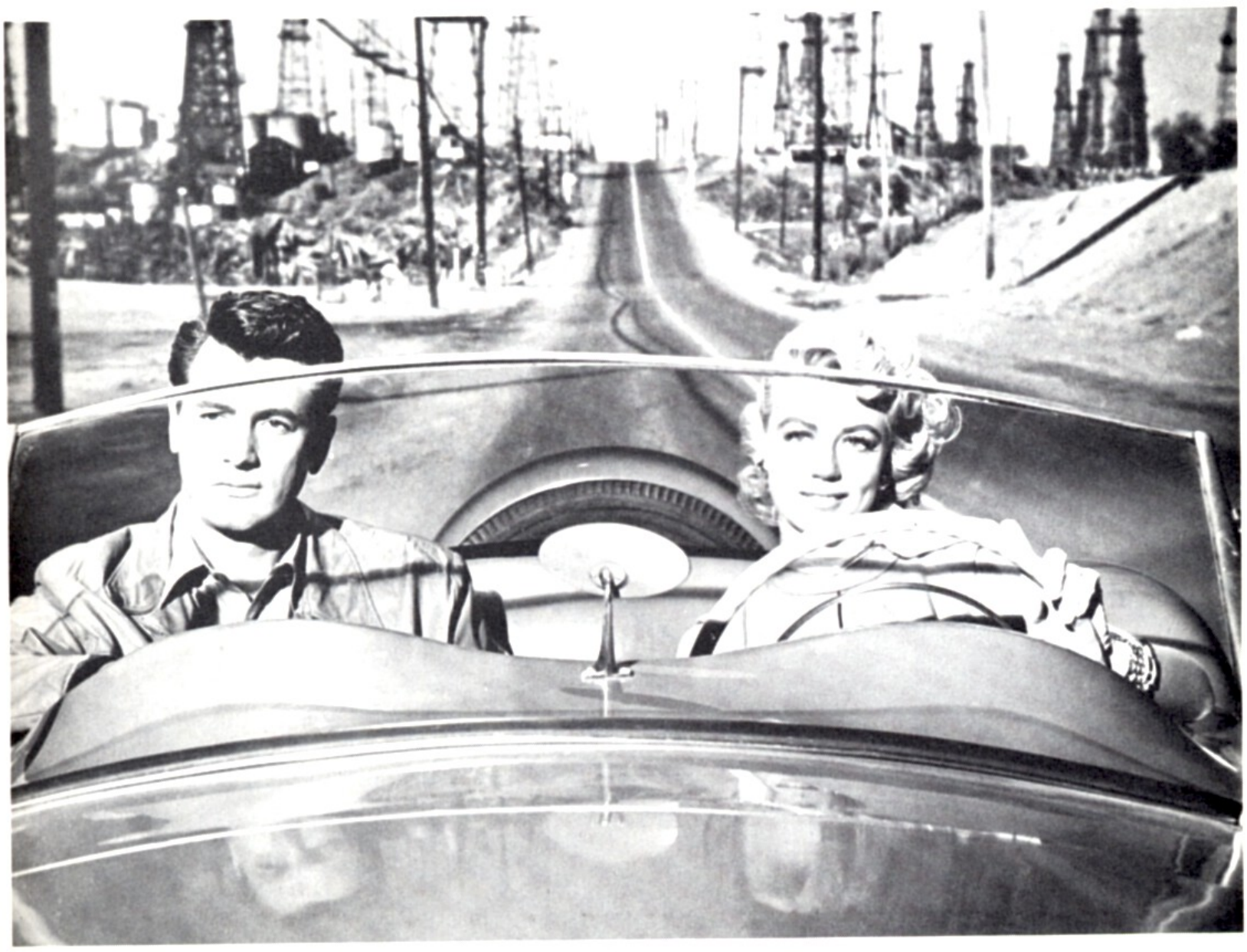
Marylee is perhaps the most excessive figure in an excessive film. This excess demands analysis, for she is more than an example of the alienating male processes of fetishisation and punishment. An image wholly appealing to voyeurism and fetishism would fail to articulate with such consistent violence the realities of female frustrations turned to perversity within the bounds of her inflexibly patriarchal family.

The seeming cause of her desperate situation is Mitch's refusal to treat her as anything other than a sister, so that, as surrogates for him, she picks up rough trade at petrol stations and roadside bars. In doing this, she frenziedly acts out her disdain for the dynasty of capitalists into which she has been born. Her obsession with Mitch – Heathcliff to her Cathy in one of many parallels the film sets up with *Wuthering Heights* – is with a figure associated in her childhood memories with the primitive virtues of pastoral America, but hardly now wholeheartedly embodying them. But a second and underlying cause is suggested in Marylee's confinement to a wholly dependent role until the deaths of her brother and father accidentally release her, an imprisonment for which she takes her revenge by exercising the only powers she possesses – sexual powers – to the extent of degradation. And however unhinged her behaviour, the reactions of the males in the clan (including Mitch) in forcefully denying her the objects of her desire – the rough trade epitomised by the football player pump attendant and the roadhouse Romeo – must strike all but the most irredeemably patriarchal viewers as excessive.

In the remarkable scene of her solitude by the river, as she recalls images from the past, Dorothy Malone's over-the-top erotic gestures – darting tongue, tumescent breathing, thrusting chest, eyes alternately widening and narrowing with passion – might seem abstracted, grotesque examples of over-acting. But in the scene's context of extreme sentiment and artifice, these histrionics become part of a structure of ironies, mingling in an uneasily suggestive way the sexual with the infantile as she writhes over pre-adolescent memories, a combination reformulated at the end of the scene as the camera closes in on the treetrunk with its carving of an initialled heart.

The symbolic function of the river further defines Marylee's situation. Representing for both her and Kyle an idealised, uncorrupted past, it becomes the sole force in their minds that can dampen the inflamed torments characteristic of the degenerate, hellish world of the Hadleys ('To hell with the Hadleys!'). It is yet another version of the nostalgia for a pastoral solution to present confusions and another of Sirk's formulations of the larger past-rural/present-urban oppositions in American culture

Stills: Written on the Wind. *Marylee – excess and a frustrated obsession with Mitch (Rock Hudson).*



Stills: All that Heaven Allows – *the softer rhetoric of the 'woman's picture'. Cary (Jane Wyman) and Ron (Rock Hudson). Right: with Cary's children.*

that are so characteristic of melodrama. But vital though the meanings of Thoreau are across Sirk's American output, here they appear to mean little more for these characters than a sentimentalised regression.

Kyle repossesses the river through alcohol and by employing Mitch as a kind of minder, a dependency that further stresses the mother's absence in the Hadley home; Marylee literally returns to the river itself, in a later scene forcing Mitch to accompany her. In this Eden, she begins by recapturing her childhood, dressed in a highly tailored version of a Huckleberry Finn outfit, barefoot, skimming a pebble over the water. But what starts as a release from present frustrations turns to melancholy as the voices of childhood invade her consciousness and the soundtrack, and the initially happily greeted fantasy of the childhood Mitch and his pledge of love gives way to the realisation of the gap between childhood memory and Mitch's role as an inversion of the cruel lady of courtly love, the object of her unrequited desire. Mitch, for Rainer Werner Fassbinder 'the most pig-headed bastard in the world' ('Six Films by Douglas Sirk' in *Douglas Sirk* edited by Jon Halliday and Laura Mulvey, British Film Institute 1972, p.99), rejects Marylee in unconscious revulsion at her frank sexuality, and it is also in keeping that he should instead choose Lucy (Lauren Bacall here showing none of the spirited independence of her Hawksian roles), a cool decorous bourgeoise of whom the son of the backwoodsman can say, with unconscious significance, 'we are of a kind' – a woman whose designs the film's peremptory gestures towards romantic love hardly manage to conceal as she is literally bought by Kyle early in the narrative.

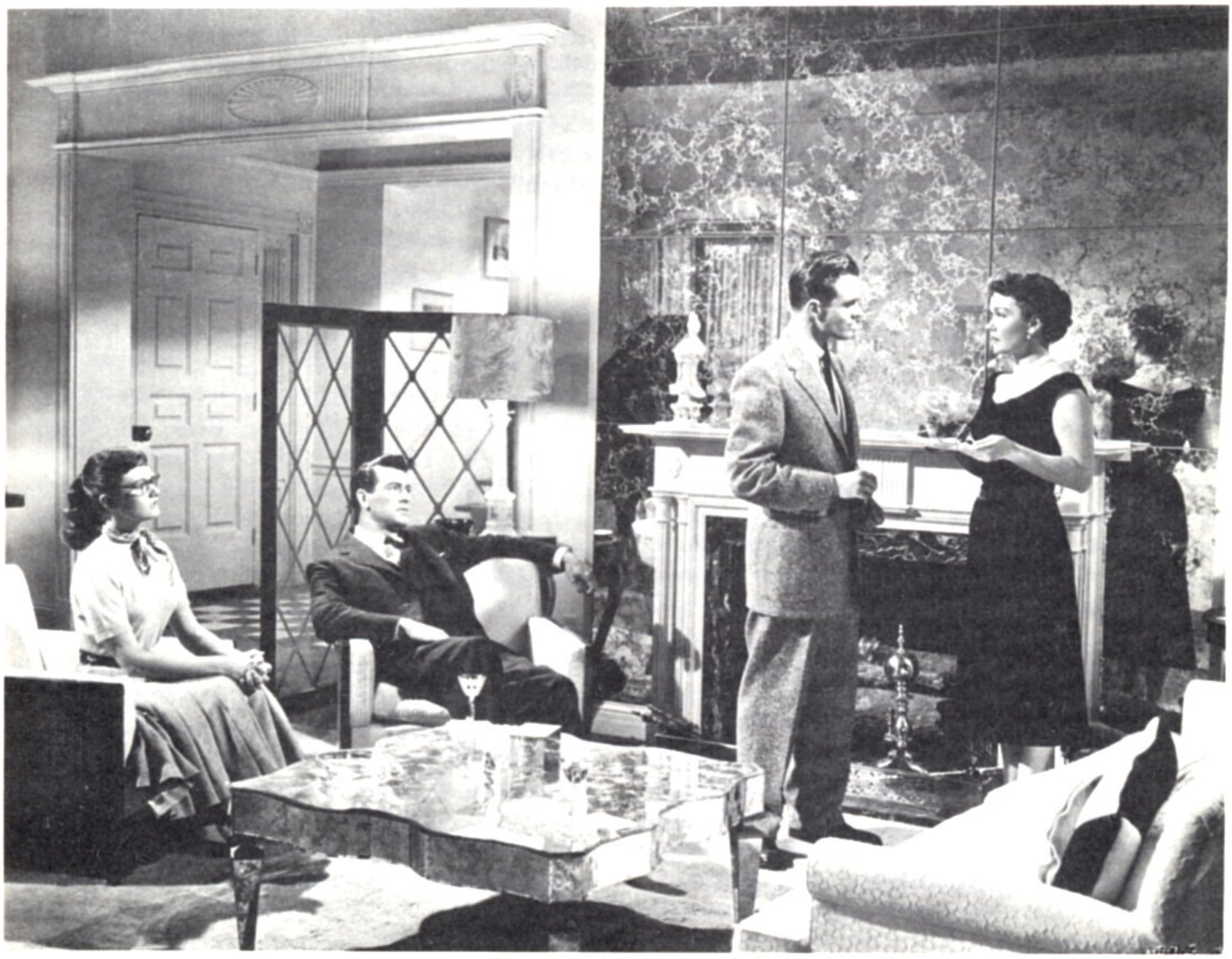
As Marylee recalls drawing the attention of Kyle and Mitch, the boyhood rivals, through the cosmetic

smearing of mulberry juice on her lips, the scene offers a psychological clue to her addiction to the reds and pinks of her adult life (her car, dresses, etc.). The sentimental music, over-dramatic gestures and innocently recalled events combine as before to superimpose clashingly the infantile and the sexual in a grotesque inflection of melodramatic pathos. Marylee is at once almost dementedly perverse and the character most wholly, if distortedly, alive and rebellious in her brash vulgarity and colourful sensuousness. At the end of the film, her release comes too late. Now custodian of the black river of Hades – the Hadley oil, signified by the derrick earlier associated with Jasper – rather than the river of her childhood, she inherits the phallus only in the form of capitalist power, her loss of its sexual force dramatised in the suggestive way she fingers it.

Here, as elsewhere in *Written on the Wind*, irony – though given many levels – is overt, relayed through a wild rhetoric of hyperbole, exaggeration and angst. It is not deployed here in contradiction to the undisputed surface concerns of a melodrama that addresses questions about individual and social chaos, but locates those concerns more deeply, both socially and psychologically. Only in the case of the seemingly approved couple, Lucy and Mitch, does irony work to undermine apparently positive elements, the romantic couple associated with the triumph of bourgeois rationalisation over the feudalistic anarchy of the older style of capitalism associated with the Hadley world.

All that Heaven Allows

To move to *All that Heaven Allows* is to pass from one extreme of melodrama to the other. *All that Heaven Allows* inhabits the sensitised world of the 'woman's picture' with the mature heroine's quest for love, her ambivalence between family and lover, and the concomitant structure of love resisted/ accepted/blocked/sometimes fulfilled/ sometimes lost, with the ideal 'feminised' male of the subgenre ('Rock is a tree', as Fassbinder remarks in Halliday and Mulvey, p.99, a phallic presence feminised by the golden raintree, the Wedgwood piece he mends, and the deer he nurtures). Characteristic of the woman's picture, too, is the general softness of tone, especially in the soundtrack with its hushed voices and versions of Brahms and Liszt. The primary positioning of the viewer seems straightforward: identification with and sympathy for Cary (Jane Wyman) and her desire for romantic love, and for Ron (Rock Hudson), who offers her not only love but a critique of suburban anomie in the Eisenhower era as well. Where irony in *Written on the Wind* seldom emanates from any character's knowledge, here it is Ron's viewpoint (increasingly shared by Cary) which judges the bourgeois victimisers of Stoningham as unknowing victims of repression and ignorance. But perhaps two other more covert ironic subtexts may be uncovered. The first, which has been variously asserted, though hardly argued through, is that a number of situationally ironic strategies (uncomprehended by



Ron and Cary) suggest that the *Liebestraum* is impossible. The second is that the couple's relationship raises issues that might well make for doubts even before the ending.

The Andersons' party

The sequence in which Ron takes Cary to the Andersons' party is particularly marked by two features: overt explication of Ron's values by Alida (Virginia Grey) to Cary (initiated by the unmediated introduction of the copy of *Walden*, from which Cary reads aloud) and the set of pastoral ideals emodied at their party.

Clearly a series of positive/negative comparisons with the Stoningham country club structure the sequence. The welcoming of Cary by Mick and Alida contrasts with the prurient hostility of the socialites. At the party, spontaneity prevails. The guests bring food, and tables are improvised out of planks and trestles. Instead of the soulless dance-band music of the club, a naively happy song is improvised at the piano by Ron, with a folksy accordion accompaniment and spontaneous, unsophisticated dancing. The *mise-en-scène* differs markedly from the claustrophobic country club, and in a repeated trope the large skylight in the roof suggests a close connection with the natural world (a chain of meaning linking up with Ron's living at the greenhouse at the start of the film and his incorporation of a huge window into the rebuilt mill). The partygoers tend to be framed from angles that include this skylight and the night sky, across which leaves blow, as if enacting a fusion of dance and nature.

Yet, this alternative 'club' is itself subjected to certain covert ironies. For all the positive-negative oppositions, an underlying asymmetry is observable, arising from the fact that the guests are individuals who are hardly part of the mainstream of American life. Those highlighted are (from a viewpoint that sees the repressive exclusiveness of Stoningham society) marked pleasantly by their ethnicity (the Hispanic family) or their age and eccentricity (the beekeeper/painter and the Audubon Society spinster). Though there are many positive constructions to be made against the values which marginalise them, their marginality also suggests a pastoral utopia less substantial than at first appears, a dream of the good life hardly touching the concerns of the greater world. Ron's jolly, somewhat uncouth song with its banal lyrics ('Ay-yi-yi/ Every passerby/He looka her up/He looka her down') seems here less the director's error of tone than a signal for scrutiny, its potentially exemplary crossing of ethnic, class and pastoral elements no proof against triteness of form and content.

In the earlier part of the sequence, with its transparent *Walden* symbolism and Alida's exposition of Ron's values, the question (corresponding to one of Paul Willemen's modes of 'distantiation') is whether the overtness and (over-?) transparency of presentation open up a level of ironic meaning – not anti-Thoreau, but sceptical about the reality of the dream in and for modern America. 'To thine own self be true,' Alida's summary of Ron's philosophy, seems too simple, or too undefined, especially if we remember, as Sirk the Shakespearian director surely did, that these are not Hamlet's words but

Stills: All that Heaven Allows. *Overt irony in the unmistakably negative presentation of the country club and the covert irony of the idyllic, pastoral counter-world – merely a dream?*

Polonius's. Connected with this are ambiguities affecting the Andersons. Though Alida is positively presented, Mick, out shooting with Ron, boorishly tells him to make up Cary's mind for her, since this is what women want. It is not simply that a 'fifties remark sounds offensive now; what Mick says is a crass misunderstanding of what Ron believes about Cary making up her own mind. The incident exposes Mick and perhaps suggests that we should see the balance of power (clearly with Mick) in Mick and Alida's relationship critically, also slightly modifying in the process the film's apparent general assumption that knowledge comes from its 'exemplary' males and reaches the females through them.

The ending

Rather than noting different versions of the idea that the ending should not simply be read optimistically, we shall use Laura Mulvey's remarks (most importantly in 'Notes on Sirk and Melodrama', *Movie* 15, reprinted in Gledhill) to structure our thinking. Mulvey's argument is this. Though Doctor Dan suggests to Cary that her 'headaches' will be cured by marriage to Ron, the happy ending is only achieved through 'an ironic *deus ex machina*' (a view implicitly invoking Sirk's own claims about subverted happy endings). Ron's accident 'casts a *hidden* [our italics] shadow over their perfect joyful acceptance of their love.' The fact that the film ends with Ron bedridden and Cary nursing him means that the male and female equality of a primitive economy cannot be established. It also means that the re-sexualisation of the older woman is undermined because 'the object of her desire is reduced to childlike dependence on her ministrations.' The projection of the distanced ideal of *Walden* against modern suburban America places the ideal as a dream into which Cary moves, but which is broken at the end. We would add a further point, that Cary's ambivalence is so great that it is hard finally to believe in her change. How justified is the reading of such ironies?

On the surface, the end is optimistic. Cary's ambivalence is explained both by her misunderstanding of Maryanne's relationship with Ron and by her statement to Alida that she has let others and even herself come between her and her desires. Doctor Dan's wisdom provides the catalyst that propels her towards Ron. In the last frames, the camera tilts gently from Ron's sickbed to take in the deer, associated with caring and love, at the large window that looks out on the pond.

Nevertheless, Mulvey's points raise major questions. Even Doctor Dan's persuasion does not result in a completed action, since Cary's drive to the mill is prompted only by an accidental meeting with Alida. Reaching the mill, she hesitates, then leaves, neither hearing Ron's shout nor witnessing his accidental fall. Later, at home, she starts to telephone him and then stops. Only Alida's news of the accident provokes decisive action. Ron's traumatised state is in realistic terms mitigated by the doctor's confidence in his recovery, so that it is

wrong to think of the situation as a lifelong dependency on Cary – and possible to argue that Cary's maternalism at the end is a kind of equalising parental role towards Ron, who has been both father and mother as well as son to her. Nevertheless, the closing moments are readable metaphorically in the way Mulvey suggests – the more so if one takes into account not only the possibility of ironies playing on the conventions of the woman's picture (e.g. the medical discourse to the woman discussed by Doane; the closures of romantic love), but also the apparently flawless grounds of Cary's and Ron's relationship. The audience's sympathy for Cary does not cancel out the reality that Ron represents for her both a substitute son and a protective but ultimately dominant father possessed of all wisdom, against whom she rebels but to whom she finally submits. Likewise, sympathy for Ron does not preclude more obvious questions about his desire for a woman considerably older than himself. Though Cary's age is softened by Jane Wyman's beauty – the Cary character's age is, of course, hyperbolised in Emmi, Fassbinder's reworking of her in *Fear Eats the Soul*. There, the implicit oedipality on both sides is forcibly displayed – the questions reverberate past the simple answer that Ron's desire is a demand of the generic male fantasy figure, to embrace such questions as what oedipal reassurances, safeties and superiorities (the issue of her fear of younger women is clearly raised with Maryanne) Cary offers him. A further oddity is his choice – with its own possibly regressive logic of fixation with the bourgeois world – of a suburban housewife.

Finally, there is the point about the love being in some sense a 'dream', an assertion that leads to the question of the most complex of the various forms of 'distantiation' that Paul Willemen described in his analysis of the 'Sirkian System' ('Distantiation and Douglas Sirk' in Halliday and Mulvey). Briefly, the argument is that an excess of transparency in the use of symbols may produce an effect of distancing from the overt actions of the film, as here in the doves, Wedgwood, golden raintree, deer, and so on. Again, we would suggest that this 'distantiation' is nothing so crude as parody or purely intellectual response divorced from emotional reactions, but is structured more to produce a response along the following lines: 'would that this beautiful image were simply true, but it tells us more about our psychic longings than about the reality principle'. (At least we feel this to be true of its workings in *All that Heaven Allows*.)

In agreeing that the ending is open to the reading suggested by Mulvey, we should emphasise that while Sirk's viewpoint meets that of his radical analysts at many points, his suspicion of closure is not quite identical with theirs, for though it shares a negative analysis of many aspects of the bourgeois order, it also entails a more radical pessimism which, according to a critic's premises, will be judged either regressive or unassailable.

It will be appreciated that irony and, in particular, Sirkian irony, is a difficult and inconstant mode, its more covert forms readable only by audiences both familiar with generic conventions and to some degree distanced from the most obvious ideological content of the films. Irony itself may be thought a secondary, defensive mode, or a mark of profound art, but as regards Sirk's historical position in Hollywood – Brecht's ironical Heaven – it was All that Heaven Allowed.

Bruce Babington

Peter Evans

Stills: All that Heaven Allows. *Left – prelude to a happy ending? Below – Cary and Alida.*

ALTAIR IV REVISITED

Forbidden Planet (1956)

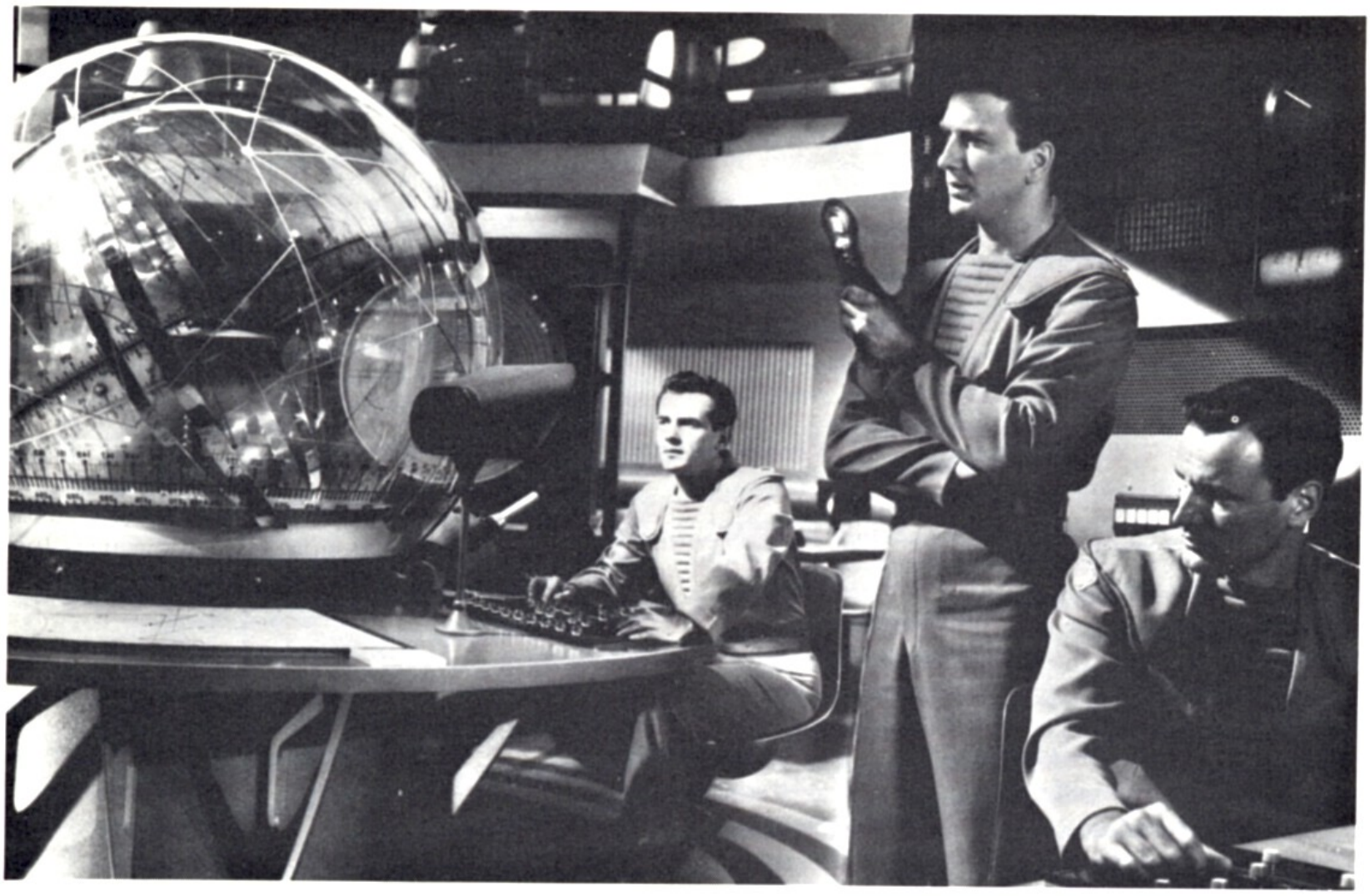
Since *Forbidden Planet* (Fred McLeod Wilcox, 1956) is one of the few films of the 1950s Science Fiction/Horror cycle that can generally be recalled by those with a non-specialist interest in the period, its selection for reconsideration here might seem somewhat perverse. Indeed, of all the films in the cycle, it has undoubtedly received the greatest and most enduring attention from fans and critics alike. The main reasons for this are twofold.

First of all, in its foregrounded use and representation of technological hardware, the film is a showcase for the wonders of applied science, both through its futuristic speculation on the development of utility science – robots, space-ships, free and unlimited power-supplies – and in the advanced special effects commissioned by MGM to herald its typically prestigious entry into the field. This operates as part of a mutually reinforcing process, whereby barely plausible pseudo-scientific ideas draw an implicit authority from the state-of-the-art technology by which they are realised on film. This, in turn, allows judgements on the merits of the technology offered by the text to feed back into our perceptions of present-day developments. This is true of other hardware-orientated films of the period such as *The Day The Earth Stood Still* or *This Island Earth* and is the source of strongly ambivalent currents in contemporary films of a superficially anti-technological nature like *RoboCop*. These films may thus be seen in part as historical responses to the incursion of cheap, advanced technology into home, work and leisure activities, bringing into play the familiar mythic tropes – Icarus, Prometheus, The Sorcerer's Apprentice, etc. – which commonly inform our narrative attempts to negotiate the ambivalence of an activity that delivers to us consumer durables and atomic weapons with apparently equal disinterest. The extreme range of this bounty accounts in large part for the tendency of many of these films to transport us from the mundane to the apocalyptic, balancing Smalltown against Other Worlds, or even the Infinite (as in *The Incredible Shrinking Man*).

Second, and less of a generically specific feature, is the inclusion of Freudian material relating to the Electra Complex. Briefly, this is achieved by reworking the plot of *The Tempest*, transferring its setting from the enchanted island to the planet Altair IV and relocating its sexual theme (examined, for instance, by Leslie Fiedler in *Return of The Vanishing American*, Paladin, 1972, pp.41-48)from its original explanatory framework of magic to the 'scientific' territory of psychoanalysis: the celebrated 'Monsters from the Id'.

Having established these two areas of influence on the film, I propose neither to pursue the notion that the film is simply a reflection of social trends, nor that it is merely an up-to-date and self-conscious remake of *The Tempest* and the 'timeless theme' which it offers us. It has been one of the enduring problems in critical attempts to read the film that the Freudianisms have been accepted more or less at the level at which they are appropriated from the subtext of the original play (*see*, for instance, Margaret Tarrat, 'Monsters From The Id' in *Films and Filming*, December 1970). It should hardly need reiterating that any genuinely interesting attempts to come to grips with the text from a psychoanalytical perspective will not be achieved by accepting the content which the script consciously serves out. Rather, we can read the explicit Freudianisms as part of the film's attempt to inject ideas about science into all areas of the text. The Mind becomes another object of scientific enquiry (and improvement). Along with the special effects and the exclusively-commissioned soundtrack of electronic music by Louis and Bebe Barron, the human drama and monstrous events of the story are similarly organised under the master-signifier of what, in the manner of Roland Barthes, we may conveniently term 'scienceness', that is, the historical capacity of certain imagery to represent the idea of the scientific while possessing little or no foundation within existing scientific knowledge.

Forbidden Planet's actual treatment of science is not, in itself, remarkable. Where it becomes interesting in the light of modern critical practice is in the way that it raises obstacles to the film's conventional movements towards establishing order, in particular establishing the dominant definitions of sexual identity under patriarchy. The film's pro-technological discourse partly vitiates the attempts to recuperate the threatened destabilisation of the family and patriarchal authority that is implied to



Still: Forbidden Planet – *J.J. Adams (Leslie Nielsen) on the bridge of United Planets Cruiser C57-D.* We *have the technology.*

be a corollary of the introduction of technological advances to the domestic sphere. In particular, this registers as a collapse of confidence in the ostensible hero, Adams (Leslie Nielsen), whose conventionally privileged relationship with the viewer is disturbed, both through diegetic failures to resolve questions raised about his insecurity and incompetence and – perhaps more interestingly – the presence of a number of narrative asides which serve to relegate Adams in the estimation of other characters and the audience itself.

It is AD 2200, and United Planets Cruiser C57-D, under Commander J.J. Adams, is headed for the planet Altair IV to investigate the present welfare of a twenty-year-old scientific expedition. The ship is a celebration of the utilitarian image of science, positively awash with flashing lights, shiny surfaces and perspex tubes and bubbles. Moving comfortably and efficiently among the paraphernalia, the crew are a harmonious little team whose relaxed but orderly routine is complemented by their uniform – a mixture of military and baseball styles which serves to promote an idea of leisurely masculinity. As they approach the planet, they are contacted by Dr Morbius (Walter Pidgeon), who tries to dissuade them from landing, saying that they will be in danger. Adams insists on carrying out his orders, and, on arrival, the crew is greeted by Robbie, Morbius's robot servant. It is through the robot, one of the film's chief attractions (and subsequently 'star' of *The Invisible Boy*, 1957, and the inspiration for much contemporary spin-off merchandise), that the film introduces the idea that technological development may constitute a threat to established notions of the sexual economy of the home.

On the one hand Robbie is a 'housewife's dream', as Peter Biskind puts it in *Seeing Is Believing* (Pluto Press, 1984, p.106), 'the latest thing in labour-saving devices, a Waring Blender, Mixmaster and Electrolux vacuum-cleaner all rolled up into one.' Obeisant to a fault, multi-lingual and – an appeal to consumer fantasies of limitless cupidity – able to synthesise, apparently for free, practically anything from lunch to precious stones, Robbie appears initially to be the unambiguously good thing that might develop out of the age of automation. Yet a more ominous note is soon evident regarding the robot's presence in the Morbius household. Morbius's wife is dead, but any household duties she may have performed are more than adequately taken care of by Robbie who cooks, cleans and decorates. Watching the domestic scenes, we are prompted to speculate that Mrs Morbius has disappeared, not from natural causes but natural wastage. This is pointed up by the remark of Doc Ostrow (Warren Stevens) that Robbie 'looks after us like a mother.' This is identified as a source of narrative disorder by permitting an unorthodox and independent education for Morbius's daughter, Altaira (Anne Francis), who is marked as a problem for the crew in general, and Adams in particular.

Rather than busying herself with domestic chores around the home, Altaira has been given an Eve-like grounding in the Forbidden Knowledge of a liberal education – Adams is especially concerned about the extent of her familiarity with biology. Altaira is presented as being outside the codes which conventionally define a woman's role and sexuality

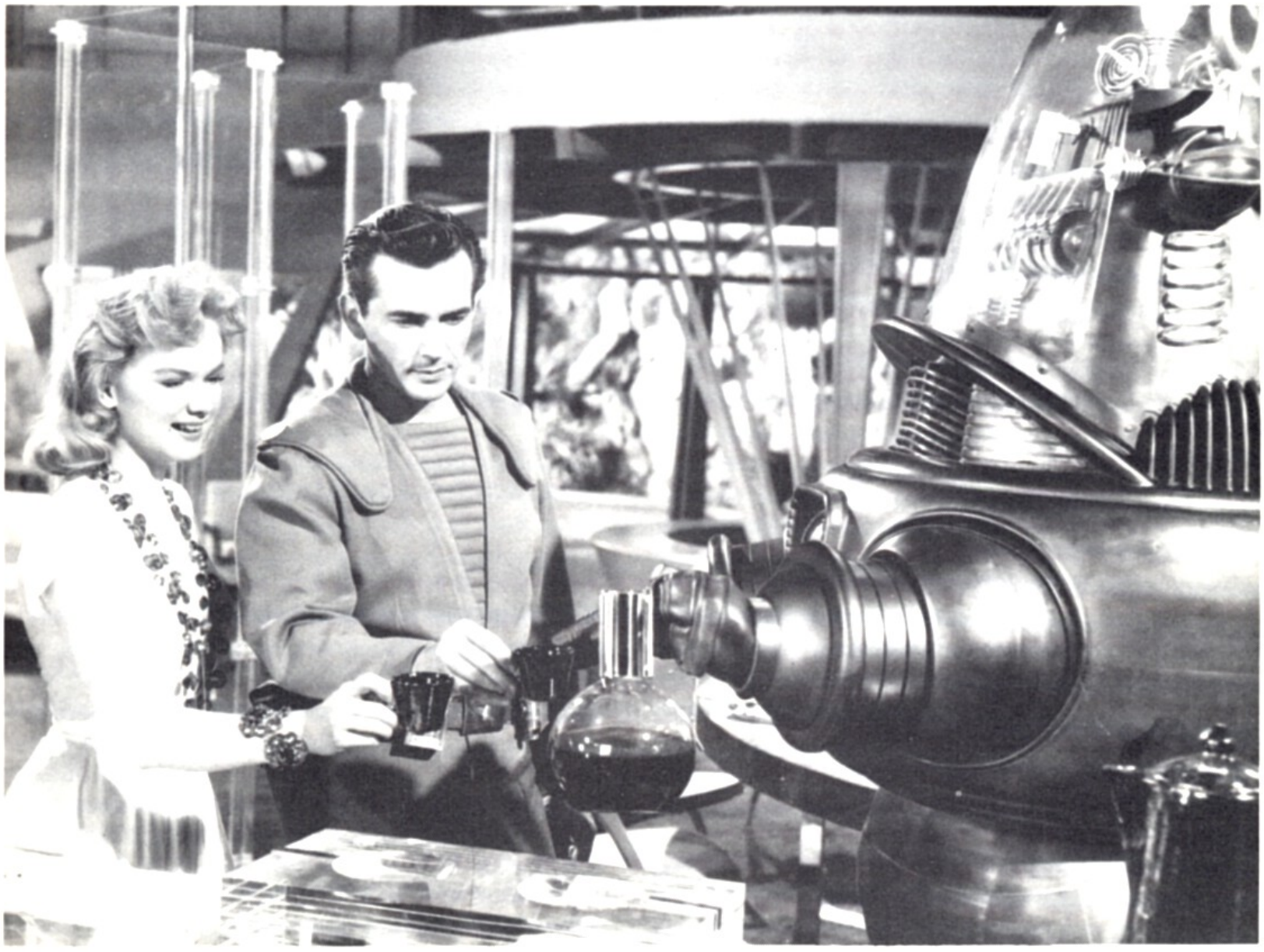
within patriarchy, and her directness about sex is unnerving for the crew: walking straight over to the three assembled officers of the landing party, she says, 'You're lovely, Doctor. Of course, the two end ones are divine.' Apart from making the crew feel awkward by approaching them as sex objects, Altaira is also unwilling to engage in traditional sexual power games: in the same scene, she refuses assistance with her coffee from Lt Farman (Jack Kelly) and then proceeds to make him appear foolish by treating his attempts at chatting her up with a naive literal-mindedness.

A more substantial indication of Altaira's unconventionality is in the disruption of the visual codes relating to looking. In the light of the work that has followed Laura Mulvey's article on visual pleasure ('Visual Pleasure And Narrative Cinema' in *Screen* vol.16, no.3, 1975), it is interesting to note that Altaira's resistance to the customary roles assigned women under patriarchy is partially conveyed by breaking with the typical strategies of looking that encourage the viewer to share a masculine subject position. Her initial exchanges with the officers involve an unusual subjection of the men to a protracted stare, and the camera denies us the opportunity to place Altaira as the subject of any of their particular looks. The film's attempted re-inscription of Altaira within the patriarchal order, effected in relation to Adams in particular, is conducted in large part by the 'correction' of this situation.

On a broad level, it is Adams's function, in a conventional heroic manner as representative of the Law, to establish an acceptable relationship with Altaira in which she is displaced from the 'incorrect' incestuous affections of her father and the casual, extramarital involvements offered by the 'space-wolf' Lt Farman (the death of Farman at the hands of the monsters can be seen as having a narrative function that is aligned less with the workings of Morbius's Id, than with Adams and the SuperEgo). Both technology and Altaira's sexual status are articulated as direct threats to Adams, undermining his authority and masculinity. When the Doc asks if Robbie might not be a dangerous weapon in the wrong hands, Morbius replies with a surprise demonstration. He asks Adams for his sidearm (which the robot belittles as a 'simple blaster') and then, placing it in the robot's hand, tells Robbie to shoot Adams between the eyes. It is an embarrassing and frightening moment for the Commander, placing him in a prolonged situation of impotence in front of his men. The robot cannot, of course, commit the act, being programmed according to the (uncredited) Asimovian laws of Robotics, the first of which forbids a robot to cause harm to a human. The scene's humiliation of Adams, however, unmasks the fear that it has been the primary task of the Asimovian proposition to allay.

Altaira herself is presented to Adams as a problem of order. Her sexual openness is a potential source

Still: Forbidden Planet. *The maternal machine – Robbie pours coffee for Altaira (Anne Francis) and Lt Farman (Jack Kelly).*



Still: Forbidden Planet – *Lt Farman and Altaira embrace; Adams about to pull rank.*

of trouble within his crew of 'eighteen competitively-selected, super-perfect physical specimens with an average age of twenty-four point six who have been locked up in hyperspace for three hundred and seventy-eight days.' The attempt by Adams to restore order is signalled by an increased assertiveness and confidence in his manner with Altaira once she has accepted him as the proper object of her affections, and this shift in their relationship and in Altaira's sexual definition is marked by an alteration in the subject/object relationship between the two characters and between the viewer and the characters.

The relationship is first established as Farman and Altaira make coffee after lunch. Farman is exaggerating the reputation of Adams as a lover in order to make the girl wary of him and thus improve his own position. Both Altaira and the audience are distanced from Adams who is in the background – an object of visual and verbal reference – while the other two are in medium close-up. We share their point-of-view as the impressionable Altaira suddenly believes she actually can see fire in Adams's eyes and appears alarmed: Adams's sexuality is initially defined to her in terms of a visual reference.

In the scene in the woods, Farman takes advantage of Altaira by introducing her to the new experience of kissing. His upbraiding by Adams ends his involvement with Altaira in the film. Adams

then criticises Altaira's appearance, declaring her revealing outfits to be a problem. Once again, Altaira objects to the way he is looking at her, but her resistance to his will is softening and she goes off to persuade the robot to produce her an 'eye-proof' dress. Conforming to Adams's strictures, she begins to curtail her appearance of availability and restrict her sexual openness to the rest of the crew. The change in her attitude and the new authority that Adams carries for her are responsible for a corresponding placing of Adams, at this point, in a more favourable relationship with the audience. The scene starts on Altaira and Farman, but at its close we remain with Adams after the others have departed.

This development is completed in a scene at the Morbius house where Altaira is swimming in the pool of a garden constructed as a primitive and rather garish Eden. She is naked. We enter with Adams, who clearly reveals the perceived threat of Altaira's sexuality by exclaiming 'Oh, murder!', turning his back while she dresses and appearing very nervous when she claims to have a surprise for him. This time, however, the problem is resolved by their eventual embrace. This forming of a couple signals the end of any optical 'sympathy' with Altaira that might privilege her over Adams and is the point at which the film can begin to solve the dilemma of the Id monster and Morbius's incestuous desire.

What might have been a resolutely closed narrative process based on a fully endorsed orthodox resolution of the Oedipal problem is, however, massively compromised by the presence of persistent discourses in favour of science or technology that find a point of coherence in the character of Doc Ostrow – a sensible reply to the anti-intellectualism generated by Morbius's excesses; utility science is strongly endorsed by the film. From the wonders of the ship (it is *we* who have the flying saucers!) to the secrets of the Krell laboratories and the bounty of Robbie, the film promotes a strongly positive view of applied science. The ship's engineer is one of the few peripheral characters given any kind of fleshing out; his diligent wizardry is given the ultimate valedictory at his funeral: 'Fine technician, good shipmate . . . and that's a good epitaph for any man.'

The most extraordinary feature of the film is the way in which it constructs a kind of narrative wink at the audience in order to privilege the values embodied by Ostrow at the expense of those of the hero, Adams. The film goes some way to offering a kind of scale of intelligence and sensitivity which places Ostrow on the middle and Adams and Morius at opposite poles. After the meal at Morbius's house, the officers prepare to leave. Adams is gazing, somewhat dumbly, at Altaira, while Doc Ostrow graciously thanks their host for the meal. Morbius quite pointedly declares that he misses the conversation of 'gentlemen such as yourself, doctor'. The audience shares the comment's barbed exclusion of Adams who suddenly realises he is being mocked and bids an embarrassed and brief farewell.

It is highly unusual for a mainstream film to set up such a completely straightforward and bland hero as Adams, who might in ordinary circumstances pass as unremarkable in his humourless and unsophisticated manner, and then go on to openly mock his intellectual limitations. *Forbidden Planet*, however, is quite relentless in exposing the dullness of its protagonist. When the Krell laboratory is being revealed to Doc and Adams, they are both keen to try out the IQ measuring machine. Adams displays an almost childlike enthusiasm to be first, but Morbius cautions that he will probably be disappointed. The tests are indeed disappointing, but far more for Adams than for Doc. The commander's humiliation is then compounded by Morbius's sarcastic pronouncement that 'It's all right . . . a commanding officer doesn't need brains, just a good loud voice.' This is accompanied by a smirk at Doc who can barely disguise his own amusement. We are privy to this conspiratorial exchange, while the unfortunate Adams is not.

There are further aspects of the film that place Adams under attack and chip away even at the virtues more commonly associated with his ostensible role as heroic man of action. His 'healthy' interest in the opposite sex – which might ordinarily form part of the defence against charges of bloodless intellectualism – is undercut by the implication that it may be compromising his duties as a leader. For instance, in the scene in which Adams has finally won over Altaira, he leaves Doc alone in order to pursue her, even though they are supposed to be on business. That he has chosen an inappropriate moment is made plain by Doc's gestures and vague protest, to which he is oblivious. The audience is once again asked to judge the hero's irresponsible behaviour. The final, and most damning, argument is provided by the fact that it is Doc who displaces Adams from the centre of the narrative's process of resolution by solving the riddle of the monster from the Id. This is given a bitter twist by the fact that in doing so he takes a fatal brain-boost from the Krell machine while Adams is off flirting with Altaira. Arguments that this is an indication of the Doc's scientific meddlesomeness are countered by the fact that Adams was just as keen to take the boost; Adams is implied to be dull and not in control of events over which he is supposed to take charge.

What makes *Forbidden Planet* so fascinating is this systematic and consistent demolition of much of the foundation upon which conventional narrative constructions of the hero take place. Adams is frequently presented as a dullard. In one instance, Doc actually cuts him off abruptly as – in response to having the awe-inspiring wonders of the Krell revealed to him – he bovinely splutters, 'A thing like this . . . it's just too big.' Unlike Doc and Morbius, Adams is not sensitive enough to detect the high frequency of Altaira's whistle. Mocked by the film and quite charmless in his much-resisted and authoritarian courtship of Altaira, Adams is not allowed much of the audience's indulgence in his repressive mission of restoring patriarchal norms; our

satisfaction at witnessing Altaira sacrificing her erudition, independence and wit to play the role of future wife to this unstylish boor is minimal.

At the centre of the narrative's efforts to restore the Oedipal norms by substituting Adams for Morbius is the coexistent problem of the consequences of scientific progress. The threat of scientific overreaching, despite self-conscious allusions to the Eden myth, is not given the wholeheartedly negative treatment that might place it within the more familiar Promethean narrative trajectory that often accompanies accounts of hubristic rationalism. For the film to solve its sexual/ideological problem, it needs also to resolve the causal factors in the scientific discourse, but there is a major obstacle presented by the historically contingent ambivalence of scientific discovery. Post-war anti-intellectualism and the Eisenhower administration's McCarthy-assisted attack on the 'egg-head' might be discernible in the film's treatment of Morbius, but it rejects extremism rather than intellect *per se*, finding as much sympathy for the character of the urbane Ostrow as it does for Adams.

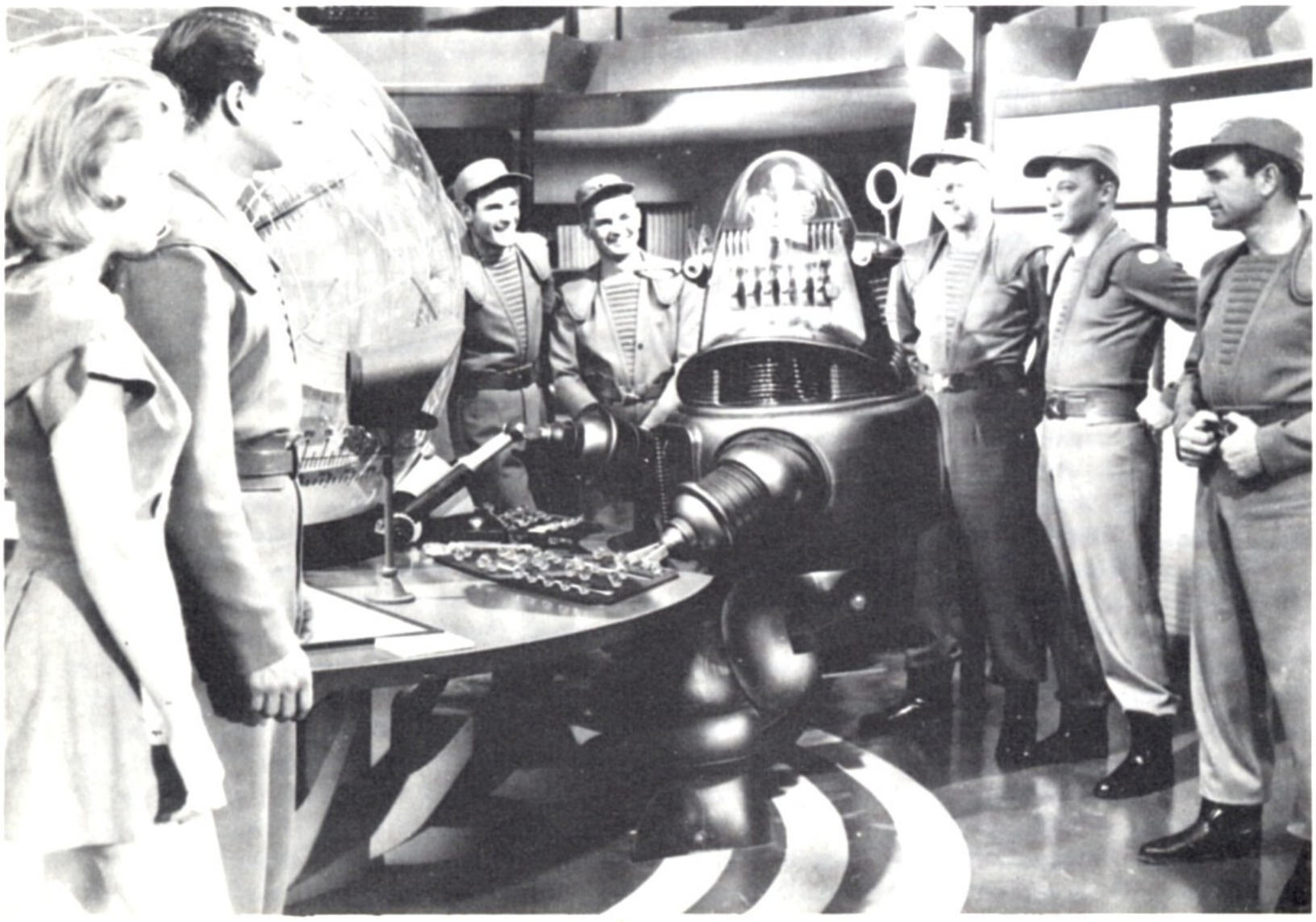
The centrality of the home and the domesticity of Robbie the Robot are no less crucial to the film than the menace of the Id monster, whose realisation on screen by Disney man, Josh Meador, offers a paradoxically triumphant aspect of technological endeavour. Where the film is most obviously concerned about new technology is in its relation to the possible liberation of woman from the typical duties of the home and the maternal function, freeing her in a way that men – or at least symbolic fathers like Adams – find problematic. It is instructive to recall the previous year's spectacular *This Island Earth*, in which the inventor Cal (Rex Reason) receives a mysterious catalogue of new and advanced equipment. His assistant says excitedly, 'Here's something my wife could use: an Interociter incorporating an electron sorter', and Cal replies 'She'd probably gain twenty pounds while it did all the work for her.' (The film also features a subplot based on Cal's temporary loss of control over a woman because of the activities of high-tech-peddling aliens.)

Forbidden Planet is unable to reject the material promises of the machine since it was conceived as a showcase film based on the presentation of futuristic hardware. The persistence of this pro-technology line and a repeated tendency to sympathise with its moderate advocates produces a crisis in its overall point-of-view, failing to permit the endorsement of the Commander's position and inhibiting a sense of closure which the audience can accept. The final scene serves only to confirm this. First, the film seems to put a full stop to the difficulties represented by Altair IV; we and the passengers of the C57-D watch it explode on the ship's viewing screen. Yet who is astrogating the ship but Robbie, the consumer's dream?

Technology, a mixed blessing and initiator of the film's narrative contradictions, is at the helm of the ship and heading for Earth. All the misgivings that the film has dispelled with the destruction of Altair IV are reinvoked with a vengeance by Adams's final proclamation that when Earth reaches the level of the Krell, Morbius's name will shine again.

Pete Boss

Still: Forbidden Planet. *The ending – science in control.*



THE ADVENTURES OF RAFE HUNNICUT

The Bourgeois Family in 'Home from the Hill' (1960)

On its initial release, Vincente Minnelli's 1960 melodrama *Home from the Hill* was variously described by mainstream reviewers as having 'a certain low-Faulknerian likeability' and being a 'long, rambling tale . . . aimless, tedious, and in conspicuously doubtful taste'. Such descriptions both relate it to matters which, elsewhere in American culture, could be recognised as 'serious', and denigrate it in terms ironically comparable with the treatment of Faulkner thirty years earlier.

My purpose here is to take such connections 'seriously'. The matters to which the film addresses itself – the significance of the hunt, the nature and purpose of the family, the transmission of patriarchal power – are continually recycled in American culture because they raise some of the central tensions and contradictions of that culture. To take up such matters need not necessarily be a matter of intention; this is not an article on Vincente Minnelli, but a consideration of how the film, consciously or not, meets the challenge of the energies inherent in its material.

The film deals with the relations of a Southern landowner, Captain Wade Hunnicut (Robert Mitchum) to his two sons, the elder, illegitimate Rafe (George Peppard) and the younger, legitimate Theron (George Hamilton). Broadly, it operates by dramatising two conflicts, the struggle for Theron between his father and his mother Hannah (Eleanor Parker), and the shifting of the commitment of Theron's sweetheart Libby Halstead (Luana Patten) from Theron to Rafe.

Still: Home from the Hill. *The struggle for Theron (George Hamilton) – Wade (Robert Mitchum) and Hannah (Eleanor Parker) at the family dining table.*

The film opens by locating its title in a quote from Robert Louis Stevenson in which an American commonplace is signalled:

> Here he lies where he longed to be;
> Home is the sailor, home from the sea,
> And the hunter home from the hill.

On the one hand the world invoked is of 'home', of the family and the bourgeois order. Home is being opposed to space, to the threat to identity posed most famously by the immensity of the sea – the American classic here is Herman Melville's *Moby Dick*. What makes home so desirable is the myth of stability, centred around family, property and stable family relations and therefore primarily concerned with stable definitions of sexuality. And the relief in these lines, the sense that a felt longing is at last satisfied, turns on the return of the man to the home.

In other words, we might say that these lines are playing with the hoped-for identity, in terms of definitions of male sexuality, between what it means to be a 'man' (a hunter, a sailor) and a 'family man'. For if the world of the home operates on a relatively narrow definition of what it means to be male (most importantly a father within the terms of the bourgeois patriarchal order), its crucial instability is its apparent failure to supply from within itself any terms in which this kind of maleness can be learned. Typically, it is necessary for the boy to become a 'man' somewhere else, away from the family and away from the house – on the river, in the woods, on the battlefield. Only then can the hunter come home, if – and here is the tension and anxiety which has affected so much American art – he still wants to. 'I can't stand it,' says Huck Finn when, after his journey down the Mississippi, the prospect of 'civilisation' rears its head again: 'I been there before.' It is as an inflection of this problem, the anxiety in American culture that the necessary acquisition of 'maleness' may render the world of home and family untenable, that I want to look at *Home from the Hill*. Any given instance of this pattern is also firmly related to its historical moment: just as Mark Twain's treatment of Huck is a comment on the America of the 1880s, so Minnelli's melodrama is looking at the America of Eisenhower and the years following the end of the Korean war.

Perhaps the main way in which this is felt is in the film's treatment of the possibilities open to figures of different generations, in terms not only of Minnelli's analysis of the characters, but also of their own hopes and ambitions. The opening chapters of Twain's novel focus on what a father is against what a son might possibly become, both through individual psychology (Pap's resentment that Huck might become 'better' than his father) and through historical possibilities (Twain's nostalgia for the lost Mississippi – and lost America – of the pre-Civil-War period). In an analogous way, *Home from the Hill* is looking at the difference between a generation associated with active wartime service and the sons and daughters brought up in peacetime.

This is the point of establishing, at the beginning of the film, Wade Hunnicut as Captain Hunnicut; it is being implied that he is a veteran, presumably of World War II. We see a man whose relation to the home is uneasy enough, a leading citizen of the town who is also its leading adulterer and who has been sexually estranged from his wife for many years. But he is also a man whose ambitions for his son are very different and constitute, in the first half of the film, a specific project. In allowing Hannah complete control of Theron's upbringing, he has, as he sees it, rooted his son firmly in the home. Now, with his father in charge, Theron's induction into manhood will not be on the battlefield but in the woods, where the right kind of experience will return him to the house as a successful hunter, a man who can preserve the bourgeois order whose threatened breakdown is felt in Hannah and Wade's sexless marriage. This is the project which seems on the brink of realisation in the central party sequence, where Wade can say to Hannah, 'You and me, together we made a first rate person,' and command her reluctant assent: 'I suppose we've been good for something.' Furthermore, if the contradiction between 'home' and the world of the hunter can be dissolved for Theron, Wade believes that this triumph will redeem his marriage to Hannah. She will unlock her bedroom door, his adulteries will cease, and the image of the successful family, which adequately expresses and contains the sexual energy of its members, will be restored.

This fantasy, central to the film's meaning, is complementary to Wade's adulteries. One aspect of the psychology of the hunter is that the activities of the chase (and Wade's adulteries are firmly identified with 'hunting') are felt as separate from the world of home and family. Against the awareness of the potential disruptiveness of the hunt (the death or eclipse of the patriarch) is posed the sentimental assumption that what has been left behind must incarnate order (successful patriarchy). A clear instance is that moment towards the end of *Moby Dick* when Ahab and Starbuck, facing the final confrontation with the whale, are momentarily complicit in an idealised fantasy of their families which centres, of course, around their role as fathers. Nantucket is conveniently distant – neither man will live to negotiate the return from the fantasy to the realisation of what the home contains. But such a return is very much the structure of the opening of *Home from the Hill*, a series of scenes which move Wade from hunt to home:

1) The hunt conceived as space, both literal (the opening shot of the sky and the ducks) and psychological (the all-male group of hunters).

2) The denial that the hunter is in any way implicated in the home. When Wade is shot by a cuckolded husband, the emphasis is strongly on the unexpectedness of the violence and the lack of any connection between Wade and his assailant. His first words to the cuckold are, 'I don't believe I know you,' and when the cause of the shooting becomes clear, Wade's response is to deflect the image of the restrictive home on to someone else –

Stills: Home from the Hill. *After the first shooting, Rafe (George Peppard) supports the wounded Wade. Below – Wade and Hannah.*

home is 'where you ought to be,' he tells the husband. This leaves him to assert his freedom as a (sexual) hunter; he tells the doctor, 'It's my right to cross any man's fences when I'm hunting.'

3) The awareness of family. In part, this is signalled by the arrival of Wade in the town to see the doctor with whom a story must be agreed upon in order to explain the wound to the community. As a guarantee of his confidentiality, the doctor offers the family: 'I'm a friend of your wife.' An important role is played here by Rafe, who (not for the last time) acts as the agent of Wade's return to the home. On the journey, Wade, after commenting that he is in 'no hurry to get home', tries again to insist on women as the happily unindividualised objects of his desire: 'I can't even remember which one she was.' Rafe's reply, 'He's only got one woman, so he has no trouble keeping them straight,' points up a paradox which reflects as much on Wade's marriage as it does on the cuckold's. Within the exclusivities of the family, 'no trouble keeping them straight' refers only to the identities of the wives and not to their behaviour.

4) The nature of home. The concluding part of this movement from outside to inside ought to be a movement from the public world to the private one, into the most private space of all, as Wade moves through the house to the bedroom. But the force of the scene is that the most private space of all fails to be private. Hannah's sexual rejection of Wade is figured here in the insistent concentration on open doors, part of a sustained thread of imagery in the film. The first shot of Hannah, taken through an open doorway, and her first line, with its overtones of seduction – 'You need some help, Wade?' – offer a version of the unhappy home radically different from Wade's. Hannah's response to Wade's refusal to make their sexual relations exclusive is not a matter of retreating further into the exclusivity of the locked room but of leaving her sexuality standing, as it were, in the open. It is in this scene that Wade first raises the image of the successful family, arguing that his adulteries are the product

Still: Home from the Hill – *Theron on the 'snipe hunt'.*

of Hannah's rejection and would cease if she ceased to reject him. But Hannah knows, as she makes clear later in the party scene, that such exclusivity is a fantasy. To accept Wade would simply make her the most beautiful 'of them all'. The crucial point is not her rejection of him sexually so much as her rejection of any participation in the terms of his fantasy, whether of the unhappy home (the wife locking out her husband) or of the happy home (husband and wife locking out the world).

The scenes in which Wade embarks on his project of taking Theron away from Hannah and making a man of him display a structural feature that is also important elsewhere in the film: the parallels between particular scenes and sets of scenes. The meaning of the snipe-hunting sequence depends in part on its relation to the earlier duck hunt. Similarly, the scene in the house with Theron and Wade must be read against the earlier scene with Hannah and Wade.

The point connecting the snipe-hunting scene with the earlier hunt is that in both cases we see Wade with a figure of the younger generation whose lack of success in the hunt signals failure, as Wade sees it, in sexuality. His reply to the cuckold's threat that he won't miss next time is a deliberate sexual gibe, 'You ain't got one more shot in you, boy,' and connects directly with his distress on finding Theron by the lake. He has been duped by Wade's cronies into the 'snipe hunt' and is shown as a figure of fun, the phallic gun replaced by the bag and whistle. In both cases, a failure of maleness in the hunt is connected with a failure in the family – the husband who misses his target has an adulterous wife, the boy made into a jackass is no son to his father.

Minnelli cuts to the scene in which Wade looks around Theron's bedroom. Thomas Elsaesser has written that a repeated configuration in Minnelli's films is that of 'father and son feeling completely lost in their own home' (*Brighton Film Review*, no.18). Here the device establishing this alienation refers us back to the scene between Wade and Hannah through the similar failure to enclose the space, marked again by the emphasis on open doors. Theron is presented as a child whose anxiety about his position in the family is expressed in his creation of a 'private' world which is innately fragile and fails to be an unambiguously personal space within the home. An analogous case in Minnelli's work is Tootie's (Margaret O'Brien's) family of snowpeople in the Smith garden in *Meet Me in St Louis*.

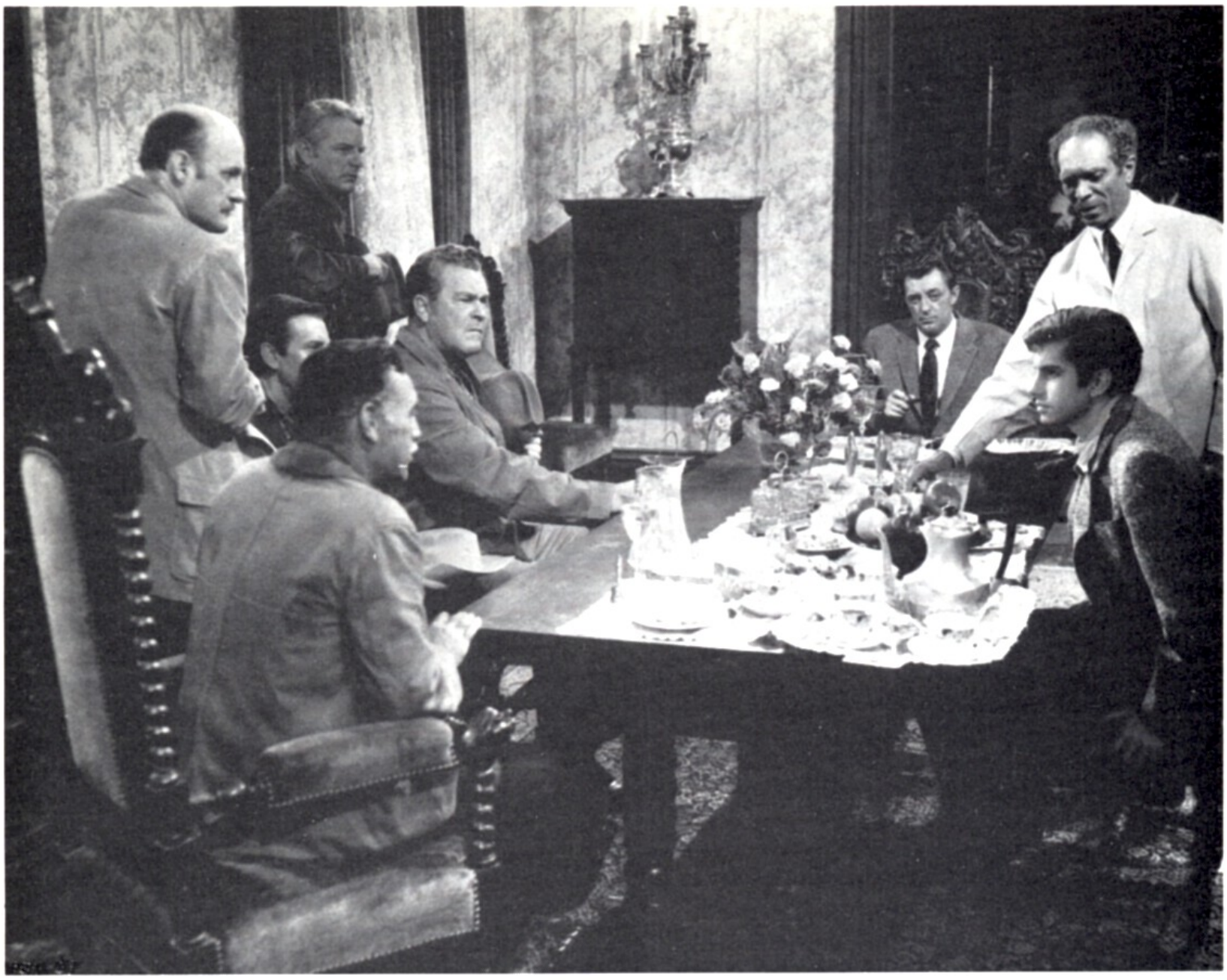
Perhaps the only figures who can successfully create private enclosed space do so not as an assertion of the family but as a rejection of it. Leaving the door of Theron's room open, with the comment that he will show him how a man lives, Wade takes Theron into his study – the scene begins with an explicit shot of his closing its substantial double doors. Again *Meet Me in St Louis* provides an analogous moment; Mr Smith (Leon Ames) effectively thwarts the wishes of his entire family by coming in from work and insisting on shutting himself into the bathroom. The right of the father is conceived as the right to space unviolated by the rest of the family.

The character of Wade's study, the only part of the home in which he is not lost, is clearly marked. Its basic quality is its turgidness, the sense that it is overstuffed and dead, that its decoration, with its ranks of guns and bright red chairs, is a substitute for the sexuality which is repressed in the rest of the house. But most crucially, it is a turgid version of the American pioneer cabin, with its collection of hunting gear, its inappropriately enormous stone fireplace, and the three hunting dogs on the hearthrug. As such, it is an entirely proper setting in which to teach Theron to be a 'man' in the sense

Still: Home from the Hill – *Theron faces Wade in the latter's pioneer 'study'.*

of rejecting the family. Wade's characterisation of the successful patriarch turns on his not needing the usual signs of connection with family or a wider society, not because such a connection is absent but because it is based on a power structure that is felt to be unassailable. Wade characterises himself as a man who need carry no identification (everybody knows who he is), no cash (everybody will give him credit), no keys (nobody dare steal from him) and no watch (everybody waits for him and he for nobody). Why such a figure should be alienated from the family is not perhaps entirely obvious until we recognise the origin of this list: a configuration normally associated with the world of the hunt has been relocated as an assertion of patriarchy.

The image of the man without the usual props of urban life is found elsewhere in American texts which argue that in order to know the natural world most fully it is necessary to leave such things behind and become as the Indian was. Ike McCaslin in Faulkner's *Go Down, Moses* (1942) is only allowed his first sight of the great bear, Old Ben, when he has relinquished not only his gun but also the watch and compass with which he is 'still tainted'. If the relinquishment of civilisation is the condition, loss of family is the consequence; inflections of this vary from the virginity of James Fenimore Cooper's Natty Bumppo to the flashes of sexual nausea in Ike McCaslin (who dies a childless widower). So, far from underpinning Wade's sanguine assumption that the hunt is about the acquisition of maleness that can be reimported without effort into the home, his list evokes the hunt in an ominous



Still: Home from the Hill. *Patriarchy transmitted – the men look on as Wade gives Theron the task of hunting the rogue boar.*

way. This instability becomes more evident later – here it is registered mainly in the set, for, as Wade tells Theron that 'what every man hunts out there is himself', the camera pans across the crowded paraphernalia of the room.

The most explicit moment of the scene is Wade's attempt to 'test' Theron's use of the carbine by having him discharge it in the room. I think that the point can only be to terrorise Hannah, a fact that Theron registers in his astonished 'You going to have me shoot this gun off in the house?' Wade's reply deliberately ignores the question of 'home': 'It's a big fireplace, Theron, don't you think you can hit it?' What Wade wants (and gets) is a tacit pact between the men to violate the hearth. The close-ups of Wade and Theron, followed by the shot of Hannah on the far side of the closed study doors, now establish that the male group disrupted at the very beginning of the narrative is reasserted in a more specific form, the first hint of the rejection of the mother.

In a less complex narrative, it might be possible to go on to plot Theron's acquisition of 'maleness' in a simple, linear way. We see him learning to shoot with Rafe's assistance, and his introduction to the woods. This is followed by the assertion of his adult maleness in the dinner table scene, which begins with Wade telling him to shave before he comes to his 'mother's table' in future and ends with the displacement of Hannah by the group of tenant farmers and the assignment of the boar hunt to Theron. It concludes in the successful boar hunt, the presentation of the trophy to Theron and the beginning of the courtship of Libby. To describe it like this is, I think, to see it very much as Wade sees it when he talks to Hannah about his pride in Theron during the party scene which concludes the hunt. But on closer examination of this structure, a pattern emerges within: the suggestion that this initiation has been a positive one is undermined by the relation of the series of scenes centered on Theron and Wade to the parallel series centered on Theron and Rafe. The two scenes in which Wade asserts Theron's maleness within, or rather against, the home (the shot in the hearth/Hannah's dinner table) are respectively followed by sequences offering strikingly different inflections of Theron's skill with a gun (shooting bottles at Rafe's cabin/the hunt for the wild boar), followed by two conversations (Rafe and Theron discussing girls/Wade and Theron discussing fear). It is worth comparing these scenes a little more closely.

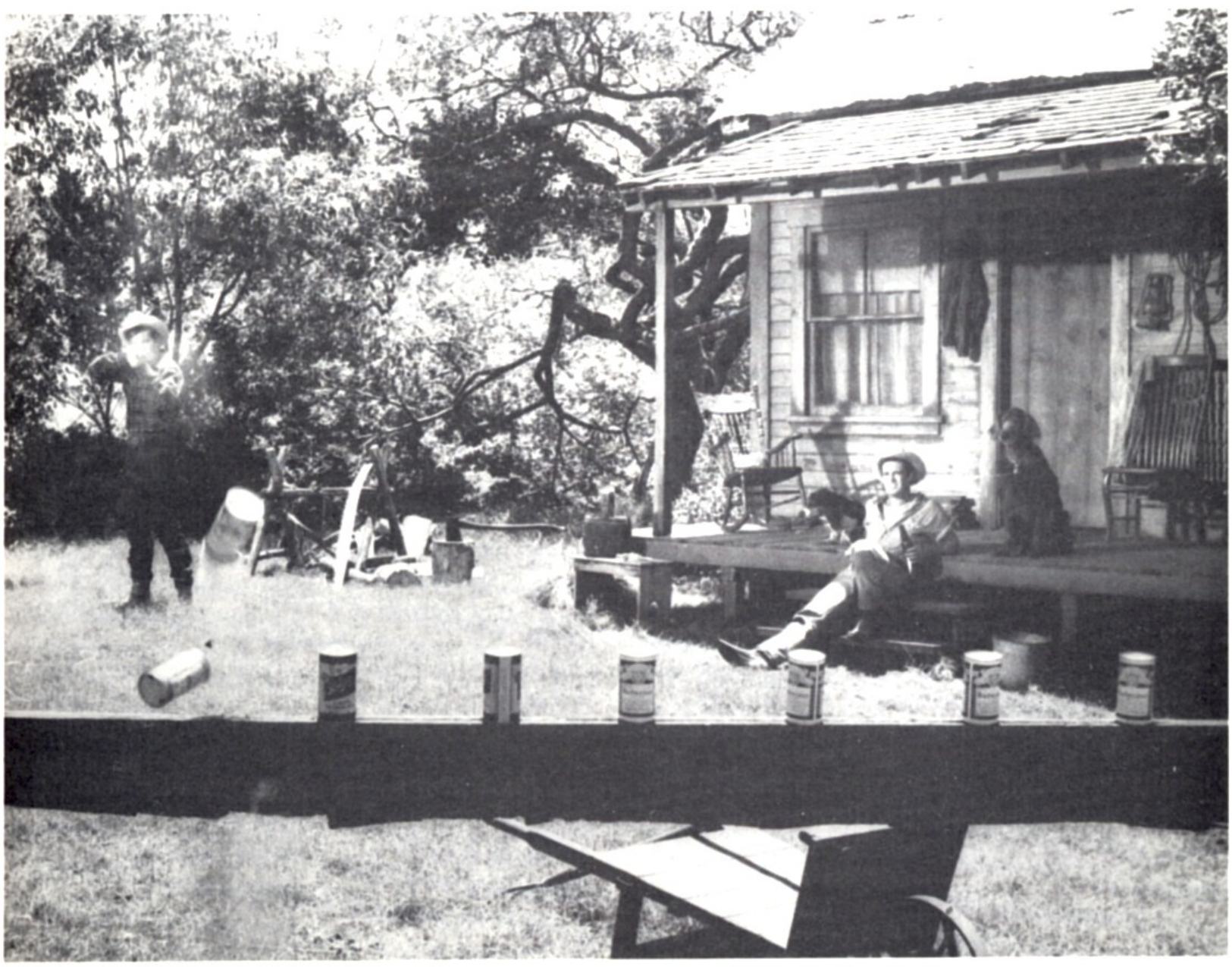
The scene outside Rafe's cabin stands in clear contrast to the violence of the shot into the hearth which has preceded it. There are obvious movements here from night to day and from the enclosure of the study to the space of Rafe's yard. Something

closer to a genuine pioneer cabin appears in Rafe's shack, with its verandah and rocker – only the dog is a literal link with Wade's study. The moment at which Theron shoots out the bottom of the bottle of beer Rafe is drinking neatly signals the opposite inflection of the question of Theron's marksmanship from the earlier shot. A moment of tension and disturbing complicity between the father and son gives way to a moment of trust and delight as Theron exults in his skill and Rafe responds, not with terror that he might have been hit, but with gentle irony. The scene dismisses any aspect of competition between the two – it is simply arguing that they enjoy being with each other.

The hunt for the boar is exactly the opposite. From the first, Theron wants to be alone, and resents Wade's insistence that Rafe should go with him. At least in Theron's mind, this sequence is about competition – despite Rafe's assurance that he has no desire to steal the honour of the kill, Theron leaves him asleep so that he alone will confront the beast. While the successful hunt can be said to confirm Theron's maleness and align him firmly with Wade, it does so in terms that are located outside the society and the family, and which are arguably negative. For example, at the end of the hunt, it emerges that Theron has disobeyed his father's instructions and not climbed a tree for safety after his close-range shot at the boar. Wade discovers this with approval, commenting that he too never climbed the tree – their mutual male pride seems to turn on the refusal of even this one gesture of self-preservation, freezing male identity in the figure of the solitary hunter and the one shot that *has* to count. In the comparable moment in the earlier sequence, Rafe and Theron have climbed a tree – they are sitting in the branches trying to attract deer by rattling antlers. Here the hunt is seen as a shared business, ruefully comical (they are both soaking wet), but offering them an intimacy which enables Theron to admit, in his confidences about girls, the extent of his sexual insecurity. The boar hunt is placed between this moment and the next scene in which we see that insecurity, as Theron and Rafe sit in the car outside Libby's house. Thus Theron's courtship of Libby follows, not the intimacy of hunting with Rafe, but the isolation of hunting the beast.

Again, these distinctions are following established patterns in American culture. Contact with the world of nature has always been capable both of a negative inflection when seen as the experience of an isolated individual and of a positive inflection when shared and offered as the medium of transmission of human contact. In *Moby Dick*, Ahab's mania is linked with the figure of Pip, the child who is cast accidentally adrift and goes insane in the immensity of the ocean. Juxtaposed with this by Melville is Ishmael's famous description of the squeezing of the whale's sperm, the exploration of nature as the context of love: 'let us all squeeze

Still: Home from the Hill – *Theron practises shooting outside Rafe's shack.*



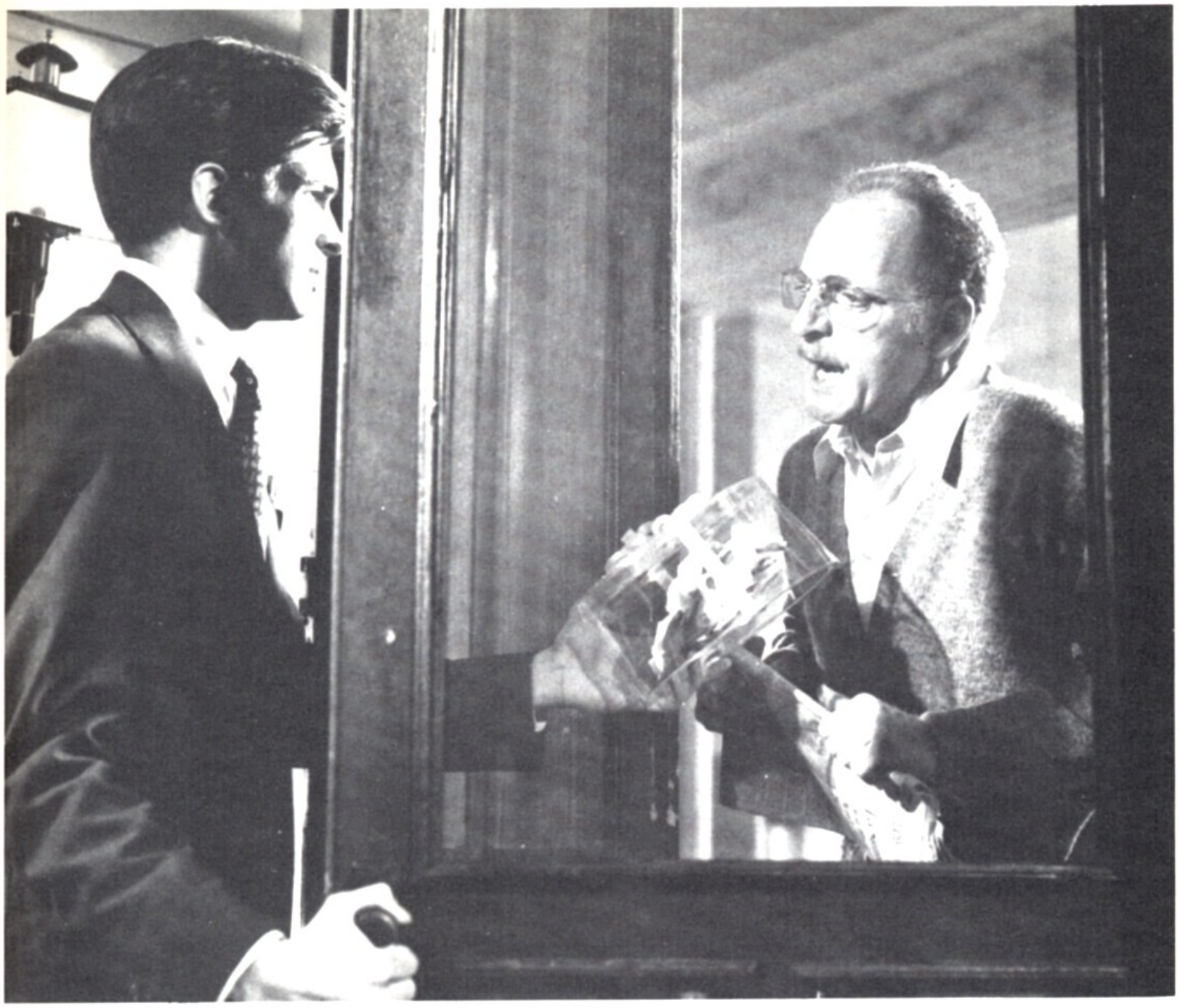
Still: Home from the Hill – *Theron and Rafe try to attract deer by rattling antlers.*

ourselves into each other.' Equally, in *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, the idyllic times enjoyed by Huck and Jim on the raft have their opposite in the vertigo which overcomes Huck when isolated from his companion by the fog. The trick that he plays on Jim when they are reunited (claiming that their separation has been a dream) clearly relates to Huck's own anxiety about his awakening to the sight of the 'monstrous big river'.

It is a commonplace that the myth expressed in the positive inflection here is not only one of human contact but more specifically of racial harmony. A particular case of this is when the racially 'other' figure takes on the role of the father, transmitting the skill of the hunt but, because of his 'inferior' position, doing so outside the terms of white patriarchy. In *Go Down, Moses*, Ike's mentor is the appropriately named Sam Fathers, who is both Negro and Indian in origin. The moment in which he 'dipped his hands in the hot smoking blood and wiped them back and forth across the boy's face' is exactly echoed in the story Rafe tells of himself and Chauncey and his own first hunt. Wade's treatment of Theron stresses only the son's similarity to the father in terms of knowledge and behaviour, rather than any initiation into a hitherto secret world.

The attenuation of the importance of such transactions can be felt in Rafe's tone as he hands Theron the boar's tail: 'Here's a trophy for you, sonny – you can wear it behind your ear.' What was a vital rite has become an awkwardly crude symbolic act, and what we see here is less an initiation into nature than an induction into patriarchy, using the natural world only as a medium in which patriarchal power can be displayed. The effect of Wade's whole project is to assert patriarchy precisely in the term outlined in the first scene in his study: the family conceived as a power structure which the patriarch must dominate.

The subsequent scenes of Theron's courtship of Libby operate within these terms. The opening line of this sequence, Rafe's plea to Theron, 'Go ring the doorbell, will you please,' introduces the point; Rafe knows that the appropriate place for Theron to meet Libby is inside the Halstead home, submitting to the context of her family (specifically, her father). His failure to do this is followed by his insistence that Rafe speak for him, which suggests their intimacy but is also faintly ominous, carrying with it a hint of instability, as the character finds himself in a position for which he is not directly responsible. A comparable configuration is found in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (1952), where Rosemary Bartlow (Gloria Grahame) feeds lines to



Still: Home from the Hill. *Defending the family – Albert Halstead turns Theron away from his home.*

her husband (Dick Powell) in his telephone conversation with Jonathan Shields (Kirk Douglas) in Hollywood and initiates a chain of events which leads to her infidelity and death.

On the evening of the party, Theron's failure to get past Halstead's front door obviously follows from his earlier failure to meet Libby in the context of her family. As Albert Halstead (Everett Sloane) slams the front door in Theron's face, we should recollect the earlier treatment of space; we are in the world where the family is defined through the locked door. As Theron walks away, there is the sound of a locomotive whistle in the distance – opposed to the exclusivities of the family is the emptiness of space.

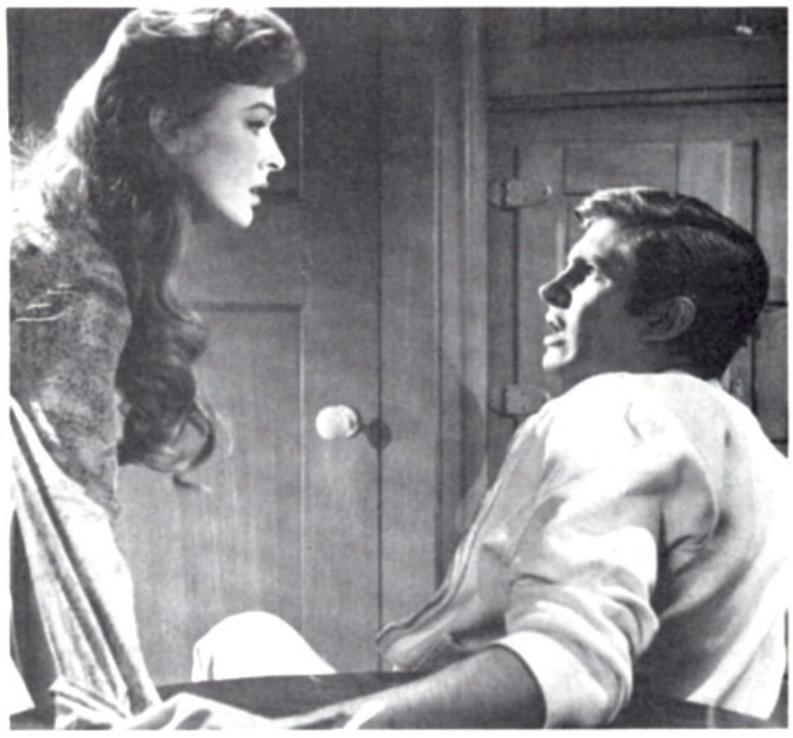
That an understanding of the home as a cluster of private and public spaces is not just Wade's or Albert Halstead's but also now Theron's is demonstrated in the scene in which Libby goes to the Hunnicut home. Having been shut out from the Halstead house, Theron now shuts himself and Libby in. We see him taking her up to the attic and closing the door; the study and stairway doors are left open. Not only does this underline the retreat from the family (like Wade's study, it is another 'private' space in the house) but also the set itself, with its jumbled props of family life, is expressive of Theron's own confusion about the family. Libby's sense of herself and her life, expressed in one of the number of lists which punctuate the film, that she will 'get married, have lots of children, can peaches, get fat' has no equivalent in Theron. All he has is his desire, and Libby herself is a little nervous at this, staring out of the window and trying to divert Theron into the recognised ritual of courtship. She attempts to locate their first meetings firmly in the social world, announcing that she often goes to the library at a particular time of day. From here, the movement can be, she hopes, towards the family – her public introduction to the Hunnicut home, the formal proposal, the white wedding.

But Minnelli cuts, not to the library but to the woods, to the couple's picnic, which will end in the sexual act in which Libby's baby is conceived. The setting here is one of the more positive notes in the relationship, representing an escape on Theron's part from the fantasy of the locked door. Here, as in the earlier scene with Rafe, he is again free to express his sexual insecurity, and Libby can express active sexual desire – the virginal white of her previous two scenes here gives way to her scarlet dress, while Theron now wears white. This symbolism itself has its famous antecedents. The allusion to the central symbolic colour in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* underlines the fact that, like Hester

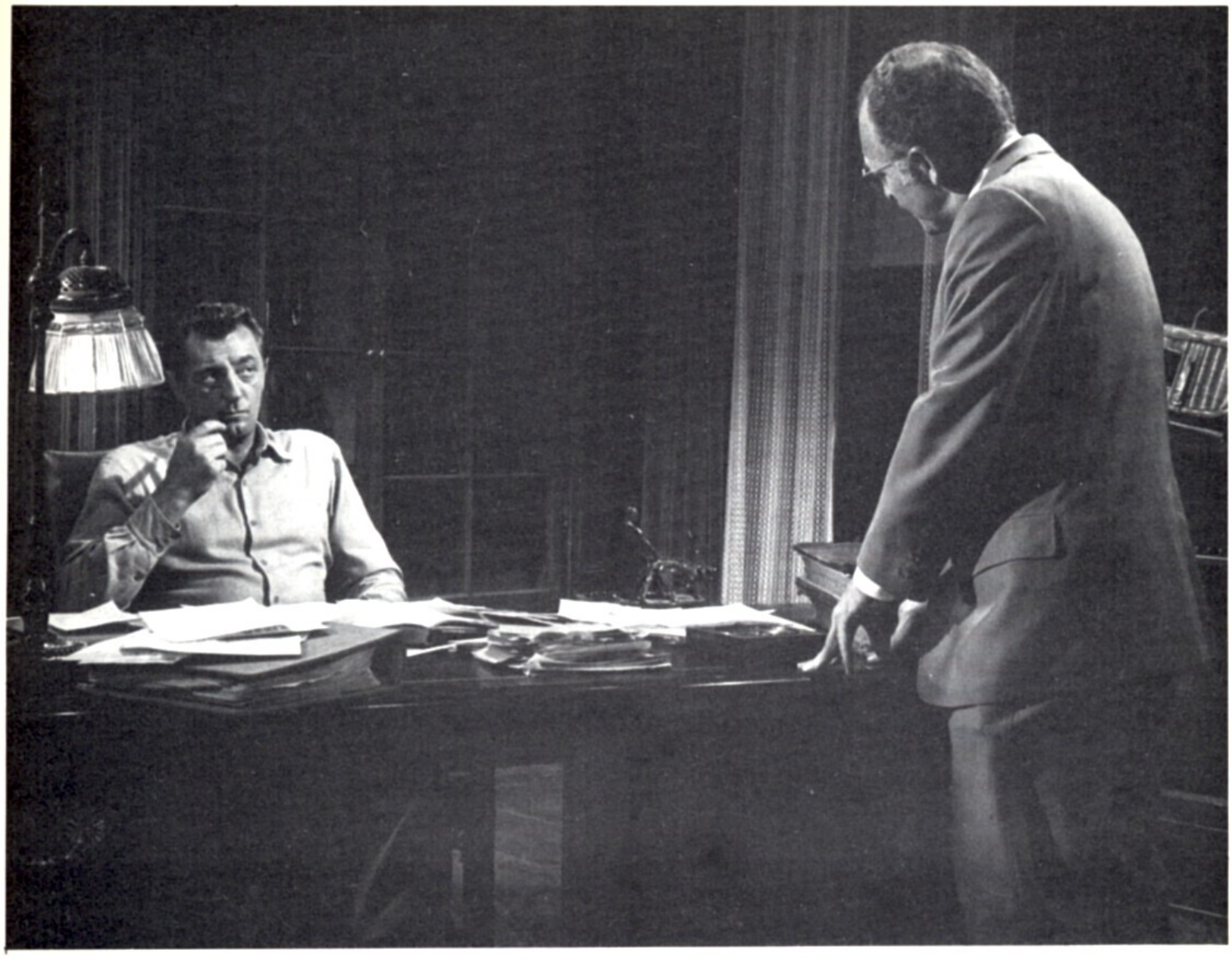
Prynne and Arthur Dimmesdale, Theron and Libby in the woods are refugees from the social order, and that making love gives them no new context but simply invites punishment by the old one. They are both rejecting the containment of sexual activity within marriage and rejecting the assumption that sexual prowess is the privilege of the patriarch; the derisive 'boy' of Wade's initial insult to the cuckolded husband receives a new inflection when Theron says 'I wish I weren't such a kid,' and Libby replies as she pulls him down to her, 'Never mind.'

After they have made love, Theron returns to the Hunnicut home in the early hours of the morning. Such a return from a realm in which more radical expression is possible can be a moment of Gothic excess, as the strain of adjusting to the repressions of town and family prove almost too much. (Dimmesdale's fantasies, as he walks back into Boston after meeting Hester in the woods for the last time, are a case in point.) Certainly the scene here has some Gothic elements (the time of night, Hannah's appearance and acting style) and is the setting in which she recounts to Theron the secret of the family: the fact that Rafe is Wade's son. Her apparent intention is to present Wade as a monster and to 'win back' Theron with the revelation that Wade has compromised the patriarchal line (Theron is not the oldest son). But the story is fatally relevant to the image of the family that Theron has inherited from Wade; its monster is not the father but the mother, not Wade but the creature that Hannah finds in the house making a 'sound like a cat mewing', Rafe's mother.

Hannah's story is one variant of a myth about the disruption and reassertion of order within the family which might be characterised as follows: a woman enters a house assuming that she incarnates the order of 'home' only to discover that the building is already inhabited by a monstrous female



Stills: Home from the Hill – *Theron and Hannah (right); Theron and Libby.*



Still: Home from the Hill – *Wade and Halstead.*

presence. Among the many variations of this are *Jane Eyre*, *Rebecca*, *I Walked with a Zombie* and *Psycho* ⌙ Andrew Britton has pointed out its relevance to Minnelli in his account of *Meet Me in St Louis* in *The Australian Journal of Screen Theory* no. 3. Where it deals with the restoration of order, the myth obviously has to do with the defeat of the 'monstrous' by the 'good' woman and Hannah, at least consciously, sees it in such terms: the assertion of the good (socially legitimate, bourgeois) line over the corrupt one (illegitimate, lower in class terms). Theron takes it as a story not about class but only about sexuality, about the vulnerability of the hunter at the moment he submits himself to the home and the threat of castration from the female within it. As a result, Hannah is seen but implicated in rather than defeating the monstrous presence.

All this becomes clearer in the next scene, in which Theron confronts Wade. His appeal to his father to recognise Rafe is based on an idea of the male pride that ought to be shared by the three of them: 'If you were any kind of a man you'd be proud of him.' In the climactic exchange which follows, Wade's answer combines a disgust at female sexuality with a stress on the socially degraded nature of the woman: 'His mother was a tramp, a sand hill tacky having her child by the edge of a ditch.' His rejection of Rafe is finally a defence of the bourgeois order. Theron's response is not to defend, but further to insult the mother, his 'rejection' of the father taking the form of disgust at the animality of his woman: 'She must have been some pig to crawl in bed with you.' While Theron and Wade are superficially in total antagonism here, their rejection of the mother makes them complicit in a way that relates to the earlier scene of the shot in the hearth. The point is made in part by Minnelli's presentation of them in a two-shot, facing each other in more or less identical postures, and in part by Wade's otherwise odd failure to take up the insult. His gesture with his hands here, suggesting that he is content to leave it there, is almost as if he recognises that this response is not altogether unsatisfactory to him. The closing shot of the sequence again parallels the earlier incident; it is of Hannah staggering on the stairs as she hears the exchange between the two men.

The same point is a central feature of Theron's remaining scenes in the film, in all of which his apparent rejection of the father is contradicted by other elements. His surrender of his keys and money to Rafe, for example, in the next scene, is explicitly to make restitution. But implicitly it is a repeat of the earlier rite of the hunter/patriarch. Theron is acting out his role as inheritor of the patriarchal line, just as his father had outlined it to him. It is also glanced at in the opening of the scene in which he finally breaks with Libby. She begins by acknowledging, 'You look older,' and he replies ambiguously, 'I've been alright.'

The rejection of Libby further aligns Theron

Still: Home from the Hill – *Theron rejects the pregnant Libby.*

and Wade in that it is juxtaposed by Minnelli with Wade's humiliation of Albert Halstead. Both scenes are prompted by the discovery that Libby is pregnant, and Theron's rejection of marriage is no great distance from Wade's presentation of a social order in which marriage is another form of commercial exchange: 'You've been in business long enough not to try to sell me any damaged goods.' But perhaps the strongest link between the two scenes is in the exercise of the power of patriarchy. Theron's sexual insecurity has entirely disappeared, and he is clearly conscious of his power to dispose of Libby as he likes. Wade's treatment of Albert Halstead in the next scene is only an even more explicit version of the same kind of power.

That this power is one of the main concerns towards the end of the film can be shown by pausing for a moment over a detail of plot. Why does Albert Halstead, on overhearing the men outside the church after the baptism of Libby's baby, shoot Wade? He knows that the 'accusation' against Wade is untrue, as the earlier interview scene has shown, and anyway the baby now has a 'father'. He does so because the myth of Wade's sexual prowess – the men are idly speculating on how many bastards he has fathered – is the final stroke of Albert's sexual humiliation, the product not just of Wade's behaviour but of the sexual politics of the whole society (the sense of this moment as a public occasion is crucial). It is brilliantly suggested by his encounter with one of Wade's tenants at the gate of the Hunnicut mansion after the interview; the moment is entirely continuous with Wade's gibe to the cuckolded husband at the beginning of the film. It is because Wade invites violence in terms not local to any one individual that Minnelli does not show Albert in the scene in which Wade is killed. The death appears as the impersonal result of his position, continuous with his opening line in the film: 'Who the hell did this to me?' By killing Wade, Albert reasserts his masculinity (the petrol station attendant mistakes the driver of the speeding car, thinking Albert is Wade). Finally, Theron kills Albert with one shot, fired from the hip – the complete identification of gun with phallus.

It is a moment that signals the final eclipse of Wade's project. The killing of men in wartime, which was supplemented by the killing of the boar, has given way to the killing of a man. Theron is not even 'Captain' Hunnicut, and this violence cannot be reintegrated into society; there is no attempt to suggest that Theron's departure here is anything other than a defeat. But another factor must be invoked. In order to understand it fully we must understand that its emotional centre is the embrace between Theron and Rafe, and cannot be read outside an exploration of Rafe's function in the film.

An obvious and important antecedent to the figures of Theron and Rafe can be found in Tom Sawyer and Huck Finn. In Twain's novels, they are not actually brothers (though they pretend to be

Still: Home from the Hill. *Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer – Rafe and Theron.*

towards the end of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*), but we view them in some important respects in the terms in which we see Theron and Rafe. Theron and Tom are both figures whose place in the bourgeois order starts by being apparently unassailable, but through them we see that order criticised. As in *Home from the Hill*, violence is crucial in Twain's work to the expression of that criticism. Tom's childish fantasies of mayhem culminate in the bullet which strikes him in the calf during the 'adventure' which he has engineered, and this violence again has a firm relation to the family, from the beginning of the book (a condition of joining Tom's gang of 'robbers' is having a family to be killed in the event of disloyalty) to the end (the game of helping Jim to escape is offered as a way of tormenting the Phelps family). The most explicit and apocalyptic expression of this, the Shepherdson/Grangerford feud, includes the murder of Buck Grangerford, a figure comparable to Tom. But this episode is tucked away in the middle of the narrative. Unlike Minnelli, Twain concludes with the continuing assimilation of the violence into the middle-class order. At the end, the bullet which struck Tom has become one of the symbols of his authority: 'his bullet round his neck on a watch guard for a watch.'

The figure of Huck Finn is an obvious antecedent of Rafe. The crucial parallel is that neither Huck nor Rafe is entirely outside the order of which Tom and Theron are the 'natural' inheritors. In both cases, their status is not that of outcasts but rather as having been very exactly 'placed' by society as dependents who cannot be allowed to partake directly of the power of patriarchy. When Huck at the opening of the novel is taken away from his father and put with the women, the intention is not to turn him into Tom Sawyer but to give him a relationship to the society which prevents real privation while blocking access to power. His wistful fascination with the novel's procession of adult white males marks a muted awareness that power is concentrated in their hands and that it is in relationship to one of them that he might learn to manipulate it. The kinds of father figure extend from the fascists (Sherburn, Grangerford) to the imbecile, castrated Uncle Silas; it is not surprising that the figures to whom Huck is most attracted and partly resembles are the con-men, the duke and the king, who represent a subversion of the terms of the patriarchal power exercised by the others, manipulating it through role, disguise and deceit. Minnelli's interest in the figure of the con-man is most obvious in Gene Kelly's role as Serafin in *The Pirate* (1947). An unrealised Minnelli project in the early 1950s was a version of Twain's novel that placed central emphasis on the King and the Duke (Kelly and Danny Kaye).

The moment at which this aspect of the Huck figure surfaces most clearly in Rafe is in his first scene with Libby. The function of role here is to offer a way out of the constraints that generally operate in the first encounter of boy and girl. The problem, as Minnelli seems to have felt it, is that the encounter may be repressively trapped inside the terms of home and family (girl meets boy-next-door) and drained of energy exactly to the extent that it fails to disrupt them – as with Esther (Judy Garland) and John (Tom Drake) in *Meet Me in St Louis*. Alternatively, the encounter that takes place outside (in the city or the wilderness) suffers the opposite problem, that of establishing some contact with the society without losing its energy (the problem that faces Judy Garland and Robert Walker in *The Clock*). Insofar as Rafe approaches Libby here not as the suitor but as the suitor's spokesman, the problem of their relation to a context which would raise questions of money and social class can be evaded. Libby can respond to Rafe sexually without feeling threatened, and Rafe can feel attracted to her without risking the rejection by her family. Indeed, the attraction depends in part on their mutual relief at being free for a moment from those constraints.

Paradoxically, the other point stressed in the scene is that they could make a success of living together in this society. In this respect, Libby and Rafe are the exact opposite of Libby and Theron, for whom a belief in 'love' is juxtaposed with a series of settings that express an inability to realise a coherent domestic context for the emotion. Here the opposite assumptions (they are not in love, they will not get married) are coupled with an equally consistent stress on a series of contexts that emphasise a substantially domestic world in which they might share tasks. Plotted together, the two 'romances' look like this:

1) Rafe's encounter with Libby takes place as she is washing the car, which she continues to do as they talk. The activity suggests simple control of the literal domestic world. Libby is dressed in working clothes – an open-necked blouse and rolled-up jeans.

2) In the next two scenes with Theron, which I have already discussed, the keynotes are entrapment in the house and Libby's presentation of herself as a virgin. In the first, she runs up the Halstead stairs in a frothy white party dress, and in the Hunnicut attic she is wearing simple white clothes.

3) Theron's and Libby's picnic in the woods is the only scene in which we see Libby with both men, and the sequence begins not with the lovers but with a shot of Rafe walking towards them, with a hoe balanced across his shoulders. Partly the point is about class – the world of work opposed to the leisure generated by the Hunnicut fortune – and this relates to the conversation which follows Theron's cocky suggestion that Rafe should get himself a girlfriend. Rafe offers in response one of the film's lists: he sleeps with his boots on, drinks beer in the morning and has a skunk for a house pet. But the items here point straight towards a domestic setting of a kind for Rafe, a sort of easy order very different from the jumble and alienation of the Hunnicut attic. Libby is recognising this when she

replies to Rafe's list with one of her own, an account of marriage that is only slightly ironic: doing the dishes, paying life insurance, taking the kids to the dentist, mowing the lawn. This echoes elements of her earlier list in the attic scene, to which Theron had no answer. Even at the moment when Libby seems most firmly linked with Theron, the evocation of a possible domestic world is still something shared with Rafe.

4) Setting Theron's final rejection of Libby in the Halstead car is important. The connections are with the previous scenes acted out in Wade's truck. Both the reluctant return home after the first shooting incident and Theron's asking Rafe outside the Halstead home to drive round the block again use being inside the truck as an expression of uneasiness about the domestic context.

5) The scene in the supermarket, like the car washing scene, involves tasks which could have figured in one of Libby's lists about family life. Libby's appearance also clearly recalls the earlier scene. Then Rafe's role as spokesman for Theron had insulated them from the threatening social world, but now the stress is all on the fragility of social position and the ability of the bourgeois world to destroy those who have threatened its order (the scene immediately follows Albert Halstead's humiliation by Wade). The anxiety with which Libby arranges her hair while Rafe parks the shopping trolleys and his concern that she should not be seen crying in public mark their awareness of this vulnerability, which is very much the context for Rafe's offer of marriage. It will save Libby and her child, who will otherwise be outside patriarchy, from 'running around loose' in the world.

Still: Home from the Hill – *Libby meets Rafe in the supermarket.*

However, this does not successfully resolve the contradictions of the family. Marrying Libby is in part a redemption of the past (Libby and her baby are analogous to Rafe's mother and himself) and in part a reintegration of Rafe into the bourgeois order (he and Libby take over the Halstead home). But it is bought at a cost; Rafe knows that Libby would have married Theron, that certainly for the Halsteads and possibly for Libby the sense of gratitude is mixed with resentment. The point is perfectly articulated in the scene immediately after the wedding, where the uneasiness of the whole party culminates in Albert struggling irritably with the broken screen door. Rafe's offer to fix it is a delicately ironic inflection of the stress on his control of the domestic world. (Obviously, this moment also relates to the wider symbolic use of doors in the film, annotating

Albert's failure to sustain the order implied by the closed door, and Rafe's qualified reassertion of that order.)

The tensions are also evident in the bedroom scene. Rafe's line: ('I haven't been in a room this nice since I went to hospital to have my appendix taken out') is a wry comment on his newly acquired social position, and a deflection of the private and erotic connotations of the room. The bedroom represents an impasse for Rafe and Libby just as much as it did for Wade and Hannah at the beginning of the film. In both cases, the couples are together not for the sake of each other but for the sake of the child, and the difficulty is in re-establishing between them a successful sexual relationship that also upholds the bourgeois order. It is entirely appropriate, then, that Libby and Rafe are brought together through the melodramatic device of her nightmare. The desire for Rafe that has been repressed ever since their first encounter can now be expressed (they are married), but must emerge in such a way as to give support to patriarchy. Thus the nightmare can't be admitted to be an ex-pression of Libby's repressed sexual desires – rather it is seen as a manifestation of an anarchic force, from which she needs Rafe's 'protection' in the form of his conjugal presence.

If we take it that the image of the sexual union of Rafe and Libby is still set about by references to what has been excluded (Libby's nightmare, the figure of Theron looking up at the bedroom from the street), can any redefinition of the family be seen as going on here? Rafe has been described (by Laura Mulvey in *Australian Journal of Film Theory* no. 3, p.27) as a figure who 're-establishes the family and "feminine" values.' Presumably what are thought of as 'feminine' values are moments such as the scene in his cabin in which he covers the sleeping Theron with a blanket and his first response to Libby's nightmare: 'I'm going to tuck you in.' But to see this only in terms of gender and family role is to dislocate it from its context, the establishment of Rafe through his attitude to nature and the hunt which can be defined by looking at an area in which attitudes to nature and to family intersect: the interest in animals, both wild and domestic.

This is one of the film's carefully structured ways of expressing the difference between Wade and his immediate family, and Rafe. For Wade, domestic animals are emblematic of absolute power (they come to heel at the snap of his fingers) and can be sacrificed with equanimity (his comment to Theron about the boar killing all three dogs). Animals which will not come to heel are used as images of violent disgust (Hannah compares Rafe's mother to a cat, Theron likens her to a pig). For Wade, Hannah and Theron any identification with an animal is anathema – Hannah's boast to Wade is that Theron won't come to heel like a dog.

Contrast this with the opening moment of the film. As the would-be assassin aims, the movement is sensed simultaneously by Rafe and the dog. From this moment, Rafe is identified with the animal world, rather than set up over it. This is expressed in several ways. One of these, as I have already discussed, involved the implications of Rafe's account of his first hunt. There is also the row between Wade and Theron over Rafe; Theron points out to his slightly baffled father that his treatment of Rafe is like his treatment of the dogs. The exchange is important because it leads directly to the scene where Theron, fleeing the Hunnicut home, arrives at Rafe's cabin. Immediately he enters, Rafe tells him to shut the door. He has been bathing a puppy and is holding the wet creature in his arms. In the ensuing conversation, Rafe reveals that as a child he was tethered to a post to keep him away from the Hunnicut home. When Theron falls asleep, Rafe covers him with a blanket and the puppy lies on the bed beside him.

What is offered here is a different possibility for the meaning of the domestic. The Hunnicut and Halstead homes are attempts to contain sexual activity, the closed door excluding the threatening male figure. Rafe's door is a protection against nature, his cabin a place of light and warmth as opposed to the dark and cold outside that would kill the puppy. The set confirms this, with prominence given to the fire and to the striking table lamp. Rafe's concern with literal, physical warmth is repeated several times in the rest of the film, and is always linked with the image of home and the identification of man with animal. In the supermarket scene, Rafe describes himself as 'storing up nuts for the winter'. In the final scene between the brothers, his first action is to put his jacket around Theron's shoulders and say 'It's getting dark, cold, let's go on home.' His other line is: 'You're just a colt'; after they have embraced he tucks the jacket back.

This last scene perhaps poses the limits of Rafe's position. Here a sense of home that is not sexually repressive can still momentarily be evoked. In the scene with Libby, though, Rafe's tucking her up is presented as taking place firmly within the context of the re-established order and in no sense overturns it; the film never denies the coherence of the repressive apparatus. Rafe is shown as a man with a profound relation to nature and sense of his kinship with the animal world, but this cannot be simply imported into the home and is associated, in a way which can be traced back firmly through Faulkner's Ike McCaslin to Cooper's Natty Bumppo, with a degree of spiritual isolation. In part, this has to do with his sense of having a past not accessible to people like Theron and Libby. In the cabin when Theron begins, 'I know all about you,' Rafe replies, 'All about me – I don't think you do.' What Theron is claiming as the whole truth about Rafe (his newly-discovered relationship to patriarchal power) is countered with the picture of Rafe with Chauncey and with his mother, both figures for whom the keynote of Rafe's public response is reserved diffidence. The crucial scene here (cut from the print released in the UK) occurs just before the scene in the woods with Libby and Theron; it shows Rafe visiting the unmarked grave of his mother and encountering Hannah. In their conversation, he

can express to a *woman* something of the emptiness he feels at his isolation from the power structures of the society – he says to her that it would have been better if he and his mother had never been born. No moment in *Home from the Hill* is more resonantly American than this encounter of victims.

The scene obviously has a close relationship to the final meeting of Hannah and Rafe at Wade's grave, which at first has something of the same mood. Hannah's attempt to assert the coherence of Rafe's family through a conventional hallowing of the child ('Is he *very* beautiful?') is answered in a way which is a reminder of the fractures in this structure: 'He looks like his daddy.' Rafe's cautious, gentle irony extends to the gravestone, a 'nice, handsome marker'. This is his mood until he reads the inscription, discovering that Hannah has acknowledged the paternity that Wade denied: 'Father of Raphael and Theron.' There is apparently no doubt that Rafe welcomes this final reintegration into patriarchy. Hannah seems to be claiming that the inscription only acknowledges what was always true: 'He had two fine sons.' Rafe, however, makes his awareness of his rebirth specific: 'Not till today he didn't.' As Huck says at one point about the Phelps family: 'It was like being born again, I was so glad to find out who I was.' The last gesture is to reintegrate Hannah into the family; the film closes with Rafe telling her how Libby and he are 'green' with the baby and taking her 'home'.

Still: Home from the Hill – *Rafe and Hannah at the paupers' graveyard.*

Two points remain: the name being on a gravestone, and Hannah's response to Rafe's astonishment as he reads it: 'Don't you think I'm capable of a human gesture for once in my life?' The final re-establishment of Rafe within the order of the society takes place via monumental masonry. The sense of definite acknowledgement goes along with the suggestion that Rafe (now Raphael) is trapped by the relationships inscribed in the fixity of the stone. A comparable moment is at the end of Cooper's *The Pioneers* when the young hero and heroine include the name of Nathaniel Bumppo on the grave of Major Effingham. It is an invitation to accept their social order which is seductive (Natty follows the letters with 'deep interest') but has to be rejected: the scene opens with Natty literally lying on the grave which bears his name, but by its end he has, like Huck, left civilisation behind.

As for Hannah's comment, it may be a claim to generosity now, but at the same time it is clearly a confession of past guilt. Perhaps this is the grimmest note of all; to be allowed back into the home, she has to pay, and the admission of her guilt is the price.

Edward Gallafent

Reflections on PEEPING TOM

(1960)

'It is the spectator, and not life, that art really mirrors' Oscar Wilde.

I

1990 sees the thirtieth anniversary of *Peeping Tom* and *Psycho*, excursions into domains of horror which had always lurked on the fringes of Michael Powell's and Alfred Hitchcock's most typical work. Opening within six months of each other, the two films were greeted with almost unprecedented critical outrage and hostility. Superficially and thematically, they share striking similarities. The central characters – awkward, diffident, vulnerable but likeable men in their mid-twenties – are both voyeuristic loners trapped in a milieu created for them by their dead parents. Here they relive the past, vainly attempting to instil life into the empty worlds in which they are entombed: Mark Lewis (Carl Boehm) repeatedly re-animates the dead by running his home movies, while Norman Bates (Anthony Perkins) attempts a semblance of vivification through taxidermy of birds, animals – and worse. Their peculiar and unnatural subjection to their dead parents has left them immature and impotent. The former quality is indicated when each offers milk to a potential female victim who has infiltrated his personal space; the latter by the phallic thrusts with which they stab to death women by whom they are aroused. As the journeys into the labyrinths of their respective psyches are pursued, however, it becomes apparent that the 'normal' world surrounding them also hides guilty secrets. Before each film has finished, a tangled web of relationships has been generated, involving watching and being watched – and incorporating the relationship of the spectator to the events depicted – investing the screen image with a more complex significance.

Psycho was quickly vindicated: commercially, by its enormous box office success; critically, by auteurist commentators who, through analysing its construction, demonstrated its underlying seriousness and established its position at the forefront of the Hitchcock canon. *Peeping Tom*, on the other hand, destroyed Powell's commercial career and, despite the enthusiasm of a growing minority of champions, it remained little known even within the critical establishment. So dark and extensive was the shadow cast by the initial reviews that, as late as November 1978, the central article in a book accompanying a Powell and Pressburger retrospective at the National Film Theatre was obliged to concern itself with explaining the early hostility in order to clear the way for critical debate (Ian Christie, 'The Scandal of *Peeping Tom*' in Ian Christie, ed., *Powell, Pressburger and Others*, British Film Institute, 1978).

The tide soon turned. The 1978 retrospective and the adoption of Powell as Chief Director in Residence by Francis Ford Coppola's American Zoetrope company started a generally favourable reappraisal, and the National Film Archive has restored several films made by Powell and Pressburger films for their company, The Archers. Raymond Durgnat, always fascinated by Powell's contradictions (*see* his pseudonymous article in *Movie* 14, 1965), listed many structural oppositions and parallels in *Peeping Tom* ('Movie Crazy' in *Framework* 9, Winter 1978/79), building on the early explication by Ian Johnson ('A Pin to See the Peepshow' in *Motion* 4, February 1963). Reynold Humphries ('*Peeping Tom*: Voyeurism, the Camera, and the Spectator' in *Film Reader* 4, 1979) applied rigorous semiotic analysis to key sequences in order to expose the mechanisms by which audience identification is achieved; and David Thomson filled in much of the background to the film for its twentieth anniversary, providing a historical auteurist commentary which rates Powell even above Hitchcock ('Mark of the Red Death' in *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1980).

In America, media coverage and renewed notoriety were attracted both by Martin Scorsese's successful efforts to have *Peeping Tom* re-released and by the resulting campaign by dismayed feminists to have it banned. In the field of film studies, though, the women's movement has celebrated the film for its deconstruction of female representation within mainstream cinema. Mandy Merck and Sue Clayton ('Obvious Nastiness? An Opinion' in *Spare Rib* 106, May 1981, pp.26-27) describe it as 'brilliant' and compare its 'self-conscious, almost melodramatic, use of music, camerawork, and lighting' with that of Brian De Palma in *Dressed to Kill*, the

Still: Peeping Tom – *Helen (Anna Massey) and Mark (Carl Boehm) watch a home movie.*

style of which 'does little but solicit the technical plaudits it received' as a way of elevating unacceptable representations of sex and violence to the status of art. They accept without question that in *Peeping Tom* these devices are employed to raise the spectators' consciousness by reminding us 'that the cine-camera is itself a peeping tom and that film-making and viewing are activities of aggressive phallic voyeurism' (*see also* E. Ann Kaplan, *Women & Film*, Methuen, New York, 1983, p.73).

The French had never doubted Powell's importance, and were quick to see the Freudian links between spectatorship and power, and the complicity of the audience in Mark's crimes (*see* Jean-Paul Török, ' "Look at the Sea": *Peeping Tom*' in *Positif* 36, 1960, translated in Christie). A problem with many of the assertions about this aspect of the film is that they remain simply assertions (e.g. Török's remark that 'the presence of the lizard in [young Mark's] bed is enough to tell us all that needs to be told about onanism and the castration complex' (p.61), which in fact tells us nothing). The present article attempts to examine further the self-reflexive aspects of *Peeping Tom* by relating it forward to the French-inaugurated film theory in the context of which it now makes clear sense, and backwards to traditional literary aesthetics, specifically to theories which either support or reject Romanticism, a mode which many critics have held was close to Powell's heart. It likens these theories to two dominant trends in cinema history, approaching the subject through exploration of literary parallels suggested by the film. Unless Powell completed the second part of his autobiography before his death at the beginning of 1990, we may never discover what his intentions were in *Peeping Tom*. Nevertheless, the first volume, *A Life in Movies* (Heinemann, 1986), appears to justify the present approach in that it contains over a hundred literary references and informs us that 'I had grown up with a keen appreciation of the art of writing, and when I chose

Still: Peeping Tom. *The prostitute (Brenda Bruce) opens the door to Mark. Note how this production still – unlike the corresponding shot in the film – preserves the convention of not looking directly at the camera.*

film-making as my medium of expression I brought the same ideals to it that I had already brought to literature' (p.410).

II

The lights dim, and *Peeping Tom* confronts us with an extreme close-up of a closed eye, which immediately opens to stare at the camera. Its diegetic object is, temporarily, withheld. It appears to be observing us observing it. Immediately, then, the mode of address has shifted from that of dominant cinema, with its rule that the actor should never look at the camera, to a discourse encouraging us to acknowledge our position as spectators, separate from, yet situated (and, in this case, scrutinised) by the text.

The screen, reflecting back to our eyes projected patterns of light, ostensibly a work of entertainment designed primarily to shock and terrify us, here resembles a giant mirror. The aptness of the simile is twofold. First, it suggests an analogy with Jacques Lacan's mirror phase as the origin of the seemingly individual Self (subject), defined through specularity (relations of looking and seeing) against the Other, and thus prefigures the consequent concern of psychoanalytic film theories with how the text constructs the spectator. Second, those of us who question why we watch horror films, or consider the ways in which they affect us, are familiar with the suggestion that what terrifies us on the screen is a projection of our own repressed fears, insecurities, and desires. (The films themselves acknowledge this: from *Frankenstein* to *The Fly*, by way of the doctors Jekyll and Quatermass, the terror released into an unsuspecting society almost invariably results from a central character's creative imagination or desire *to know*.)

The eye on the screen stares into us, just as we have little choice but to gaze into it. What we pay for at the box office before a horror or thriller film is the sensation of fear (equated here with being looked at). The picture provides a stimulus; in the most disturbing examples of these genres, the spectator's imagination 'releases' the horrors which elicit the desired response. 'Fear', as *Peeping Tom's* protagonist, Mark Lewis, insists, is itself – more than any image a movie is capable of showing – 'the most frightening thing in the world'.

Within seconds (after a momentary establishing shot, followed by a close-up of a camera being wrapped inside a coat), the film cuts, apparently to reveal what the eye is seeing. Although the shot/reverse-shot convention is disrupted by the two mysterious intervening shots, the spectator is sutured into the text in place of the now absent and, as yet, unidentified eye. Because we are familiar

with cinematic conventions, we do not mistake the screen for reality. Our sophistication necessitates the use of what David Pirie has described as 'one of the few genuinely Brechtian moments in the history of cinema' (*A Heritage of Horror*, Gordon Fraser, 1973, p.103), making us observe the spectacle through a latticed viewfinder to raise our awareness that we are watching a film and suspending our disbelief. Such is the power of an apparently subjective shot like this that, despite the interposed viewfinder, we are encouraged to believe in the reality of the diegesis. The viewfinder paradoxically suggests that we are present at the shooting, rather than a projection, of the event depicted. The effect of suture is reinforced by the use of colour, the naturalistic and detailed appearance of setting and performance, the whirring of the camera's motor on the soundtrack, and our conditioned attribution of 'authenticity' to shaky hand-held camerawork. We see only what the camera sees, and there is nothing in the *mise-en-scène* to suggest that it is not objectively recording reality. The continuous forward tracking shot, following the prostitute into an alley (pausing briefly as the operator's hand is seen dropping a film box into a bin), through a door, up a narrow staircase and through another door into her room, where we watch her start to undress, places us in the position of voyeur, forcing us into complicity with what is about to happen: the absence of cutting modulates our viewing into relentlessly prolonged gazing. At the same time, the impression we receive is that the camera, rather than presenting a flat, stagey rendering of objects deliberately displayed before it, is probing, penetrating, into the depths of a pre-existing reality. It is only when the mystery of what we have witnessed begins to be explained that this metaphor can be appreciated as gruesomely apposite.

The first few shots, then, introduce the twin notions of cinema-as-mirror and cinema-as-probe, both embodied in Mark's camera and both central to the concerns of *Peeping Tom*. Paradoxically, the absence of editing suggests an absence of mediation, while the presence of the viewfinder and the sound of the motor may remind us of the constructed nature of the image. The spectator has already been alienated while the film most persuasively involves by inviting identification with the unseen camera operator.

Through these tensions, Powell's horror film becomes the vehicle for a sustained exploration of the cinematic apparatus. As an index of the radical complexity of his project, several crucial points have yet to be noted. First, any identification with the camera operator is the result of both Powell's trickery and our own self-deception. For, assuming that normal rules of continuity are operating, there is no doubt (because the third shot in the film shows it) that the camera is wrapped, at chest level, inside a coat; nobody is looking through a viewfinder, and the viewfinder is not, despite what we see both

Still: Peeping Tom – *identification with Mark's camera makes the spectator a voyeur.*

now and in Mark's projection of the developed film, located at eye level, even if our willing suspension of disbelief suggests otherwise. (I am indebted to Michael Graves for this observation.) Second, the tracking shot is not, in fact, continuous; there is a jump cut immediately after the film box is deposited in the bin, but our acceptance, hence expectation, of conventional editing makes the cut virtually invisible unless the film is closely analysed. It may be, however, that we are invited by an audacious piece of provocation to apply such scrutiny – to surrender Imaginary pleasure in favour of Symbolic examination, as it were. The prostitute, in the first shot through the viewfinder, is apparently wearing one seamed and one seamless stocking, and the camera tilts and tracks in towards her legs to allow no mistake about this; yet as Mark follows her upstairs she has seams on both legs. It was in trying to account for this discrepancy that I noticed the jump cut – small wonder the film was misunderstood if this is the level of attention it assumes. Finally, it is easy to forget nowadays that the use of a pre-credits sequence was highly unorthodox in 1960 and would itself have constituted a shock; the postponement of the credits sequence, signifier that 'this is fiction', would have made the footage appear all the more raw and unmediated.

III

A route towards further examination of this aspect of *Peeping Tom* is the film-within-film device provided by Mark's own cinematic endeavours and the behind-the-scenes studio sequences on the soundstage where he is engaged as focus-puller. It would not be inappropriate if this reminded the spectator of the play-within-the-play in *Hamlet*, as the film contains many more pointers to this Shakespearean precursor than the allusion indicated by Johnson (p.37). These include Mark's physical resemblance to traditional conceptions of Hamlet (as in Laurence Olivier's 1948 screen version, made at Pinewood where Powell and Pressburger were filming *Black Narcissus*) – although, as will be seen, this is but one aspect of the polysemic image presented by the casting of Carl Boehm; the difficulty of ascertaining at first whether or not he is insane; the motivation apparently rooted in sexual jealousy and the Oedipus complex (Mark's father remarried after the death of his mother with the same indecent haste with which Gertrude married Claudius); the dark, claustrophobic ambience evoked by the lighting, colours, and settings; even the composition of the antepenultimate shots, which resemble a tableau of corpses at the end of a stage tragedy. Consider, too, that Mark's challenging of patriarchal institutions – the police, the film industry – by imposing on his female victims an extreme version of the experiments with which his father tortured him, echoes how Hamlet's challenging of Claudius, spurred on by his father's ghost, victimises the only two females in the play; and in both cases, the young man, driven by the memory of his father, has embarked on what is ultimately a suicidal mission. The importance of these parallels is that they hint at the use of the self-reflexive device of an interior text which illuminates the enclosing text, thus questioning its status in a way that reinforces the opening sequence. Given the mirror motif in *Peeping Tom*, it should not be forgotten that Hamlet's advice to the Players was that the function of art, 'both at the first and now, was and is, to hold, as 'twere, the mirror up to nature' – the 'nature' reflected by a film-within-a-film is the diegesis of the enclosing film.

Powell was extremely proud of his literary knowledge. Given that he claimed to 'have mirrored England to the English in my films' – even though 'they have not understood the image in the mirror' (*A Life in Movies*, p.81) – it seems reasonable to suggest that Hamlet's words meant more to Powell than simply an exhortation against stylised or exaggerated acting. What is important is that they express an aesthetic axiom, a philosophy central to two post-Shakespearean literary movements, both opposed to Romanticism: Neoclassicism, against which Romanticism had reacted, and, more recently, Realism.

To the 18th-century Augustans, art, finding its most perfect expression in poetry, tended towards an exact science. The poet's proper subject was humankind, especially the individual in relation to society. The aim, as Aristotle and Horace had taught, was to use craftsmanship and formal technique to provide, as precisely as possible, an imitation of human life for both instruction and pleasure.

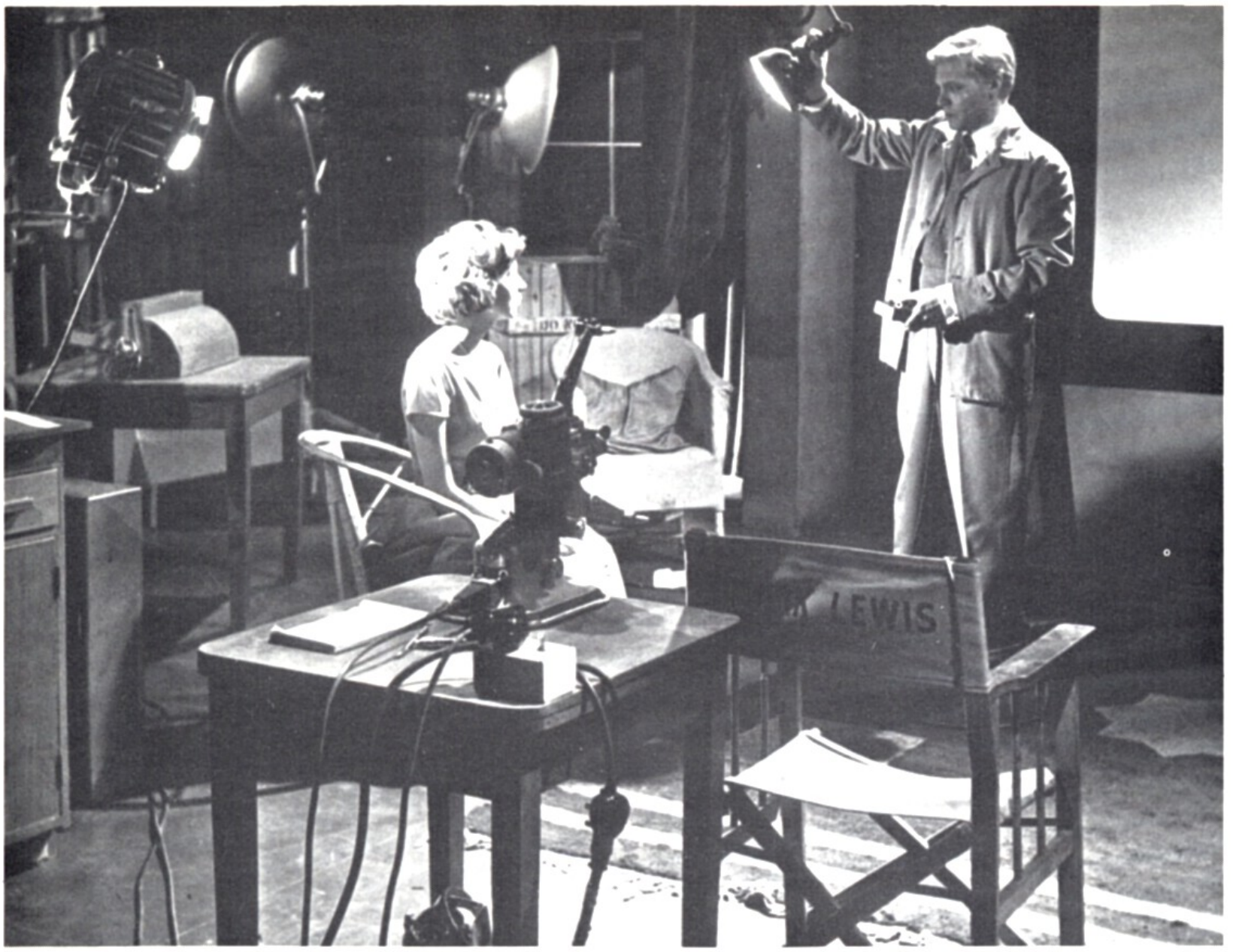
In the twentieth century, realist novelists were still striving to imitate reality. One impulse, represented by Arnold Bennett, Sinclair Lewis and Theodore Dreiser, was to forge a style so pure and unadorned that the language would not draw attention to itself (and hence to the fictional status of the work), but would act as a transparent medium conveying the created 'reality' that the writer sought to demonstrate. As Peter Mercer has observed, 'On this view of realism the ideal novel would be a flawless mirror to the world, but since language is never neutral, such a novel is impossible' (in Roger Fowler, ed., *A Dictionary of Modern Critical Terms*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973, p.157).

The classic realist text of dominant cinema, with its conventions of invisible editing, claims a similarly transparent signification; indeed Christian Metz defines 'abstract', 'avant-garde', or 'experimental' films precisely as those in which 'to one degree or another the cinematic signifier abandons the status of a neutral and transparent vehicle at the direct behest of a manifest signified which alone is important' ('The Imaginary Signifier' in *Screen* vol.16, no.2, 1975, p.40). Nevertheless, several decades have passed since film-makers and theorists believed that the camera, because it is a faithful recording instrument, has the power to represent reality as it is. Since the 1920s, it has been a truism that the initial selection of subject and audience, the choices that govern lighting, focus, camera-angle and framing, and the further selection and juxtaposition involved in editing, all militate against the neutrality of the camera eye.

Still: Peeping Tom – *Helen lies beside the dead body of Mark.*

Even so, film historians have long recognised the taxonomic convenience of identifying two main strands of film-making traceable to the earliest demónstrations of moving pictures. The first is the so-called realist tradition, exemplified by the short recordings of everyday scenes by the brothers Lumière. This tradition, arguably reaching fruition in various documentary movements, stems from the development of photography as a recording system; the aim is, in V.F. Perkins's words, 'to "possess" the real world by capturing its appearance' (*Film as Film*, Penguin, 1972, p.60) and to achieve the minimum possible intervention between object and image. Thus, reality is recorded in preparation for the later, more creative, process of editing. Such films are frequently didactic in intent, montage providing a powerful means of instructing and, where appropriate, delighting the audience (John Grierson's 'creative interpretation of reality').

The parallel development, largely indistinguishable from mainstream commercial movies, began cinematically with the fantasies of Georges Méliès; it had germinated considerably earlier, however, with the widespread popularity of optical toys and illusions which were produced solely to fascinate and please. Perhaps the purest form of this kind of film-making in commercial cinema is animation; but where the camera films real objects and people, the emphasis remains strongly on creation. Each film constructs its own image of reality which, according to the purpose, corresponds to a greater or lesser extent with the familiar experience of the audience. Hence this kind of cinema, summarised in the popular notion of the Dream Factory, embraces a wide range of essentially unrealistic conventions, from those of German Expressionism in the 1920s to those of the Busby Berkeley musical. To quote Perkins again, even when the aim is not pure fantasy, non-realist cinema 'permits the presentation of an ideal image, ordered by the film-maker's will and imagination' (p.60). The audience is confronted with a totally controlled vision in which an image of reality (that is, a fiction) is constructed by various devices available to the film-maker (*mise-en-scène*, performance, camerawork, editing, etc.) in order to be recorded in the final print. *Auteur* critics, and those film-makers who are privileged with a



Still: Peeping Tom – *Mark lights Helen before attempting to film her.*

modicum of creative freedom, are therefore able to regard film as a medium for artistic self-expression.

In practice, this Lumières/Méliès polarity is anything but clear-cut. Unconscious fantasies and ideology severely compromise the notion of either a neutral or a totally controlled vision. Nevertheless, despite the patently limited value of analogies between one art-form and another, the possibilities for self-expression offered by the fiction-fantasy tradition allow the dichotomy to be expressed in terms of, on the one hand, literary Neoclassicism and Realism and, on the other, Romanticism. Inherent in cinematic technology, as in writing, is the potential for both recording and creation. The tension between the two – 'fact against fiction, the eternal argument between the liar and the journalist' (*A Life in Movies*, p.237) – the basis of all cinema, has rarely been explored more searchingly than in *Peeping Tom*.

Powell, somewhat confusingly, described himself as 'obstinately Classical' (p.77), dismissed documentaries as being 'for disappointed feature filmmakers or out-of-work poets' (p.241), and was aware of a 'mystical sort of dual theme' between truth and poetry in his work (1971 interview with Kevin Gough-Yates, quoted by John Russell-Taylor in *Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1978, p.227). He has usually been seen by critics as a Romantic (*see* Durgnat, *A Mirror for England*, Faber & Faber, 1970, p.208), yet he bemoaned (*A Life in Movies*, p.624) the 'highly romantic – or should I say High Romantic' ending of one of his films, *Black Narcissus*, as the only conventional note in it! Clearly Powell was at home with these concerns; and to elaborate Mark Lewis's contradictions is to wrestle with the contradictions of the nebulous set of ideas which is often misleadingly termed Romantic theory.

IV

The substance of Romanticism is 'common life', to use William Wordsworth's vague phrase; but this is also the focus of those movements seemingly opposed to Romanticism. A crucial difference is that the Romantic is not concerned with presenting 'common life' to the audience as objectively as possible; the subject matter, rather, is the artist's response to his or her own perceptions, the laying-bare or projection of the ego as a celebration of emotional intensity and, implicitly, an affirmation of human spirit and the potential richness of experience. As a result, certain aspects of the world become charged with significance in that they hold special meanings for the artist; a personal symbolism emerges, and the only limitation imposed upon the artist's fantasies is that they should be couched in signifiers sufficiently recognisable to enable an audience, however small, to relate to them. The artist highlights and foregrounds areas of experience so as to force each member of the audience to see the world anew in a discourse which

Still: Peeping Tom – *Mrs Stephens (Maxine Audley), the blind seer, 'takes a picture' of the villain.*

assumes identification. Mark Lewis in *Peeping Tom* constitutes a correlative to this process, repeatedly directing spotlights in order to isolate the objects of his fascination, usually as a preliminary to filming them. The film's device of looking through his viewfinder as he does so reinforces the identification mechanisms inherent in mainstream cinema. (The metaphors used here to characterise Realism and Romanticism respectively are neatly echoed in the title of M.H. Abrams's major work on Romantic theory, *The Mirror and the Lamp* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1953). 'The title of the book identifies two common and antithetic metaphors of mind, one comparing the mind to a reflector of external objects, the other to a radiant projector which makes a contribution to the objects it perceives' (p.viii). The ambiguity of Mark's position is symbolised by his replacement of the lamp on his murderous camera with a mirror.

When subjective perceptions are represented through deliberate distortion the result is Expressionism. As a movement – associated with Germany, where it established its most enduring embodiment in cinema, and with urban settings, which it regards as a veneer over chaos – Expressionism is concerned with a visionary imagination's ecstatic release of psychic forces normally repressed by convention. Thus the casting of a German to play the psychotic Mark Lewis – bizarre, given that he was supposedly born and brought up in the Kensington house which he still inhabits – may be seen as an allusion both to the *Sturm und Drang* origins of Romanticism and to German Expressionism. After all, Boehm's performance has been regarded by many as a homage to Peter Lorre. So, too, it may remind us of the Gothic associations of the British horror tradition, for Mark's name is reminiscent of the 18th-century Gothic novelist, M.G. Lewis, who in *The Monk* created a magic mirror which linked sexual passion with evil and revealed the 'infinite danger within or beneath what had seemed familiar and safe' (Howard Anderson, Introduction to *The Monk*, Oxford University Press, 1973, p.vii).

Mark's position at the fringe of metropolitan society, which he is at once incorporated into and set apart from, like that of the psychopaths in Fritz Lang's thrillers, accords with Expressionism's concerns. It is worth recalling at this point that Powell made Lang his 'idol' and 'knew all of Lang's films by heart' (*A Life in Movies*, pp.516-517); note also that Mark's whistling in the opening shots of *Peeping Tom* and immediately before lighting the set for the murder of Viv (Moira Shearer) echoes the whistling of the child killer in *M* – itself a transitional film from Expressionism to psychological realism – and that in both films it is a blind person who identifies the culprit. While Mark's films cannot be described as Expressionist, he nevertheless struggles for the 'perfect' image in the external world, which reflects back to him his twisted concerns. He seems closest to finding it in the face of

Still: Peeping Tom – *a whole life stored on reels.*

Lorraine (Susan Travers), with her deformed beauty and 'eyes full of . . .' something inexpressible in words; the detectives investigating the killings have seen an approximation of his vision when they refer to the unforgettable expression on the faces of the corpses.

Several moments in *Peeping Tom* indicate that psychic impulses not far removed from Mark's 'deviant' drives are barely kept in check by bourgeois respectability: witness the amused fascination with which Helen (Anna Massey) is drawn towards a woman undressing at an uncurtained window, while Mark looks away in embarrassment, and her inability to detach her gaze from his movies; the revelation that Helen's blind mother (Maxine Audley) spends her time 'spying' on him from her room below; the presence of pornography in an envelope marked 'Educational Books' (itself a foreshadowing of Mark's father's academic work) purchased by a reader of *The Times*; and the discovery from Mark's tapes that Helen's highly conventional former suitor has virtually committed a rape. *Peeping Tom* offered these observations long before film theory began seriously examining the relationship between mainstream cinematic pleasure and unconscious libidinal drives.

Architecture was central to both German Expressionist cinema and Gothic literature as an objective correlative for the psyche. In *Peeping Tom*, Mark's house, wired for sound and full of characters watching each other, is both an organic extension of himself and a metaphor for the institution of cinema; he has never lived anywhere else and is himself the product of the experiments carried out by his father in these same rooms. His private and public selves are delineated by the darkroom/projection room – bathed in red light and into which no other person has been admitted before Helen – and the anteroom outside the dark, heavy curtain, in which he keeps his father's respected books and which provides a transition towards the outside world. With regard to Romanticism, the darkroom makes an interesting comparison with the film studio where Mark is employed. In the latter, the emphasis is on artifice: we witness rehearsals, we see Mark carefully preparing shots with his measuring tape, and bulky and sophisticated professional equipment repeatedly clutters the screen. The Romantic's aim, conversely, is spontaneous composition rather than artful manipulation towards foreseen ends. The subject matter, to quote Wordsworth again, is 'emotion recollected in tranquillity'. Consequently, art may be seen as a two-fold process: the initial act of perception and immediate response, followed by its contemplation and expression. Mark's *cinéma-vérité* ventures in 16mm capture all the spontaneity required of the first stage; his viewing of the developed footage in his darkroom, where he relives (literally *in camera*) the feelings experienced during the shooting, constitutes the second.

V

The contradiction between Mark as Romantic, engaged so fully in his art that he seems almost unable to perceive or think without the aid of cinematic equipment (which he carries with him everywhere), and Mark the documentarist, coldly and scientifically recording the horror in his victims' faces as they respond to their own infinitely multiplying fear, may be reconciled if one asks what the subject of his filming really is. The murder shots are not isolated exercises in voyeurism made for their own sake so much as material for an extremely thorough documentary about Mark Lewis. Why else would he make so much effort to record the progress of the police investigation closing in on him or, after the first murder, the corpse being carried out on a stretcher and bundled into an ambulance? He is in a way continuing his father's work, of which he himself was the subject.

This emphasis on the artist as subject places him squarely in the Romantic tradition of such literary works as Wordsworth's *Prelude*, Lord Byron's *Childe Harold*, the essays of Charles Lamb and William Hazlitt, Thomas De Quincey's *Confessions of an English Opium Eater*, Samuel Taylor Coleridge's *Biographia Literaria*, and Thomas Carlyle's *Sartor Resartus*. These, however, are largely fictionalised autobiographies of the mind, presentations of an image of the self. Mark's madness is his inability to distinguish thus between artist and persona. He is utterly dedicated, subsuming his entire life to his art. More important, he seems to have no existence independent of his film image: 'I've been watched all my life – I've never had a moment's privacy,' he tells Helen, and his memories are stored on film. He achieves with little effort the transformation of himself into his art which is the aim of the Romantic dreamer, and was the sacrifice demanded by Lermontov (Anton Walbrook) in Powell's *The Red Shoes*. Mark tries to transcend life itself, to become a figure of mythic grandeur in the heroic solitude of his self-orchestrated death.

Mark is almost inarticulate verbally; the semiotic material constituting his consciousness seems to be composed of cinematic images rather than words. If, for Lacan, the human subject is constructed in and through language, then Mark – who had movie images of himself in place of a mother – is literally constructed through cinema. Because he consequently behaves as though he believes his to be a different order of existence from that of the rest of humanity, he cannot commune with others except by turning them, too, into images. He can only achieve consummation, an authentic shared experience with another, by means of his bayoneted tripod and mirror which enable him to turn his victims into images for their own perusal (as has happened to him) at the very moment of penetration. His films thus go beyond cinema which records (documentary) and beyond cinema which records

Still: Peeping Tom – *Mark takes the life of Viv (Moira Shearer) along with her image.*

that which has been constructed for the camera (fiction), for his camera-weapon creates its subject (woman-as-victim, her fear and her death) at the moment of recording. It destroys the reality while simultaneously preserving the image.

In achieving this, Mark's objectification of his victims – replacing their individuality with his imposed vision – is a grotesque exaggeration of what much recent criticism argues is routinely done to women in conventional representations. In a pin-up, for example, or in mainstream cinema which fetishes female stars for an audience addressed as male, the woman before the camera is less important than her image. It is worth noting, therefore, that Mark's victims are a prostitute, a dancer, and a pornographic model: all professions in which women are paid to be looked at. This makes them complicit in Mark's voyeurism – for their exhibitionism is its corollary – without making them culpable; as Lacan's schema asserts, their identities as alienated subjects within this relationship of specularity are structured into patriarchal ideology, and this emphasises that Mark's voyeurism is not uniquely his problem. What his mirror, blade, and camera do is subsume Lacan's Imaginary (the unified Self) and the Symbolic (the mirror image as signifier of self) into the Real at the moment of death, thereby revealing the ideology in all its horror as its victims are destroyed.

Mark's is the perennial Romantic dilemma: the struggle to achieve empathy with the object of his perception in order to reconcile his inner vision with his outer experience, and so end his isolation, is futile – the camera, like any artistic medium, has an inherent tendency to transform, and thereby betray, both. The perfect integrating form, the Imaginary, is an ideal and does not exist: that is why Mark's films are black and white instead of colour; why he declares, 'Whatever I photograph I always lose' (a reminder of Edgar Allan Poe's *The Oval Portrait* and other similar tales of tormented artists); and why he has to continue his solitary quest. Until he finds in the model Millie (Pamela Green) the double of his hated stepmother, he cannot effect a recorded image indistinguishable from his perceptions, and so affirm his imagined status as the inhabitant of a celluloid world. He is, to use Helen's phrase, a 'magic camera', preying on the real world for the film that is his life. Having told a bystander that he works for *The Observer* as he films the aftermath of the first murder, he goes into the newsagent's shop for which he provides pornographic photographs: here he spreads a number of copies of the *Daily Mirror*, which features a picture of his victim on the front, in such a way that she becomes a multiple image, like film frames. The idea that his own life is a film is reinforced when on several occasions he is shown peeping in through the window of Helen's mother's sitting room, the frame of which exactly resembles that of his viewfinder, and, more decisively, when in his last moments he sets off a bank of individual still cameras – 'Watch them say goodbye, one by one' – in a reversal of Eadweard Muybridge's original experiment which made moving pictures possible: at the moment of death, he turns himself into a series of still images. The point is underlined in that the final shots of *Peeping Tom*, his life – his fictional role – having run its course, show a film coming to its end and slapping round and round on a full reel.

Still: Peeping Tom. The Observer *and* The Mirror *– Mark in the newsagent's shop.*

Still: Peeping Tom. *'Watch them say goodbye, one by one' – Mark's suicide, recorded by still cameras.*

VI

The psychosis that Mark suffers because of his father's experiments almost achieves the aim of the Romantic artist. Romanticism particularly values childhood perceptions as a way of blurring the separation between Self and Other that seems to be absent in Mark – of returning to the Imaginary, we might say. It is therefore interesting that Mark is presented as a child, severely traumatised and fixated in the stage of his life when he was given his first camera, who has never grown up. (The 'magic camera' of Helen's book, of course, sees grown-ups as they were when they were children, as do Mark's film archives of himself.) Other characters address him as 'Boy', 'Old Boy', and 'Sonny'. Helen, at her 21st birthday party, is presented with an enormous key as a token of her adulthood; Mark, however, was never allowed keys and is shown to be unable to use one until, at the end, he locks himself and Helen in the darkroom immediately before his suicide. Romantic self-expression is thus linked with Freudian psychology (again helping to explain Mark's Germanic accent and appearance).

A particularly important moment, explaining Mark's tender regard for Helen, is his reaching out to touch her at the same time as his younger screen self reaches out and touches his beloved mother's corpse; in psychoanalytic terms, the male longs to find in the object of his desire a return to the unity enjoyed in pre-Symbolic infancy. In the light of his father's sadistic experiments with the lizard in the bed, the complexity of Mark's feelings is suggested by the lizard-like dragonfly brooch that he later buys Helen, as well as by the very fact of his having allowed her at all into the womb-like security of the darkroom. The crucial scene, however, occurs in the movie he shows her of the day his father (Powell himself) went on honeymoon with his sexually provocative new wife. During a part of this scene, Mark is given his first camera; he immediately turns it upon his new mother, who is for the moment operating the camera that is filming him. Without attempting to psychoanalyse Mark (which Durgnat has done with great erudition in *Framework* 9), it is not difficult to surmise that this combination of sexual desire, jealousy, hatred, mutual watching, and mutual filming accounts for his psychopathic treatment of attractive young women in his later

Still: Peeping Tom – *Mark with the last of his victims, Millie (Pamela Green), his stepmother's double.*

years. (Helen's line, 'Naughty boy – I hope you were spanked!' in response to a shot of young Mark watching a couple locked in an embrace, suggests there is nothing abnormal in his equation of sexuality and punishment.) Most important of all, the giving of the camera is shot out of focus: this point is drawn to our attention in the dialogue lest we should miss it. In that the aim of psychoanalysis is to encourage the patient to relive the traumatic experience until s/he is able to view it clearly and come to terms with it, Mark's profession as focus-puller is no accident. (To underline this, the psychiatrist assigned to the police investigation in the studio declares himself 'a focus-puller in a way'.) Mark finally manages to find a satisfactory object for his entangled impulses in his last victim, Millie, who is linked with the equally buxom blonde stepmother by Mark's enigmatic instruction to her to 'Look at the sea': as Johnson points out (p.38), this is conceivably something that Mark had heard his father say to his new mother, as she is first presented to us in a home movie 'rushing out of the sea and bursting all out of her very brief bikini.' He murderously desires his victims because they are substitutes for his stepmother; she is both hated as conspirator with his father in the Oedipal drama and jealously desired as a substitute for his dead mother.

Powell explicitly, if mischievously, identified himself with Mark. On *The South Bank Show* (London Weekend Television, 27th October 1986), when *A Life in Movies* was launched, he had himself filmed sitting alongside Mark's projector, watching Mark sitting alongside that same projector watching the footage of the first murder. 'Hello, Peeping Tom speaking,' he greeted us. Anyone wishing to read the film psychoanalytically is therefore offered a field day by the autobiography. That conventional criticism eschews such methods, preferring cool objective detachment, is half the joke; but the playfulness does not disguise the fact that *Peeping Tom* is an intensely personal film for which Powell gambled his career. The following observations are offered as corroboration, rather than evidence, for the present interpretation. Powell repeatedly likened his life to a river running towards death, 'the open sea' (p.670), and describes the sea as 'the mother of us all' (p.65). He had read Charles Kingsley's *The Water Babies* (p.27), in which an orphan, Tom (Powell's father was called Tommy), follows a river 'Down to the sea!' where he achieves unity ('Play by me, bathe in me, mother and child') with Mother Carey, producer of 'millions of new-born creatures, of more shapes and colours than men ever dreamed.' The first film Powell worked on was

Mare Nostrum (1925), in which a sea goddess 'becomes an obsession with the young man, and he seems to see her likeness in the face of the woman who betrays him' (p.128). Powell appears to have had an extraordinarily close relationship with his own mother, who is emphatically associated with the sea: 'She always said that she never knew what luxury was until she lay in bed . . . looking straight out over the waves rolling in' (p.91); childhood holidays were spent with her in a rented cottage which 'faced the sea; the spring tides reached the foot of the steps' (p.77); she 'took a house . . . which had no garden but the sea' (p.28); and she rented a seaside hut called 'The Look Out' (p.205); Powell has already called himself 'a Peeping Tom' (p.31) and described his private voyeurism hidden in a hollow elm tree (p.83) while a schoolboy at Dulwich. Mother 'was a good photographer', too (p.26), and she and Powell 'took one another's pictures' (p.163). Plenty here, even with a large pinch of salt, to link the mother-figure with film-making and the sea in this story of an ungrown boy (p.20) 'determined to impose his view of the world upon any audience he can get' (p.79).

Thomson observes (*Sight & Sound*, Autumn 1980) that *Peeping Tom* had its origins in a film on the life of Freud which had to be abandoned after work started on John Huston's *Freud – The Secret Passion*. This dimension of *Peeping Tom* brings the argument full circle. Its stressing of the influences of heredity (in the sense that psychosexual developmental stages are innate) and environment (leading to Mark's arrested psychosocial development) accords with Naturalist treatments of human behaviour. We encounter Mark Lewis in a cinematic fantasy not far removed from other horror films; but to understand him, the privacy-invading apparatus of objective documentary-style cinema (his father's films) has to be invoked. In this way, the two are shown to be complementary and mutually reinforcing, rather than in opposition: the centrifugal force of Expressionism throws out clues about the unconscious, while realism seeks to draw together disparate elements of external reality. If we care enough about Mark Lewis to seek an explanation, it is because, irrespective of whether the film is realist or Expressionist, it is in the nature of the medium, enhanced by Powell's skill and sanctioned by our own scopophilia, to arouse our curiosity and convince us of the reality of what we see. For 109 minutes, deprived by the theatre's darkness and quietness of any alternative object of attention, we become – like Mark – unable, within the terms of the film, to differentiate between reality and fiction: the screen becomes our eyes.

By extending the image, the institution of cinema becomes the inside of the spectator's head. This somewhat fanciful idea, it should be said, accords with the views held by Powell on the relationship of the artist and spectator (between which he did not distinguish) with cinema:

'. . . the majority of film makers of my generation have a style very much their own . . . Not me, *I live cinema*. I chose the cinema when I was very young, sixteen years old, and from then on my memories virtually coincide with the history of cinema . . . I'm not a director with a personal style, *I am simply cinema*.' (Interview with Bertrand Tavernier and Jacques Prayer in *Midi-Minuit Fantastique* 20, October 1968. Quoted by Christie, p.59.)

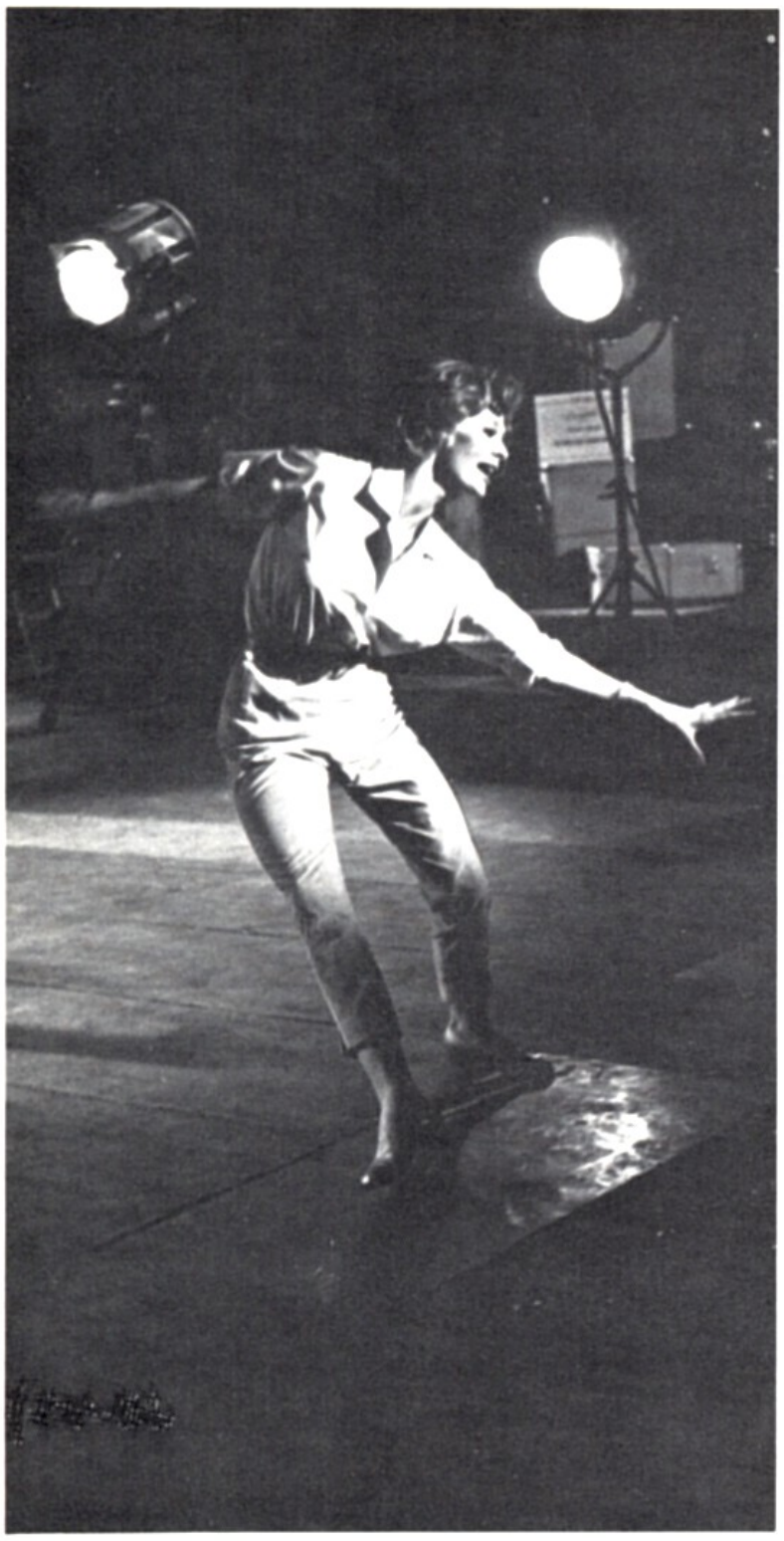
It accords also with Metz's insistence that 'the cinematic institution is not just the cinema industry . . . (The institution is outside us and inside us . . .)' ('The Imaginary Signifier', pp.18-19); and his reminder that 'during the projection [the] camera is absent, but it has a representative consisting of another apparatus, called precisely a "projector". An apparatus the spectator has behind him, *at the back of his head . . . – 'Derrière la tête'*, the translator, Ben Brewster, points out, means 'at the back of one's mind' as well as 'behind one's head' (p.52).

The link between the public institution of commercial cinema and the private world of individual fantasy is carefully alluded to: the Pinewood sound stage on which the second murder occurs is guarded against intrusions from reality by a red light outside, while Mark's room is suffused with red light inside; and both are linked by the red light under which Mark poses Millie dressed as a prostitute against a backdrop resembling the alleyway from the opening sequence. The sound of a dripping tap, a horror film cliché which nevertheless helps create tension during the sequences in his room, is in turn echoed in the percussion section of the tape recording to which his second victim, the would-be starlet Viv, dances in the studio.

Reality and fiction blend, because cinematic perception cannot tell them apart. As Laura Mulvey has argued,

'There are three different looks associated with cinema: that of the camera as it records the profilmic event, that of the audience as it watches the final product, and that of the characters at each other within the screen illusion. The conventions of narrative film deny the first two and subordinate them to the third, the conscious aim being always to eliminate intrusive camera presence and prevent a distancing awareness in the audience.' ('Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema' in *Screen*, vol.16, no.3, Autumn 1975.)

What is so remarkable about *Peeping Tom* is that it made this three-fold 'look' explicit some fifteen years before Mulvey's formulation. In the opening sequence, the eye introduces the theme of 'the look': 1) The spectator knows that someone is filming (i.e. Mark's look accords with Mulvey's notion of the male gaze within the narrative); 2) the viewfinder denotes 'the look' of the camera; and 3) the spectator is situated identically with 1) and 2). Few films make this apparent, but in *Peeping Tom* the mechanism is developed further so that the power of these three looks is redoubled by adding the victim's own look in the mirror – the self-conscious look of the exhibitionist and the accepting look of the female spectator – thereby implicating *everybody*



Still: Peeping Tom – *Viv dancing in the studio.*

in patriarchal culture. The murders actually collapse five looks (Mark's, his victim's, his camera's, Powell's camera's, and ours) into one: the Imaginary unity of cinema. The only potential victims to escape, Helen and her mother, have some inkling of what is happening: one refuses to look and the other cannot.

To the initiated, private jokes emphasise the point about our inability to distinguish between what we see (fiction) and what we think we see (reality). A sighted actress plays Helen's blind mother; a blind actor (Esmond Knight) plays a film director. But it is not until we have read about these involuted games that we become aware of the latter fact, which should have been obvious (and is, on subsequent viewings). On the studio set, an actress (Shirley Anne Field) fails to faint convincingly; finally she genuinely faints, and the director decides to print the take; the spectator may or may not remain aware that her faint is at the same time only a feint for Powell in *Peeping Tom*. On the same set, Viv is fetishised in a supposedly spontaneous dance, which is clearly elaborately choreographed and highly rehearsed, before meeting her fate; despite its resemblance to a set piece from a Hollywood musical, the sequence does no more than mildly threaten the film's credibility. Powell's primary interest was in why this should be so. He is more concerned with the psychology of viewing, the relationship between film-maker, audience, subject, and medium, and the audience's willingness to be deceived, than with the individual case of Mark Lewis. Our identification and empathy with Mark elaborate the opening image: at the same time as he is the object of our attention, he mirrors our position as spectators. He is the quintessential cinema-goer, the 'Everyman' of the twice-mentioned film theatre, the watcher who, under the spell of the medium, suspends his discrimination between degrees of fiction and reality. He meets his horror-show death, to the accompaniment of his own recorded screams, in the ultimate 'snuff' movie, in which subject and film-maker, producer and consumer, victim and exploiter, voyeur and exhibitionist, self and image, finally collapse.

VII

Durgnat once complained (*Movie* 14, 1965) that Powell's 'central problem as an artist has been his tendency to fall between the two stools of romanticism and realism, to "escape from" (or schematise) the latter, yet only "play with" the former.' This assertion is too facile to be applied to *Peeping Tom*, implying, as it does, Powell's failure to master either approach. For while the film portrays the activities of a Romantic artist, it is not itself a work of Romanticism. Just as Mark's death is recorded by automatic cameras (What could be less personal?) thereby transmuting subjectivity into the purest objectivity, so Powell's presentation of Mark, for all its exquisite style, remains calculatedly indifferent. It is our viewing habits – our compulsive need to become involved – that are chiefly responsible for our closeness to Mark.

I have aimed to show that Mark Lewis mythologises himself through self-destructive dedication to Romantic principles while at the same time pursuing his object by means of a rigorous commitment to the methods of documentary realism. Thus I have tried to establish grounds for suggesting that Powell's main concern in *Peeping Tom* was to manipulate and draw attention to the workings of both of these modes as a way of trying to define the cinematic apparatus, rather than to embrace either one of them. Treating Durgnat's terms as synonymous with the two traditions identified here, it should be mentioned that the timing of *Peeping Tom* coincided with a pivotal moment in British film-making: both the Free Cinema documentary movement and the success of Hammer during the 'fifties provided the wider background; more immediately, *Room at the Top* (1958) heralded a wave of social realist films which represented a further reaction by both film-makers and audiences against the cosiness of Ealing and the output of television. Evocative of the critically unacceptable horror

tradition in its self-consciously extravagant use of colour, its sadistic emphases, and the penny-dreadful nonsense of its plot, *Peeping Tom* probed into the viewer's psyche and mirrored its contents; alluding also to the black-and-white imprints of documentary and social realism, it probed the world in which we live. The latter process linked together institutions such as black market pornography, the film industry, and the police (who are presented loitering on street corners watching Mark as he watches Helen) in a way that implies an essential and universal similarity between the various types of watching. It contributed too to the perennial debate about media effects – 'Don't be a silly boy,' says a recording of Mark's father, who is turning him into an uncontrolled monster by means of a diet of sex and horror, 'there's nothing to be afraid of'; by this time we should be questioning the basis of our enjoyment of *Peeping Tom*. It portrayed an image of ourselves more honest than anything by Woodfall, years in advance of Anglo-American film theory.

Peeping Tom, then, encapsulates some of the conflicting forces which characterised British cinema at the time of its release. Of particular interest in this respect is Christie's account of why it met with so much hostility, which he regards as

> 'a consequence of the dominant aesthetic in British cinema of uncritical realism, which requires that any film be classified either as "entertainment" (i.e. non-serious) or as a form of "propaganda" (i.e. making a socially or personally ameliorative appeal) . . . The criteria in play, the "reading model" that the reviews propose, indeed impose, is a drearily familiar one. It rests upon a utilitarian aesthetic which, at one and the same time, divorces cinema from any effective involvement in the social formation, yet also seeks its justification in a "relevance" to certain narrowly prescribed concerns – those of liberal humanism' (p.58).

Once again the Méliès/Lumières dichotomy may be invoked. On the one hand, the experience valued is engagement with harmless, reassuring subject-matter ('entertainment', 'escapism'); on the other is complacent but dutiful non-engagement with some objective other ('kitchen sink drama', 'documentary'). *Peeping Tom*'s refusal to provide either uncomfortably compounds both, thereby drawing attention to and dislocating the viewer's safe relation to cinema (one which has rarely, other than for comic purposes, been overtly acknowledged).

As Imaginary, *Peeping Tom* is disagreeable, unpleasurable, crudely melodramatic; as Symbolic, it is a provocative essay. This depends on how the spectator reads it. For example, the match cuts – linking Mark's photographic chemicals to Mrs Stephens's whisky, or a slice of birthday cake to a film director's order to 'Cut!' – will make the narrative progression smoother if they are noticed only at a preconscious level; but they will cloy the progression, make the viewing experience spatial rather than temporal, objective rather than involved, if they are recognised.

With the conventional security of preconceptions removed, as in Brechtian theatre, the kinds of question touched upon here inevitably raise themselves. Healthy spectators of *Peeping Tom* are punished according to the degree of their involvement in the process of viewing – for example, by the horror of the first murder and the shock of Lorraine's deformity, neither of which is presented as though intended to induce relief or pleasure (that is, as the culmination of an orchestrated sequence of suspense such as might be found in a more conventional spine-chiller) and neither of which permits a comfortable, conditioned response. Like Helen in Mark's projection room, critics were rightly disturbed by what they saw and could only give utterance to the ambivalence of their feelings in modulations of her remark: 'I like to understand what I'm watching.'

Certain film-makers – for whom, as for Powell, films are 'life . . . art . . . mistress . . . religion' (*A Life in Movies*, p.225) – *have* understood. One of the voyeuristic angels in Wim Wenders's *Wings of Desire* (1988) relinquishes his immortality in a monochrome heaven for human love on a Technicolor earth in what is both a homage to *A Matter of Life and Death* and a reversal of *Peeping Tom*; the parallel is made explicit by a self-touching gesture that echoes Mark's when he is aroused (giving the brooch to Helen, or watching the couple necking) and by an exact duplication of the opening shot. In *Mishima* (1985), Paul Schrader uses films-within-the-film to illuminate the life of another artist who chose to transform himself into his own glorious creation through ritual suicide. And as screenwriter of *The Last Temptation of Christ* (1988), working with Scorsese (Powell's 'friend and greatest fan': *A Life in Movies*, p.543), he makes a claim for Powell's film which must be unparalleled in movie appreciation: thanks are offered at the start of the final credits to none other than Leo Marks, the script-writer of *Peeping Tom*, and Christ is given the dying words 'It is accomplished', immediately before a cut to coloured patterns on the screen, in which film frames and sprocket holes are clearly in evidence. Painted eyes and tamed lizards abound in the brothel scene featuring Mary Magdalen, and the film is, after all, about a man tormented by visions, dedicated to a single cause, and sorely tested by the demands of his physically absent but ever-present, all-seeing father.

Posterity will recognise *Peeping Tom* as a seminal work. What value will ultimately be placed upon it is another matter, for the fact remains that it is allusive and tentative in its exploration of cinema, and requires much extrinsic information before satisfactory explication can be approached. Its critical status has changed in accordance with the ideology of criticism, and the controversies surrounding it will continue, but thanks to developments in film theory and the enthusiasm of those critics who insisted on defending it during Powell's years in the wilderness, it should never again be dismissed on the dubious grounds of taste.

N.A. Morris

(nostalgia)

(1971)

Like many other examples of 'structural film' (defined by P. Adams Sitney in *Visionary Film* (Oxford University Press, New York, 1974) as 'a cinema of structure in which the shape of the whole film is predetermined and simplified, and it is that shape which is the primal impression of the film'), the late Hollis Frampton's *(nostalgia)* (1971) is extremely and elegantly simple in its concept and engrossingly complex, as well as highly pleasurable, in its effects and implications.

Despite its simplicity, the film's structure is quite difficult to describe, and an initial description, as so often with 'structural' films (think of the description of Michael Snow's *Wavelength*, 1967, as 'a 45 minute zoom across a room'), can be very deceptive. *(nostalgia)* runs for 36 minutes and is shot in black and white. The images consist of thirteen still photographs (several of New York painters, but also some of shop windows and other items, at least eleven taken by Frampton himself in the period 1958-1965, when he was a still photographer, and one or probably two copied from elsewhere, perhaps from magazines. The sound consists of a voice-over narration which describes the photographs and gives some account (often very personal and idiosyncratic) of the circumstances in which they were taken. What makes the film so fascinating and challenging is that this structure is modified to the point of transformation by further structuring elements. First, the voice-over narration always refers not to the still photograph we are looking at, but to the *next* one. Inevitably, this means that the first photograph we see (a formally composed photograph of what appears to be a professional dark room, probably not taken by Frampton) is never described in the voice-over, while the final segment of voice-over (perhaps the most intensely personal and enigmatic) describes a photograph which we never see. Second, the still photographic prints have been shot, from directly above, lying on an electric heating ring: as we look at each print, the shape of the ring soon begins to burn through and ignite the print, so that by the end of each segment we are looking at the burnt-out cinders of the original prints. Between each print-to-cinder segment is a short stretch of black leader, so that each segment 'starts up' anew.

Needless to say, the initial energies of the spectator (certainly any spectator unfamiliar with the film) are largely taken up with imposing some sense on the basic elements of the film's structure or system, particularly the sound/image disjunction. After three or four segments, this system is usually relatively clear and the spectator's energies can be released toward some of the other things that are going on in the film. Yet despite the soon-established familiarity with the basic system, it retains some qualities of enigma. The spectator's mind can never quite relinquish the frustrated memory of the first images and sounds which, as a result of confusion, he/she did not properly take in, particularly the first image, difficult to see anyway but rendered almost indecipherable by an apparently 'wrong' voice-over description. Similarly, since the film ends with a voice-over account of a photograph we do not see, there remain, at the end, tantalising questions about the nature of this unseen photograph and the further possibility that the film may be circular: is the final voice-over the description of that only half-absorbed first image, now already thirty-five minutes in the past? (In fact, it is not, but the film's system sets this up as a possibility to be definitely entertained, at least on a first or even second viewing.)

For any spectator not totally in thrall to 'the attention-getting density of narrative events in a Hollywood film' (as Fred Camper put it in the American Federation of Art's *History of the American Avant-Garde Cinema*, New York, 1976), there are considerable 'pleasures' here. Not, self-evidently, the kinds of pleasure associated with narrative (though they may well be related): these are more self-conscious, more consciously participatory pleasures of problem-solving and formal play, the kinds of pleasure often associated with what has sometimes been referred to as 'formalism'. Beyond their often teasing and seductive first appearance, 'structural' films, and *(nostalgia)* is no exception, have a rigorously didactic – or perhaps the more correct term here is epistemological – impulse: they invite contemplation of formal relationships within film and photography. This obvious stress on the formal should not be taken to imply that they are somehow empty or meaning or function; they often have to do with some of the most basic conventions through which we apprehend photographed or filmed reality. *Wavelength*, for example, at one level demonstrates and explores the extreme instability of the supposedly 'objective' photographic process, constantly challenging our perception,

while at another level questioning some of the elements and assumptions associated with narrative movement (and this is not by any means to exhaust the possibilities or implications of the film). A powerful relationship between spectator and film is set up, but it is of course a different kind of relationship to the one we tend to enter into with a dramatic narrative (and, equally, different from our relationship with the 'lyrical' films of, say, Stan Brakhage or Bruce Baillie, or with the 'counter-cinema' films of, say, Jean-Luc Godard or Jon Jost). Our relationship to a film like *(nostalgia)* is a very self-conscious and contemplative one. We do not simply reflect on the film: the film's structure encourages and enables us to reflect upon the way(s) we connect with the film. As Simon Field and Peter Sainsbury put it when they interviewed Frampton in 1972, 'your films are about the consciousness of the people who are looking at them, aren't they?' and 'I can see the way I project my thoughts into the film, . . . it's a sort of feedback system' (*Afterimage* 4, Autumn 1972).'

The most obvious example of this process derives directly from the displacement between voice-over and image, once we become familiar with the system. During each segment of the film, we are involved in looking at the still photograph, taking in what is represented in it before this represented content disappears as the photographic paper, the 'material' as it were, begins to be consumed by flames – a relatively short time – after which we are looking at a different image, of burnt paper (which nevertheless has a relationship to the original photograph). While looking at each photographic image, we need to try to recall as accurately as possible what the voice-over had provided in the way of description and context for it in the previous segment. Naturally, it is rather difficult to 'see' the image, since we have already formed an expectation of it, and when we do see it, a process of readjustment takes place. While readjusting and seeing in this way, we are listening to, and realising that we need to remember, a new section of voice-over commentary, describing the next image. Even when the film's system is perfectly clear, it is still almost impossible not at least to make an effort, however briefly, to relate the voice-over to the simultaneous image.

As I have indicated, the process of storing up the voice-over in order to bring it to bear on the next image inevitably involves forming certain expectations, imagining what the next image might look like (and very often it is a surprise in one way or another). In this process, we become acutely aware of time as duration, acutely aware, as in so much 'structural' work, that the time allowed us to perform certain operations is being strictly regulated by the film-maker and the system he/she has set in place. Despite its apparent minimalism, *(nostalgia)* is in no sense a 'slow' film; there is a lot for the spectator to do. All the mental activity involved and the agility it demands do not take into account the fact that for a lot of screen time we are looking not at the still photograph but the burning or burnt-up still photograph on the hotplate, which sets up an entirely different set of questions. Before considering some of these, it is worth remarking that the processes occasioned by the system of displacement can be usefully compared, in a perhaps rather abstract or schematic way (but, again, a way that we are very conscious of) with the (largely unconscious) processes that the spectator of a traditional narrative engages in: noting (narrative) information for future use, projecting forward narrative hypotheses, drawing on previously given information or clues to understand new narrative situations, and so on. Not that there is much evidence of any conventional narrative here: if there are residual 'narrative' elements of any kind in *(nostalgia)*, they are certainly residual, consisting of certain tensions about the forward projections, perhaps, or about the precise way in which the heat will penetrate and consume the still photographic prints, since no two are consumed in the same way. In the sense that the photographs (at least the eleven which are Frampton's own) are chronological (if the voice-over is to be trusted, which is not entirely clear) and that the commentary is often strongly personal recollection, there are plainly autobiographical, and hence perhaps residually narrative, dimensions here too (concerned largely with the crisis that caused Frampton to change from still to movie photographer).

One of the common concerns of 'structural' films, or those sometimes placed in the subcategory of 'structural-material' films, was the nature of celluloid and the film/photographic process, as in *Wavelength*. Hence, for example, Paul Sharits's observation that: 'by re-examining the basic mechanisms of motion pictures and by making these fundamentals explicitly concrete, I feel as though I am working toward a completely new conception of cinema. . . I wish to abandon imitation and illusion and enter directly into the higher drama of: celluloid, two-dimensional strips; individual rectangular frames; the nature of sprockets and emulsion; projector operations; the three-dimensional light beam. . . .' (statement at the Fourth International Film Festival, Knokke le Zoute, Belgium, quoted in Peter Gidal, *Structural Film Anthology*, British Film Insitute, 1976). Such an ontological approach to the material reality of film (discussed by Peter Wollen in his essay ' "Ontology" and "Materialism" in Film' (in *Screen*, vol.17, no.1, Spring 1976, reprinted in Wollen's *Readings and Writings*, Verso, 1982) was not entirely characteristic of Frampton – nor indeed of Snow – but *(nostalgia)* nevertheless asks us to consider a number of important questions related to the nature and status of photography. The burning photographs on the hotplate, for example, set down a number of delicious paradoxes. The photographic prints themselves have a kind of dullness which seems to emphasise their photographic status as frozen, 'dead' moments of past time. 'Deadness' and time past are then exploded as the 'presentness' of the heat beginning to consume the print asserts itself. The prints give the impression of 'coming alive' as their represented

content disappears, their edges curl, the charring extends to cover the whole print and the curled cinder of the print continues to bounce and twist with the heat. This 'coming alive' is itself, of course, being recorded on film in a new act of freezing. These observations are further marked both by the absolute immobility of the camera position and by the initial domination of the image by the flatness of the photographic print being replaced by the illusion of (albeit very shallow) spatial depth provided by the curled photographic prints and the now more visible hotplate itself. Similarly, although we soon know that the camera is positioned above the prints, looking directly down, the spectator has a strong urge, repeated with each new print (again, due to the force of convention), to see it as upright, as if photographed on a wall. Thus, each time the photograph begins to burn, a renewed minor spatial reorientation is required.

Nevertheless, Frampton's main interests in the nature of photography seem to lie elsewhere. Two areas in particular become foregrounded. First, *(nostalgia)* opens up a large gap or disjunction (primarily, of course, through the voice-over/image displacement) between verbal description and photographic images, which are here shown to be both essentially different from and inadequate to each other. For example, the tenth image of the film is described thus (while, of course, we have been looking at a different photograph and then at its ashes):

'Late in the Fall of 1964, a painter friend asked me to make a photographic document of spaghetti, an image he wanted to incorporate into a work of his own.

I set up my camera above an empty darkroom tray, opened a Number 2 can of Franco-American spaghetti, and poured it out. Then I stirred it around until I saw a suitably random arrangement of pasta strands, and finished the photograph in short order.

Then, instead of disposing of the spaghetti, I left it there, and made one photograph every day. This was the eighteenth such photograph. The spaghetti has dried without rotting. The sauce is a kind of pink varnish on the yellow strings. The entirety is covered in attractive mature colonies of mold in three colors: black, green and white. I continued the series until no further change appeared to be taking place: about two months altogether. The spaghetti was never entirely consumed, but the mold eventually disappeared.'

Almost inevitably, the (black and white) photograph which follows is a 'disappointment' and requires some conscious effort to be relatd back to its description, an effort which begins to point to some of the possibilities and limitations of each medium.

Similarly, every description/contexting suggests circumstances which are personal and anecdotal. The twelfth image is described thus:

'This posed photograph of Larry Poons reclining on his bed was made early in 1966, for *Vogue* Magazine.

I was ecstatically happy that afternoon, for entirely personal reasons. I set up my camera quickly, made a single exposure, and left.

Later on, I was sent a cheque for the photograph that I thought inadequate by half. I returned it to the magazine with a letter of explanation. They sent me another cheque for the amount I asked for: 75 dollars.

Months later, the photograph was published. I was working in a color film laboratory at the time. My boss saw the photograph, and I nearly lost my job.

I decided to stop doing this sort of thing.'

Here as elsewhere, Frampton provides a very strong sense of the past (his past, real or invented) being (re)constructed around the photographs. The point – made very clear when we see the photograph previously described – is that the stories which the photographs evoke are virtually 'absent' from them: the circumstances surrounding the taking of the pictures and what they mean personally to Frampton. In this sense, crucial parts of their potential 'meaning', simply cannot be read from the images themselves, and we are constantly reminded of this.

Frampton does in fact directly address the question of 'reading', in what P. Adams Sitney describes as 'parodies of several kinds of art-historical discourse' ('Autobiography in Avant-Garde Film', in Sitney, *The Avant-Garde Film*, New York University Press, 1978). Most notable are an interpretation,

Photograph: Hollis Frampton self-portrait. Frame: the incineration of the portrait in (nostalgia).

which Sitney calls 'Panofskian', delivered in a very straight manner, of the religious iconography of a photographic study by Frampton of two toilets ('As you can see, it is an imitation of a painted renaissance crucifixion. The outline of the Cross is quite clear. At its foot, the closed bowl on the right represents the Blessed Virgin. On the left is St Mary Magdalene: a bowl with its lid raised', etc.) and a description of a found photograph, apparently of a fruit grower crouched amid flooded orange or grapefruit groves (the last image we see). Here again, of course, we get the description before we see the image; the description raises significant doubts about the interpretation of different elements of the image, stressing their potential ambiguity, then suggests 'a plausible explanation', then ends with an extremely enigmatic further retreat into doubt. When we subsequently see the image, our 'spontaneous' interpretation (insofar as the film has left us with a belief in such a thing) tends to correspond very closely to Frampton's 'plausible explanation' but at the same moment is significantly undermined both by the doubt which has been engendered and by a sense of the way denotation and connotation operate in image reading: a little lesson in the semiology of the image.

Much of the voice-over commentary of the film refers to the past in apparently relatively unproblematic ways, but photography and film engage with time and memory in troublesome ways, and *(nostalgia)* opens some of these up. As well as the account of when, and the circumstances in which, the photographs were taken, the commentary speaks in the *present* tense about the photographs being looked at 'now' (though the commentary's 'now' is inevitably rather uncertain in relation to the spectator's 'now' and the 'now' of the filming process, and so on), as well as about making negatives and prints in the period between the taking of the photographs and 'now'. The moment of rephotography on film is also, of course (again paradoxically), both the recording of the destruction of the photographs by burning (Frampton speaks in *Film Culture* nos 53-55, Spring 1972, about being embarrassed by the evidence of his earlier aspirations, so humanely destroying it) and their preservation in the film *(nostalgia)*.

As these comments begin to suggest, *(nostalgia)* has an active interest in the relationship of film to language, grammar and modes of 'address', an interest shared with a number of other 'structural' films, such as Paul Sharits's *Word Movie* (1966), Michael Snow's *So Is This* (1982), Martha Haslanger's *Syntax* (1979), George Landow's *Remedial Reading Comprehension* (1970) and *Institutional Quality* (1969), not to mention Frampton's own *Zorns Lemma* (1970) and *Poetic Justice* (1972). Generally speaking, we can say that film is very weak on grammar, unable to provide very much in the way of tense or person as compared with spoken or written language. Dramatic narrative cinema

generally implies the present tense: devices such as misting images, dissolves and/or dialogue, were traditionally thought to be necessary to put narrative images into the past, to imply 'then' as opposed to 'now', although, once there, images seem to revert very quickly to the present tense. Similarly, the general tendency of narrative film has been to presuppose it is being told in the third person, even where a voice-over speaks of 'I'. Although the question of who is doing the telling is vey unclear in most narrative film, this lack of clarity is not perceived as problematical, since the very act of telling tends to be suppressed: stories 'tell themselves', or so it seems, and the spectator does not feel him/herself specifically or explicitly spoken to or 'addressed', despite the fact that everything is the film is being organised *for* him/her. Direct address to the spectator is almost always a sign of opposition in film (think of Godard, for example, or, in a less 'fictional' register, Jon Jost's appropriately titled *Speaking Directly*, 1974). As we have seen, the voice-over commentary in *(nostalgia)* does directly address the spectator although, unsurprisingly, the directness is subverted. For example, the commentary gives a very definite feeling of being both read out and recorded and of there being more than one 'voice': it begins with a voice blowing into a microphone and asking 'Is it all right?' to which another voice replies 'It's all right,' and there is a renewed impression of 'switching on' the sound each time the commentary resumes. More difficult to pin down is the sense of ironical distance Frampton seems to take to his own past (in his notes on the film, he says he 'determined to comment upon the photographs *as if in the first person*'). For the *cognoscenti* there is an additional distance in the fact that Frampton has Michael Snow, a close friend and colleague (Frampton appears in Snow's *Wavelength*), read the voice-over, so that it is Snow who is in fact saying 'I' – no real confusion here until this Frampton/Snow 'I' begins talking about a photograph which was a commission for Snow which went wrong, concluding, 'The whole business still troubles me. I wish I could apologise to him.'

The ease of spoken language and the difficulty of film images in marking person and tense is fully exploited in *(nostalgia)* to unsettle the spectator. What are known as 'shifters' in language – words like 'I'/'you', 'now'/'then', 'this'/'that', which shift meaning according to who is speaking and to whom, and where and when – are central to the film's design. Typical of the commentary is a description like this: 'I chose the one photograph that pleased me most after all, and destroyed the rest. That was years ago. Now I'm sorry. I only wish you could have seen them!' or this (for the final description, of the picture we never see, and which fills Frampton 'with such fear, such utter dread and loathing, that I think I shall never dare to make another photograph again'): 'Here it is! Look at it! Do you see what I see?' By using 'shifters' in this way, particularly in combination with the disjunction between voice-over and image, *(nostalgia)* draws significant attention to structural differences between verbal language and the narrative process in film: who are/were 'I' and 'you'? What is/was 'this' and 'that'? When is/was 'then' and 'now'?

Though the impulses continue today, the 1960s and 1970s represented an extremely productive and historically significant rediscovery of 'formalism' by the North American *avant-garde*. *(nostalgia)* is an exemplary work from that period of rediscovery marked indelibly by the singularity of Frampton's witty and contemplative sensibility. These are impulses and qualities we should continue to value very highly.

Jim Hillier

I have taught and discussed *(nostalgia)* enough times with Laura Mulvey that I no longer remember whose ideas are whose. Clearly, however, this essay owes a considerable debt to her always stimulating thinking.

DEMON

a.k.a. God Told Me To (1976)

Demon (1976) is arguably the most perplexing and fascinating of the films directed by Larry Cohen. Its complexity arises in part out of the highly ambiguous portrayal of both the central protagonist, Peter Nicholas (Tony LoBianco), and the film's monster, Bernard Phillips (Richard Lynch). Whilst such ambiguous characters are hardly unique in the horror genre, or indeed in film more generally, *Demon* appears to set out to confuse and challenge our perceptions to an extreme degree. Peter, the police detective investigating the series of mass murders instigated by Bernard, is the film's obvious hero, but his obsessive religiosity, his somewhat dour, repressive personality, his cruel deceit in his intimate relationship with Casey (Deborah Raffin) and his callous disregard for the feelings of his estranged wife, Martha (Sandy Dennis), all serve to strain our sympathetic response toward him. Following the revelation that he, like Bernard, is an alien god, we see him psychically murder three men and learn that he has unconsciously willed the deaths of his own three unborn children. In addition, as Paul Taylor points out, Peter Nicholas's name combines both 'saint and devil' (*Monthly Film Bulletin*, vol.48, no.566, March 1981, p.46).

In his reading of *Demon/God Told Me To* ('Normality and Monsters: the films of Larry Cohen and George Romero', *The American Nightmare*, Toronto Film Festival, 1979, pp.82-83), Robin Wood argues that the film's progressiveness lies in its positive representation of the emergence of previously repressed bisexuality, symbolised by the androgynous monster, Bernard Phillips. For Wood, Bernard possesses 'stronger positive connotations than any other manifestation of the return of the repressed in Cohen's work, or indeed in any other contemporary horror film', while Bernard's desire to create a new species of androgynous beings with Peter sets him in opposition to 'the entire structure of patriarchal ideology' (*The American Nightmare*, p.82). Yet this proposition fails to account for Bernard's unbroken alliance with the patriarchal establishment: he chooses an exclusively white, male, middle-class consortium of disciples and a series of white, male assassins, all of whom seem to view him as an incarnation of the god of Judaeo-Christian religion, despite his hell-like, furnace-room home and demonic crimes.

Wood suggests that 'the tangle and misery' of the sex-life of Peter Nicholas is set against the 'sense of release and happiness' (*The American Nightmare*, p.82) experienced by Bernard's fourth assassin, following the murder of his wife and children. Yet any possible positive connotations are surely countered by the father's chillingly detailed confession of trickery and betrayal which is made even more disturbing by the almost subliminal sound of children playing throughout this scene. This murder arguably associates Bernard and his assassin with extreme patriarchal brutality, an association which, I would suggest, is not diminished by the 'signifiers of homosexuality' which Robin Wood highlights in the father and also in Harold Gorman (Sammy Williams), the first of Bernard's assassins. The possibility that Bernard is a victim of (homo)sexual repression does not detract from the brutality of the acts committed against his vulnerable and trusting wife and young children.

Yet in the light of Bernard's apparent enshrinement as the figurehead of patriarchal Judaeo-Christian tradition in the film, how are we to understand the fact that he is androgynous? Further, how does a less positive reading of Bernard affect Robin Wood's argument for the progressiveness of the film? To answer such questions, it is necessary first to consider Peter in more detail.

After the opening titles, *Demon* begins with a high-angle camera pan over the roof-tops of New York City on a bright, sunlit day, and a montage of low- and high-angle shots of traffic and pedestrians. From the moment of the shooting of a youth on a bicycle, however, normality is transformed into chaos, as further, apparently random killings occur, accompanied by quickening non-diegetic music. The precision with which the police captain lists the exact times of the police actions taken after the shooting serves only to emphasise the temporal discontinuity of the opening scenes of *Demon*, as the film cuts back and forwards between Peter's face-to-face encounter with the roof-top sniper, Harold Gorman, immediately after the killings, and the later televised news reports of the events (which include an interview with Harold's protective mother). Such discontinuity supports a reading of these moments as Peter's dream, which is also suggested by his scream on waking at the moment of Harold's suicide. If so, Casey's presence at the location of the murders may indicate Peter's unconscious ambivalence towards her – before she rushes into a shop doorway, she appears to be directly in the line of fire – particularly as their initial exchanges, following the dream, are characterised by highly ambiguous comments. For example, Casey tells Peter that she's not going to 'pick on' him *today*, and Peter jokingly asks her, 'How would you like to be mugged by a detective?'

Again, Casey becomes openly angry with Peter when he tells her that he is going to visit his ex-wife, who he says is now 'ready to be reasonable' about granting him a divorce.

In the next sequence, however, we learn that Peter has been lying about Martha's feelings in order to conceal his own unwillingness to become divorced, and that he has previously had at least one other similarly deceitful relationship. Peter is therefore quickly established as both inconsiderate and untrustworthy. Nevertheless, as he also appears to be profoundly unhappy and emotionally unfulfilled rather than intentionally malicious, our sympathetic response towards him remains.

Peter's torment seems to arise from an inability to reconcile his passionate commitment to Roman Catholicism with his social relationships and his career as a police detective. Indeed, Peter's expression of his faith is secretive, guilt-ridden and suffocatingly repressive. According to Martha, Peter 'sneaks off' to offer his daily confessions 'like a thief', and is unable to answer her criticism of his religiosity: 'Where is all the joy it's supposed to put in your heart?'

Despite the cultural pervasiveness of Roman Catholicism, as seen, for example, in the Saint Patrick's Day and Saint Gennaro parades, Peter seems isolated by his faith. As Casey tells the detectives investigating Peter's conduct after his revelations to the press: 'Peter truly believes, and that sets him apart.' Only Peter hears the 'God told me to' confessions of Bernard's assassins (even in the crowded street of the Saint Patrick's Day shooting, Peter is isolated within the frame at this point). Throughout the film, he pursues his investigations alone, impatiently dismissive of his more cynical fellow (and superior) officers.

Another prominent character trait displayed by Peter is a tendency to masochism which is manifest in his recurring desire to place himself in dangerous or extremely volatile situations. For example, his determination to face the sniper, Harold Gorman, may demonstrate his bravery but is revealed as wholly unnecessary by the warnings of his fellow officers and nearing police helicopter. Peter's self-destructive wish recurs in his confrontation with Zero (a powerful figure of the black, criminal underworld) and in his challenge to Bernard to 'Kill me, kill me!' after the murder of one of the disciples. It is, in part, fulfilled by his (apparently voluntary) commitment to an institution for the insane at the end of the film.

Peter's displays of masculine bravado are seen, however, in the context of his uncertain sense of identity (he is very much an enigma to himself) and as part of an assigned social role. Peter tells Harold simply that it is his 'job to find out', and Casey comforts Peter, after his dream, by telling him that it is now 'somebody else's turn to play hero'. Until learning of his true (godly) heritage, Peter is unable or reluctant to express his feelings, refusing to discuss his problems with Martha, and lying to Casey. Even his attempt to communicate with his mother is disastrously fumbled as his increasing desperation exacerbates her fear and hysteria. In one sense, then, Peter's initial unhappiness can be seen as the result of the difficulties inherent in his (deceitful) attempts to balance his relationships, religious convictions, career and assigned social role, before his discovery of the truth about his own origins.

The themes of conception and parental ties (more particularly, paternity) are central to *Demon* and are highlighted by the imagery of the film's opening title sequence (where a shower of a semen-like substance flows down across the frame from an invisible higher source). Yet, despite his commitment to a religion which stresses the importance of procreation and fatherhood as the 'justification of sexual desire' (P. Bradbury, 'Desire and Pregnancy', in A. Metcalf and M. Humphries, *The Sexuality of Men*, Pluto Press, 1985, p.130), Peter is unwilling to become a father. His refusal of the paternal role can on one hand be seen as resistance to maturity, as a halting of his psychological development. On the other hand, in the context of a patriarchally structured society, the position of father is also an ideological one – 'a public statement of private power' (Bradbury, p.130). It might be possible to see this resistance to paternity in a more positive light, were it not for the pain and anguish that his unconscious and unsystematic refusal of this role has caused Casey and Martha.

The theme of paternity acquires an additional dimension, however, when we begin to consider Bernard in more detail. He is presented as the Judaeo-Christian God and (like Peter, as we later discover) is the product of a supernatural conception and 'virgin' birth. He remains largely unseen, appearing as a blurred or blinding light, but is graced with apparently all-seeing vision and the power to enter the minds of his assassins and disciples. Bernard's fourth assassin tells Peter that God's voice spoke within him, whilst Richards, one of the disciples, asks Peter, 'Can't you feel his power still in me?' In *Demon*, God's power is unseen and/or blinding, and able to reside in 'chosen' men. Indeed, after his renunciation of his faith, Peter tells Casey to look at him: 'Can't you see, there's nothing left.'

Freud has argued that cultural representations of God are, in essence, manifestations of an ideal father-figure and, thus, that man's 'hostile attitude to his father . . . which is one of hating him and fearing him and making complaints against him [has] come to expression in the creation of Satan' ('A Seventeenth Century Demonological Neurosis', 1923, in *Art and Literature*, vol.14 of the Pelican Freud Library, 1987, p.401). Yet in *Demon* Bernard and the Judaeo-Christian tradition are presented as demonic and cruel, and not as redemptive alternatives to the evil powers of a satanic figure or cult. It is the dark spires and (non-diegetic) chorale of a Christian church that provide Bernard's policeman assassin with the inspiration to kill. In addition, the father who has been 'told' to murder his wife and children informs Peter that 'they're with *Him* now' and explicitly refers to the Old Testament

prophet Abraham, who was willing to sacrifice his son to God: 'Sacrifices to your god are nothing new. Why are you looking at me as though I were the first?' The Judaeo-Christian tradition is presented as being historically oppressive, a sentiment which Logan, the 'Judas' among Bernard's disciples, expresses to their board meeting: 'The only way the Lord has ever disciplined us has been through fear. Cure a man and you impress a few people who already believe you anyway, kill a multitude and you can convince a nation.'

That God is here explicitly evil denies us the reassurance provided by separating the positive and negative aspects of this displaced father-figure (the defence mechanism referred to by Melanie Klein as 'splitting'). One of the central horrors of *Demon* lies in Peter's (and our) fear of a monstrously omnipotent and inexplicably punitive father.

The God of *Demon* is also associated with patriarchal authority in its broader social sense. Both 'virgin' mothers, Elizabeth Mullin (Sylvia Sidney/ Vita Taylor) and Ms. Phillips (Sherry Steiner), were subjected to a traumatic sexual assault from a blinding entity above them, their distress compounded by callous male reactions. Bramwell, the driver who helps Ms. Phillips, hesitates before offering his assistance, because 'she didn't look seductive' and then makes a remark with inappropriate sexual innuendo: 'did they fool around some?' Elizabeth Mullin was also humiliated after her ordeal, by the police officers investigating her case and by her disbelieving father. An older policeman tells Peter:

'You know, I had women claim that they were laid by the Almighty, but when you looked into it, you found it was their stepfathers, or high-school teachers, or someone else in authority that slipped it to them.'

In this sense, *Demon* can be seen to offer an emotive critique of patriarchal society and the victimisation of women. Indeed, it is Peter's heightening of public awareness of the god's demonic activities (in contrast to the secrecy and mystery perpetuated by Bernard and his disciples) and not simply the murders themselves, which brings about the climate of social protest and economic decline.

In a sequence which echoes the killing of Arbogast (Martin Balsam) in *Psycho*, Ms. Phillips tries to kill Peter when he comes to question her about her son. This filmic reference emphasises the fact that Bernard is controlling his mother's actions – it is Norman Bates, not his mother, who is the real killer in *Psycho* – so that suggestion of Ms. Phillips's guilt is undermined, and our sympathy for her remains undiminished. As Peter nears Ms. Phillips's home, prior to her (son's) attempt to kill him, we see an empty ferris wheel circling in an amusement park. After her death and failure to blame God/ Bernard for her actions, Peter rushes outside into the street to pray for her soul, and we again see an empty ferris wheel, this time a model which spins next to a gaudy statue of Saint Gennaro. The repetition of this image, connoting emptiness and perpetual lack of fulfilment, acts as a concise, yet poignant, epitaph to Ms. Phillips's life. This imagery is later echoed in the information that Elizabeth Mullin was raped on her way home from the World's Fair, where her engineer father had worked on the construction of the ferris wheel.

Elizabeth Mullin is a frail and lonely woman, yet, despite the emotional scars of her sexual assault, she has retained wit and dignity. She has become largely de-sexualised, having denied herself the possibility of sexual relationships, and refuses even to be touched. Elizabeth fails to comprehend Peter's desperate pleas for her sympathy and understanding. His frantic attempts to communicate with his mother are also misinterpreted by the nurse, who bursts into Elizabeth's room at that point, and believes Peter to be sexually assaulting Ms. Mullin (her disgust at Peter's behaviour is expressed as a disbelief in his claim to be a police detective: 'You're no cop!'). In many respects, Elizabeth can be compared to Martha, who is also now isolated after being forced to abandon both motherhood and her marriage because of Peter's fear of paternity. Both women live among the icons of Roman Catholicism, and appear in juxtaposed scenes wearing long, matronly nightgowns. Despite the ordeal of her sterilisation, which, significantly, was sanctioned by the Church, Martha has retained a sense of dignity and graciousness, offering Peter help and support – indeed, acting like a mother towards him.

During their meeting, Elizabeth Mullin confuses Peter with his 'alien' father when she screams, 'Haven't you hurt me enough? I was never the same after what you did to me.' Similarly, the icons of Jesus, which provide a recurring visual motif within the film, combine the concepts of God the father and God the son. Bernard can also be seen as father and son, initially representing a direct father-figure for Peter, as well as a more abstract paternal god/devil, despite being manifestly his younger brother. The threat of castration, which psychoanalytically symbolises the power of the father over the son, can be seen in displaced form, in the knife-wound inflicted to Peter's hand by Ms. Phillips, his first-ever injury (even during his youth he was unhurt when falling from a bicycle, unlike the first victim of Bernard's violent campaign, who is shot and killed while cycling). It is Bernard who, when reopening the wound, tells Peter, 'I taught you that you could be hurt.'

After his initial confrontation with Bernard, however, Peter's instinctive realisation that the God is, in fact, afraid of him, re-structures their relationship: Peter's original plea to, 'Kill me, kill me' is changed with the awareness that, 'you can't kill me, can you, because I'm different too.' This realisation leads Peter to begin to investigate his own origins, relinquishing his (now tainted) religious faith and ending his relationships with both Casey and Martha. Martha's compassion for Casey and their sisterly unity during Peter's departure provide an important note of optimism, when Peter's secretive and divisive attitude towards the women is finally replaced by candour.

Peter's painful struggle towards self-discovery is seen in the context of an exploitative, uncaring society, not only in the callous treatment of Elizabeth Mullin and Ms. Phillips by the men to whom their rapes were reported, but also in the oppressive attitude of others who are, in some respect, oppressed. Thus, the female nurse at the old people's home is unsympathetic toward the women in her care, and the black gangster, Zero, exploits black prostitutes and drug addicts to maintain his position of power.

Zero is closely parallelled with Bernard, like whom he is a subject of Peter's investigations (along with Peter himself). Zero murders his own 'Judas' figure, Detective Jordan, just as Bernard kills Logan, and his name indicates absence and nothingness, reminding us that he, again like Bernard, remains in hiding and is largely unseen. Peter's (somewhat condescending) interview with one of Zero's prostitutes is contrasted (structurally) with the discussions of Bernard's disciples, the upward camera-tilt across the face of the disciples' building visually denoting the opposite end of the social, if not ideological, spectrum. The fact that both Zero and Bernard maintain their power through exploitation (Zero's prostitutes and drug-dealing activities and Bernard's, mainly suicidal, assassins) offers a comparison implicitly critical of the 'opiate' of institutionalised religion.

The final confrontation between Peter and Bernard in a derelict, inner-city building follows Peter's assassination of Zero and his two 'brothers' (murders which, arguably, are inadequately justified in the narrative by Zero's murder of Detective Jordan). As Peter climbs the crumbling staircase towards the golden glow emitted by Bernard, he checks his revolver, making explicit his intention to kill Bernard, though during the course of their battle the gun remains unfired, being knocked from Peter's hand by falling masonry. Whilst Peter insists, 'We're not the same, you and me,' Bernard is here presented as a mirror reversal of Peter, telling him, as they face each other: 'In all living things, one set of genes is dominant. In me all that is human became recessive, and you, my brother, if I may call you that, are the reverse. That is why it took you so much longer to realise what you are.' Peter's defensive denials do not protect him (or us) from the revelation of his guilt, and he is forced to acknowledge his desire for Martha's miscarriages and the misuse of his own (godly) powers in the murder of Zero and his associates.

Peter is simultaneously repelled and fascinated by Bernard. Whilst repeatedly trying to shield his eyes or turn away from the blinding light emitted by the god (particularly when being forced to acknowledge unwanted insights into his own unconscious desires), he is also compelled to look, just as we, the spectators, are fascinated by the unpleasurably monstrous or forbidden, both in *Demon* and in horror films more generally.

In this film, the most startling visually monstrous element is the vagina-like form which Bernard reveals on his side (also seen during the flash-back sequence of Elizabeth Mullin's assault). Despite his disgust and fear, Peter is magnetically drawn down to face this 'vagina', which is huge and animate within the frame, and seen in the subjective shot of a zoom to tight close-up analogous to (though obviously not mimetic of) Peter's nearing eye. The sudden revelation of Bernard's 'vagina' and the accompanying, incestuous offer to bear Peter's children provide a shocking jolt to Peter (and to us) which emphasises Peter's intense fear of and distaste for the processes of human reproduction (here, frighteningly alien), including his own conception, which is explicitly linked to this sequence by the repetition of the horrific vaginal imagery.

The final image of Bernard's dominance over Peter during their confrontation is presented not by his 'vagina', however, but by his eye, enlarged to fill the frame and made abstract by colour distortion. Until that moment, Peter has been unable to maintain a direct gaze at Bernard, and in one sense at some painful truths about himself, because of the (both literal and figurative) blinding power of god. Peter's discovery of Bernard's androgyny and his realisation that Bernard has 'never felt pain' and is therefore vulnerable, marks the end of Bernard's power (signalled in the shift of the golden glow and soft-focus appearance from Bernard to Peter) and the collapse of the building into fire. The relationship between Peter and Bernard is, at this point, reversed, and the symbolic threat of castration, which designates patriarchal power over the son, is directed against Bernard. Thus, the cultural perpetuation of patriarchy (sons being coerced into identifying with male authority under threat of punishment/castration) becomes, in *Demon*, a (literally) vicious circle.

The simultaneous threat to Bernard's masculinity and the revelation of his 'vagina' (and therein the acknowledgement of his femininity) lead to his subordination. Yet, in the context of the patriarchal privilege and brutality which *Demon* portrays, it is hardly surprising that Bernard's power over Peter persists only while his femininity is denied or concealed. The obstetrician who delivered Bernard tells Peter that he assigned a male gender to the androgynous baby because 'it seemed the best thing to do'. (In this, parallels can be drawn with the repressed homosexuality which fuels the power of J. Edgar Hoover in Cohen's *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*.) So, just as Peter's masculine bravado is defined as a role, the reality of Bernard's ambiguous gender also implies that patriarchal law can be role-play, determined culturally rather than biologically.

In the course of the narrative, Peter uncovers two crucial facts about Bernard which contradict conventional cultural representations of the Judaeo-Christian deity: the god is malevolent and androgynous. The first aspect is portrayed as part of a historial continuum, the idea that God has always been cruel, whilst the second element, which Bernard initially conceals, highlights the fact that patriarchal law is arbitrary – a social construct, rather than part of any natural order. Peter's discovery of his shared

demonic/godly ancestry with Bernard, and the forced revelation of his own cruel behaviour, leads to a confusion of his sense of identity, which emphasises the contradiction inherent in his former position (that is, the hypocrisy of his murderous desires in the context of his religious convictions and his career as a policeman). At the end of the film, there is no suggestion that he will resume any of his relationships, his Roman Catholic faith or his police work.

The difficulties inherent in trying to conform to a public image and public expectations are experienced both by Bernard and by Peter, but also appear in other male characters, particularly in Logan (Bernard's 'Judas') who struggles, and eventually fails to live up to Bernard's demands, telling Peter, 'I'm really not very good at it', and in Jordan (Zero's 'Judas'), who fails to balance his police duties and hidden criminal activities. Similarly, Harold Gorman's mother pictures her son simply as a 'good student' despite the vicious murders he commits, though she, like Casey, doesn't see too well, just like the witnesses who, when questioned by Peter about Bernard, are unable to see the god with any clarity.

The dark passageways and dim staircases through which Peter stumbles when escaping from the collapsing building after his struggle with Bernard, provide images which connote (re)birth, yet Peter is here being hurled away from the light, towards a withdrawal from society which is more connotative of death. Peter's escape from his new-found and painful self-awareness to an asylum for the insane seems to be one of symbolic regression in his confused denial of, then withdrawal from, the constraints and responsibilities of adult masculinity.

Peter's self-assured, direct gaze at the camera in the final frame echoes his final gaze at Bernard and emphasises a shared knowledge between character and audience which allows his confession of guilt to Bernard's murder ('God told me to') to acquire a heavily ironic dimension, especially as Bernard's death is not definitely established. Yet the unease of Peter's sudden acknowledgement of the audience, heightened by the non-diegetic music, undermines any possible narrative resolution and emphasises the fact that, though it has been perceived, the monstrousness of patriarchy has not been defeated.

I would argue that the central thematic concern of *Demon* is the oppressiveness of patriarchy, even to those who are, as in the case of Peter, privileged within it. In *Demon*, the cruel power of God the Father is linked both to paternal dominance and to a broader notion of social oppression, and is also presented as a role to which Bernard, despite his androgyny, is able to conform. The instruments of Bernard's power (his businessmen disciples and his assassins, who include a brutal father and a uniformed policeman among their number) are, without exception, white, adult males.

Patriarchy is here neither natural nor beneficial. It is a divisive and demonic social construct based upon a tradition of misrepresentation and (self-) denial which remains inherently difficult to perceive. As a policeman, Peter is initially an obvious representative of patriarchal law, yet his responses to his position are confused. To some extent, Peter reinforces his inherent power and privilege by expressing hostility toward those 'Others' defined against the dominant social order (executing the three black men at the pool-room, willing the deaths of his three unborn children, and being unconsciously cruel to Martha and Casey). Nevertheless he is unable to find any degree of peace or fulfilment when trying to maintain his social role.

The foregrounding of the ambiguities in the two central characters of *Demon* produces one of the film's central difficulties, but is still, I feel, a strength rather than a weakness, in that it radically demonstrates the contradictory nature of masculinity in patriarchal society. The challenge to established gender roles presented in Bernard's androgyny is not reversed at the film's close, and rather than providing audiences with a reassuring restoration of cultural norms, Cohen leaves us with a highly ambiguous ending: Peter's new-found sense of self-awareness can have no place within society.

Peter's failure to live up to his socially defined role can be seen as part of a questioning of the norms of adult masculinity which is a recurring theme in Cohen's work. The transition of Jason (Scott Blum) through symbolic puberty in *The Stuff* is accompanied by a sense of loss and pain; the physical and psychological development of Tony Walker (Adam Arkin) is halted by his lycanthropy in *Full Moon High*; child-like qualities and the refusal of the social responsibilities of maturity are prominent characteristics of Jimmy Quinn (Michael Moriarty) in *Q – the Winged Serpent*; J. Edgar Hoover struggles to conform to his socially defined (heterosexual) role in *The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover*; both Bone (Yaphet Kotto) and Bill (Andrew Duggan) are oppressed by stereotypes of black and white masculinity in *Bone*; the theme of ambivalence toward paternity is at the very forefront of *It's Alive* and *It Lives Again*.

Cohen's portrayal of the ambiguous nature of masculinity for men in a society structured around male privilege seems more specific than the broad undercurrent of resistance to the 'entangling relationships' of domesticity which, as Michael Wood points out, runs through much of American culture (*America in the Movies*, Secker & Warburg, 1975, pp.24-50). Cohen's concern appears to be centred upon the oppressiveness of inequality to those who are privileged by it, as well as to those 'Others' who have less access to power, and his films repeatedly highlight the (unconscious) processes of the transmission of inequalities within such institutions as family, church, government and capitalist economy. In *Demon*, and in Cohen's work more generally, patriarchal normality is itself monstrous.

Elayne Chaplin.

This is a chapter from a thesis currently in progress.

SEPARATIONS

Chantal Akerman's 'News from Home' (1976) and 'Toute une nuit' (1982)

'Images of Manhattan are sporadically accompanied by the texts of letters to the director from her mother in Europe' *British National Film Catalogue* on *News from Home* (vol.18, no.1, Spring 1980).

'It's like seeing about 20 films for the price of one, without all the boring bits, which is presumably why the film finds itself in the festival's avant-garde section' Susan Barrowclough on *Toute une nuit* (*New Society*, 17th November 1983, p.281).

The *avant-garde* by tradition implies economic and cultural separation. Frequently self-funded or grant-aided, this work lies outside the inflexible institution of The Cinema, and is restricted to 'specialist' screenings and higher education, in strong association with the formal concerns of modern art. This tradition enslaves it to an avowedly materialist aesthetic (minimalism, abstraction, structuralism) which relates to dominant cinema only by the absence of its structuring principles.

The fact that Chantal Akerman's films repeatedly defy conventional synopsis is significant only because they are avowedly narrative, usually run the length of an average feature, use stars and 35mm where possible, and often sneak into the 'art movie' bracket, catching reviewers and audiences by surprise. According to Peter Wollen, they belong to a different *avant-garde* tradition, where narrative still figures predominantly: feature-length films which experiment with narrative in what they leave out, negate or alter. This is a tradition typified by Jean-Luc Godard, Jean-Marie Straub/Danielle Huillet or Jon Jost, which 'addresses Hollywood' (in Jost's own phrase) rather than being a product of it.

The notoriety (and voluptuousness) of Akerman's work arises from the rigour of her strategies, which combine components of both *avant-garde* traditions. Her acknowledged influences are, significantly, Michael Snow and Godard, suggesting the combination of formal system and schematic narrative, resulting in a kind of hybrid cinema, which could be itemised as a series of stylistic and strategic choices or preferences, unremarkable in themselves, but formidable in combination:

– a colour bias towards blue (stock, gels, grading, credits)
– the overdubbing of sound
– face-on camera positions, usually below conventional eye-level; no focus pulling
– great depth of field; minimal camera movement; long, slow pans; tracking shots from moving vehicles/trains
– no close-ups; very few readable point-of-view shots; a preference for bodies in medium shot; unpredictable shot lengths, often extended beyond apparent narrative motivation
– an absence of obvious artifice (such as extra-diegetic music); minimal performance (in the sense of 'filmed theatre'); little emphasis on dialogue; minimal scene organisation (especially outdoors); no prioritising action within or between scenes; a liking for 'mundane' and 'non-filmic' subjects, for domestic space, for silences and inconsequential action, for lights at night, roads, trains, taxis and arbitrary movement in general; many repeated spaces and mirrors; emphasis on the passing of time; food as an important element, eating and not eating
– an overall weakening of narrative dominance; a stress on endings; no weighting of significance through editing
– alienation and separation as dominant themes; a woman central to the drama/event; the occasional autobiographical resonance; the mother as a constant.

The effect of this catalogue of preferences is only appreciable in relation to the way it works as a meaningful system, drastically altering the watching process to implement a regime of co-presence between pro-filmic event, apparatus and spectator (where none reigns over the others), rather than conventionally folding them one into the other. This takes nerve – such a strategy runs the risk of alienating the spectator, for whom a denial of the oppressively overcoded means of watching a film seems initially a denial of the watcher.

Akerman's overriding strategy, of separation, is activated through an oscillation between the con-

ventions of dominant cinema and deviation from them. It starts not from zero, but from a textual operation with and within narrative cinema.

The 'story' of *News from Home* is ostensibly the news conveyed sequentially in letters read out intermittently by an unseen presence (in fact Akerman reading letters from her mother back home in Brussels). The film does not stage this story; it displaces it into reported speech, and centres in its place a certain refusal – or inability – to respond. The reading voice sounds out her mother's demands across sounds and images unaltered by them; sometimes it is even drowned out by traffic noise. The image similarly conveys a refusal to respond to the fact that it is watched. There is no apparent organising principle that guides us to significance within the frame.

The 'betweenness' that constitutes spectatorship in dominant cinema, placing us between camera and event, and between characters by way of their point-of-view and unequal knowledge, is here shifted to become the space between the image and its being looked at. The apparatus functions without apparent complicity with the watcher. 'Don't leave me without news . . .' begs her mother in the fifth letter. 'Don't leave me without cinema, the cinematic . . .' begs the spectator, 'Tell me how to read this image. Inscribe into it its function and my placement.'

The abolition of organised sequence and the concomitant reduction of multiple meanings drastically alters the status of the shot. We are always uncertain of the duration of each one, because there is no significant use-value in play. Logical points of termination, such as figures leaving the frame, are passed over; the shot continues. There are 59 shots in the film, with an average length of 89 seconds, but the range in duration is drastic: from 20 seconds to 11 minutes. And both extremes are subject to the same principle: each new shot in a sense returns us to a beginning, to a new space which contains no mode of articulation grafted from shots preceding it. When there is an actual chain of repetition (four locations are shown at three different times of the day), this organising factor remains (consciously, at least) unread by the spectator because the sequence is again dominated by potentially limitless duration, marked only by the reduction of people on the sidewalk as the day advances. The momentum of the sequence comes not from the repeated formation, but from the flow of people and traffic, especially yellow taxis.

There is only one instance of a readable match, when the camera faces a black woman (sitting at a traffic light on Vestry St) whom we have seen in profile in the previous shot. This is a precious 'pocket' of placement, a double collusion, firstly between the film-makers and the woman (the only

Frames, pp.109-113: News from Home.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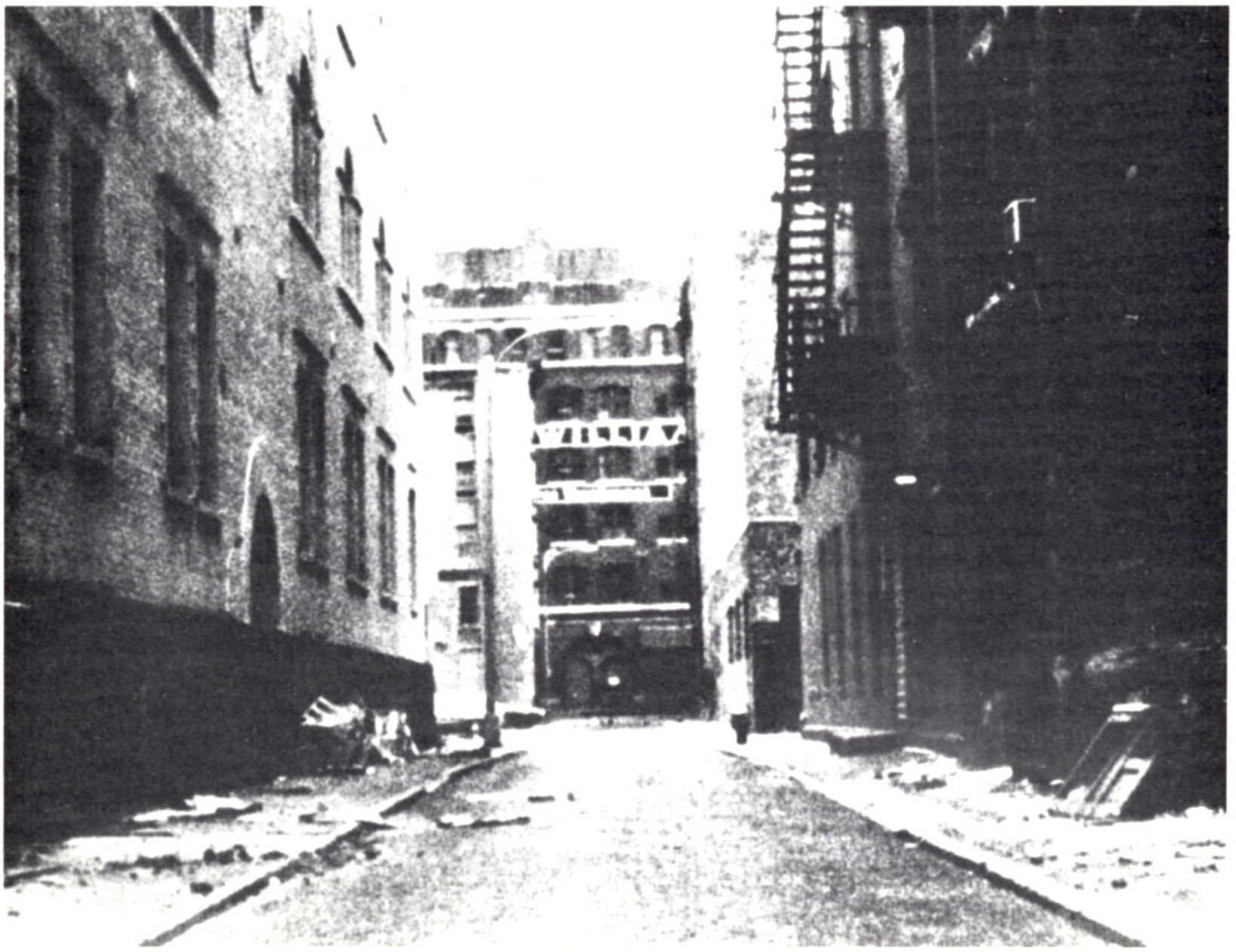


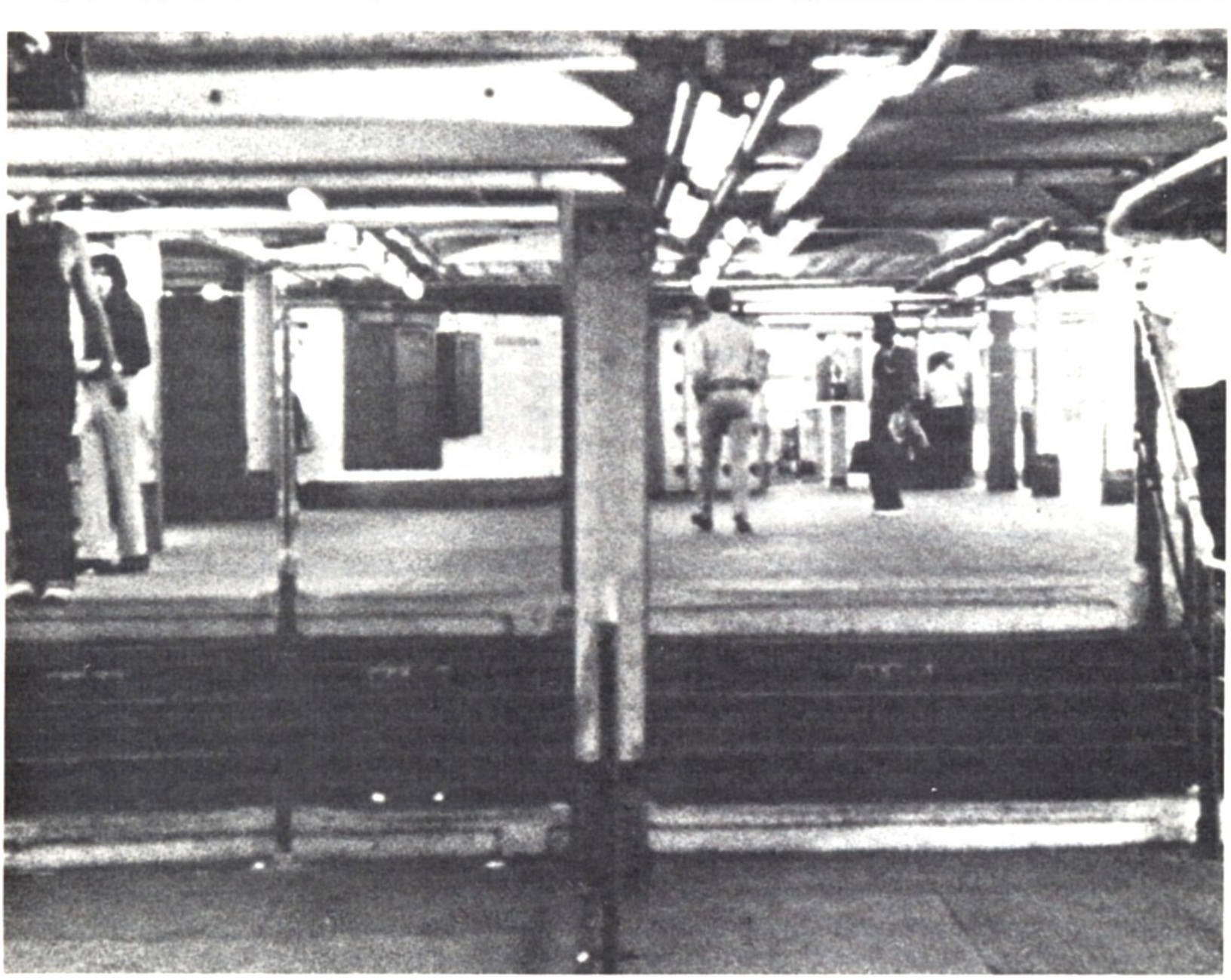
time someone has been invited to face the camera), and secondly between the apparatus and the spectator. We know where the camera is placed in relation to the previous shot.

Throughout, as if suggested by the grid construction of New York streets, the camera is always aligned to a central axis, space receding equally on both sides of the frame. This refusal to angle is very much at odds with the convention of the shot as a fold into fictive space, where it implies a certain weighting of effect around the line of action and an 'always more': there, just out of shot; there, to come in the next shot, the reverse-angle. The frontality of *News from Home* is particularly evident in the opening sequence, where the camera is placed low, facing streets between tall warehouses. The centred shot down a street where cars and people may or may not appear is a crucial delimitation of space: whatever happens in this field of vision, you will see it all. The field is therefore totalised, rather than implying its continuation in another shot. If something moves out of frame (as in the opening shot when three figures carrying boxes walk towards the camera but turn away down a cross-street), it is lost, displaced as an event by the more important event of the camera's presence within its own field, welded spatially to the regime of pespective.

The camera never points, never reveals a preference for one presence over another. It simply opens up a space through which and across which things (cars, people, litter) will pass. There are six axial camera movements in the film, all slow pans. Three of them appear to be motivated by in-frame movement, twice by figures and once by a garbage truck, but each systematically reasserts the greater motivation of aligning the camera to the space it is a part of, moving 90 or 180 degrees to end again centred axially down the straight line of a street.

There is a rhetoric of response from people in the frame as they perceive the camera. Sometimes they look 'through' it; sometimes they give a look of defiance; at other times, a smile or embarrassed wave. The fact that these responses remain in the film shores up the sense of the camera as a fixed presence, bound into what it records: in people's reactions, in the way it is moved, by train or car, and especially in the long sideways tracking shot from a car crawling along 10th Avenue, where progress is dictated by a series of traffic lights which determine pause and continuation. The camera functions as a recording device in suspense, waiting an unpredictable time between the start and finish of each shot, like the film's unwitting participants, waiting for trains, the next stop, or a DON'T WALK sign to change to green.

Pointed at rather than pointing, the camera has the function not of indicating subsequent spaces according to a coherent logic of continuation and progress but of indicating its blindness as an articulating eye. In addition, there is an 'other space' stressed out of frame, beyond the totalised field of the camera's frontal placement. In one of the shots down a subway train, a *New York Times* headline is



visible ('The Beaches'), but the reader is visible only when he stands to leave the train. The continuous hum of (carefully post-synchronised) traffic noise sometimes alludes to a car that approaches the frame but never enters it, the sound receding gently somewhere else. It is as if the event overrides the apparatus, without their standard co-ordination. The event just passes through in the way the mother's demands are sounded as they pass across the reading voice.

To call such images empty is to say more about the film's principal absence, of convention. There is no trace of the witnessing organisation of the documentary tradition ('a day in the life of a city . . .') with the camera 'capturing' typicality or essence. Nor are there the marks of organisation which make the image cinematically 'readable'. Instead, there is separation of the camera from what it faces as well as between shots.

The challenge of the film is its fullness, which is not reduced or controlled in any apparent way. There is a plenitude of presences which the watching eye wanders around, catching a little detail, harmony or drama which is there almost despite itself. Because each shot functions as a whole, as a sequence of simultaneity, the spectator's hunger for progress is reduced, as the possibility of significance is drastically increased.

Take the second shot down a subway train. A black man stands centre-frame in the carriage beyond the one containing the camera. The lights in both carriages flicker out for a few seconds, during which he is the only thing visible, his white vest glaring in an arch of light. It is a beautiful, 'accidental' resonance, created by and creating the depth of the frame, an instance snatched from the mundane by combination of event, camera, spectator.

The nine-minute shot that finishes half-way through the film has a static camera facing a platform between two lines in a subway station and displays a different rapport with space. Because of the frontality of the camera position and the absence of movement, it gradually loses its sense of depth until this is fixed again by the entrance of a woman walking into frame. Other people follow. Our gaze tends to follow her. She moves further down until she is completely concealed behind a pillar. Noise signals the arrival of a train, and a sequence of arriving and departing begins on all three platforms, including, finally, the camera's, when the size of the train, heavy with graffiti, comes as a surprise, as it suddenly blocks off the open space and depth of the shot. From a fixed position, a number of planes have been described, in a combination of depth and surface, with a segmenting of space according to the horizontal movement across it and a constant adjustment of how the image has been fixed as read.

The effect of the film's longest shot, a sideways track from a car moving down 10th Avenue, is not dissimilar. The sequence of shop fronts is broken from time to time by a cross street. The space being

passed through is suddenly and drastically extended a great distance, receding sharply to the Manhattan sky-scrapers at vanishing point.

There is only one shot which does not present its space as something entirely readable from the start. The final shot begins in darkness with the camera moving away from a few dots of light. As a barrage of noise becomes recognisable as churning water, the lights come to form the shape of a loading bay, from which the camera travels across water into daylight. Buildings become visible, as part of the place the camera leaves behind, which, during the course of the ten-minute shot, becomes recognisable as the Manhattan skyline (all icons of commerce: World Trade Center, Chrysler, Empire State). Seagulls begin to swoop behind the boat, and the sound of their cries is eventually added to the soundtrack. The buildings come together as a unity, an island, disappearing into flatness behind the sea mist. The shot continues until the reel ends.

Here then, for the first time, is the postcard: the feature of New York that defines it, but that the rest of the film refuses to give us. It harmonises into recognisable completeness in the course of a movement from darkness to its obliteration behind the mist. This shot we have seen many times in cinema, as the establishing shot of 'New Yorkness', and as the view seen by immigrants arriving by sea.

This closing shot can be seen as the only moment the film replies to its narrative, by implying a departure, a return, a journey back to the mother. But its sense is stronger as a pulling out, a giving in to the film's place – the city as, finally, a totality, but again as something the film only passes through, between the complete black and white of its beginning and end. The event of the shot is the city's growth into singularity and its subsequent subordination to the presence of gulls, mist, churning water. The image continues to offer a plenitude, although tempered with a sense of loss, as we are separated from the rigorously precise system of the film. It ends with a pulling out rather than anything readable as resolution.

Separation is also central to *Toute une nuit*, but figures additionally as a dramatised motif. Lovers are literally apart, waiting for the moment of return or a telephone call, attempting to write letters. They are also separated by being unable to communicate adequately, resorting to verbal cliché, desperate physical response or fragile gestures of commitment such as notes under doors or waiting all night under the Loved One's balcony.

This is also a film about traffic, but people rather than taxis do the coming and going. Akerman's familiar minimalism of plot and event is apparently abolished in favour of a proliferation of protagonists, whose stories happen in relation to each other only through location and time-scale ('All In One Night'). With a cast of 75, and 35 separate narratives, the film initially sets up a system not unlike that of *News from Home*, with the scene

replacing the shot as a cellular entity, returning the spectator to new space, new protagonists, new little story.

By tradition, the cinematic scene is something self-contained in time and space, but permeated with elements that are foregrounded as significant, which we carry over as a kind of residue into subsequent scenes, all of which are linked to the principle of advancement, of what happens next. The meaning of each scene is strictly dependent on how it advances elements from before, and equips the spectator to make sense of what comes after.

Toute une nuit uses the scene completely differently, to tell a story that is contained within its cellular unity of continuous time and space. The traditional dependence of the scene for its meaning on being permeated with the complementary trajectories of beginning and ending is evaded. Once we are accustomed to this, and the fact that the film's parts are greater than a reductive whole, Akerman is able to place on an equal footing scenes of epic proportions (lovers reunited) and inconsequential acts (a dealer in pelts spends the night unable to make his books tally).

An opening montage of cars, subways and trams at dusk culminates in a shot from the back of a vehicle climbing a hill, looking down upon a rapidly approaching car with the faces of two lovers illuminated by the dashboard lights. The man drives; the woman rests her head on his shoulder. The sound of an Italian pop song emerges through a drone on the soundtrack. It is the song we hear intermittently throughout (always from a diegetic source – juke-box, car-radio): '*L'Amore perdonera*' (Love Will Forgive). This shot is provided here as a kind of impossible paradigm, the couple united (or perhaps re-united by the all-forgiving power of love). It is a paradigm that will figure throughout the film as a Utopian point of reference: the state of completeness, harmony, wholeness, equality. What follows is a series of tableaux testifying to the impediments on the route to that state: incompleteness (unfinished stories), disharmony (inability to say what is meant, to stray beyond cliché), fragmentation (desires and actions that mismatch), and inequality (sexual difference).

In the next scene, Aurore Clément (Anna in *Les Rendez-vous d'Anna*) begins the series of cellular stories. She telephones her lover, cuts off when he answers, tells the room 'I love him', taxis to his flat, watches him, unaware, in his window, then leaves. In the second scene, a woman sits in a bar. A man staggers through the door and drops his suitcase. They fall into each other's arms. In the third, a man and woman sit at adjoining tables in a bar. She darts glances at him from time to time but their eyes never meet. '*L'Amore perdonera*' swoops past on a car radio. He leaves the frame. She follows, to be met by him returning into the frame. Their collision becomes a desperate embrace. In the

Stills, pp.114-118: Toute une nuit.

fourth, a woman follows two men out of a bar. 'Who are you going with?' one of them asks her. The men walk off in opposite directions. She looks at one, then the other, but chooses neither, heading off past the camera.

These four scenes establish culminations rather than resolutions: Clément remains apart but desirous; a couple are reunited; another couple is created; a choice is not made. All could be part of the same story about one couple on their ninety-minute route to restoration, but this film begins with the point of completeness, then immediately fragments, separates, schematises. It becomes a narrative about a night in which possible love stories proliferate, accompanied by other activities taking place at the same time, in the same city.

This structure alerts us to the fact that the film has a function which is greater than the telling of a story. An immediate point of reference is the 'art movie', enshrined by reviewers as the Cinema of Transcendence, for its 'foreignness' to American culture (and Hollywood industry), and its inscription of an 'informed' spectator. The art movie still tells stories with stars, but in a way that foregrounds predominantly literary concerns: a subject that is greater than the immediate narrative context, character psychology, imprints of the *auteur*'s 'world vision' and a conscious stylistic uniformity. Akerman's work sits uneasily in relation to this tradition because of the formal determination of her style and the way she uses narrative trajectories as an evident textual operation (their reduction, effacement, or, as here, proliferation) to locate the subject in the telling as much as in the told.

In addition to loosening the hold of narrative advancement, the art movie is also less dependent on spatial binds for the spectator, such as point-of-view shots and shot/reverse-angle dialogue, in order to objectify response. But it is not accustomed to their abolition, along with character and sequential narrative. *Toute une nuit* effectively replaces character with participant, relationship with relations, sequence with segmentation, but preserves the centrality of the couple as a structuring narrative principle. Where very many cinema stories are about the coming together of man and woman, this film isolates the couple as a construct, rather than a point to which everything travels. Coupling is 'performed' as variation.

The film's second section establishes this clearly, by varying the couple formation around the same location, a Cupid statue in a suburban garden. A woman waits outside her house, then leaves. The man catches her up by the statue. They embrace. A man slides a note underneath the door of a similar house and leaves. A woman opens the door, reads the note, catches the man up at the statue, and leads him back to the house. A couple leave the Cupid house together. A man brings a woman home for the first time. A woman stealthily leaves a house carrying her shoes, to be led off aggressively by a waiting man. What accumulates in this series is the invariable coming together of the male and the female.

The meeting is a crucial construct for sexual difference in dominant cinema, whether it is the chance encounter that leads to romance, the rendezvous that could be a trap, or the ensnaring of the pursued by the pursuer. This is how stars are brought together, how the regime of shot/reverse-angle shot is implemented, how cinema stories are characteristically told: A travels to B to C to D, in search of X, the object of desire.

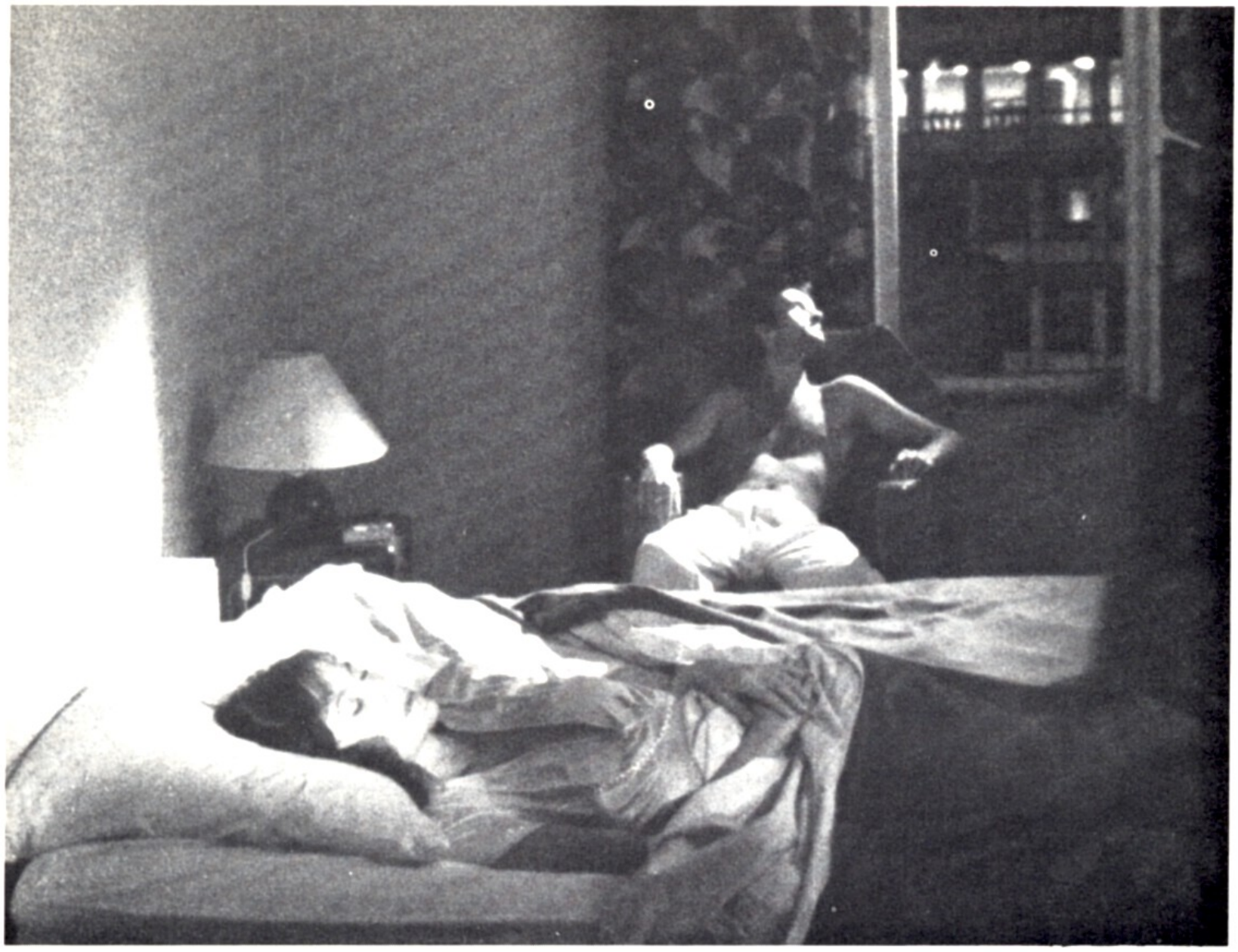
Akerman uses the meeting differently, to foreground the mismatch: couples missing each other, moving in different directions at different speeds and escaping from each other. The third section retains the couple as point of completeness, but makes it problematic by introducing marriage and the familial, primarily as oppressive constructions. A middle-aged couple decide to go out dancing. A little girl leaves home clutching a suitcase and a resisting cat. A woman smoking outside her front door is disturbed by a child's call from inside: 'Maman . . .' A woman watches a man get into a taxi: 'I won't be coming back,' he says. A middle-aged woman packs her case almost on top of her sleeping husband, smears lipstick on her face and joyfully escapes into the night.

Although this series appears to be linked only by the similarity of locale, the constant of the mismatch is reiterated as separation rather than meeting gains the upper hand, with points of completeness remaining the exception. The mother-daughter scene reads almost as a reverse-shot to *News from Home*. The daughter remains unseen, but utters a demand. The mother responds, but with resignation and inevitability, carefully stubbing her cigarette out and replacing the lighter in the pack before returning indoors. The simplest, most direct demand and response in the film are, however, not exempted from the relations that also govern them.

For it is from this point that sexual difference is increasingly inscribed as imbalance, as two forces that come together to remain separate. One of the bars, from which a woman is dragged and another follows, has its name split across the two doors – 'Rose &' 'Gérard' – doors that are a pair, that touch from time to time, but remain separate entities.

The accumulating principle of separation is not rigorously oppressive. It is more a kind of narrative given, which permits the opening up of other elements in the frame, across the scene. During the late-night sequence, as the heat rises, a scene introduces a man lying on his bed by the window. A woman is visible in the apartment across the street. As he reaches to turn his light on, hers goes out. It is a beautiful, resonant moment of parallelism: separate people, separate stories, overlapped for one second.

This kind of resonance is never foregrounded to the detriment of human action; it arises in accompaniment to it, because of the formal and narrative determination of each scene. The style is again frontal, the camera aligned to walls and static, except for the occasional pan with people in the second section as they approach or leave houses. Most scenes take place in more than one shot, and are



continuity-cut around action, but retain the box-like structure of all Akerman's work. The proliferation of action and drama does not alter her system. It is made a part of it. Each act is performed very self-consciously, without attention to naturalism. This is not the mannered domain of the art movie, but more akin to the performance of the extra, who must perform each little action with great singularity of purpose: waiting, walking, meeting, leaving. But where the extra by tradition must figure as someone to be overlooked, Akerman highlights her little actions by staging each one as a scenic whole, without differentiating in importance between them.

Within the apparent rigidity of this system, Akerman introduces variables. At two points, a couple dance and the (static) opening shot remains for the entire scene. The momentum of the first of these is passed from progression to duration: we become aware that the scene will end only after the song has finished. In the second, when we expect a repetition of this, the woman abruptly leaves before the song is over, returning the dominant strategy from duration to progression.

The staging also alters when the male/female norm is evaded. Towards dawn (a clock strikes six), a scene opens with a man smoking in medium close-up. It is the first and only time a scene begins without its dramatic space established from the opening shot. He looks off-screen left, prompting the film's first explicit point-of-view shot, of his (male) lover sleeping. His arm enters the frame from the right, and touches the man's back, the first real contact in the film that could be called a caress.

This scene as a variant also signals a drastic alteration to the film's system. From the following scene onwards, we start returning to people already encountered. A lover turns up at Clément's apartment, but not the man she stood and looked at earlier; 'It's you,' she says. We return to the middle-aged woman who had joyfully left her sleeping husband, collapsing in exhaustion on a hotel bed. When we return to the gay lovers, there is a further delay: the smoker watches the sleeper leaving, entering a car in the square below. He wears a soldier's uniform.

People we return to dominate the last third of the film, building into a multiple culmination as their spaces and stories connect and overlap, accompanied by the melodramatic build-up to a rainstorm. As the thunder gathers pace, a man walks on to his balcony. The following shot from the square beneath reveals two other known participants (including the smoker), also on their balconies. This is a glorious moment of simultaneity, of spatial and narrative homogeneity, continued in the ensuing point-of-view shot (his? theirs?) down on the square. The middle-aged woman runs across it, pausing only to gather her clothes as they spill out of the suitcase into the wind. When the storm finally breaks, we return to the apartment of the 'unhappy couple' ('we've stopped loving each other . . .'). As the curtains billow behind them, illuminated with

(pure Hollywood) lightning flashes, they touch accidentally and pull apart.

The strategy of altering the self-contained scene to become a sequel is not capitulating to the gratification of resolution, but re-opening scenic properties that we considered closed. Some attain a point of culmination (a woman who went to sleep with her lover standing under her balcony wakes to find him there still; he promptly walks off); others suggest a hypothetical course of action (the pelts dealer abandons the books and dangles a lit match over the pelts . . .); most, like the final scene (a logical return to Clément), merely establish a continuum which cannot move further. In the cold light of day and dramatically increasing traffic noise from below, Clément dances with the Wrong Man to '*L'amore perdonera*', trying and failing to tell him why she loves the other. When the other man telephones, her response is limited to one affirmative but powerless word: 'Yes'.

The most worked out narrative in the film, about the middle-aged woman, is also, significantly, the one that is bound into a completely circular structure. At dawn she returns home, undresses and goes back to bed beside her still sleeping husband. The shot is held. We wait. Her alarm clock suddenly rings. She listlessly gets up, returning to her oppressive routine as if the night had never happened. This little four-part story, covering the process of dream becoming nightmare, of escape followed by its impossibility, is somehow as profound and desolate as the story of Jeanne Dielman in Akerman's *Jeanne Dielman, 23 quai du Commerce, 1080 Bruxelles* (1975).

The organisation of narrative components in *Toute une nuit* certainly replaces the dominance of formal system in *News from Home*, but both films have to be read very much in relation to the other, as manifestations of the same strategy. Narrative is displaced, rather than overthrown, as the all-devouring principle of meaning and structure. If the two films represent opposing extremities of Akerman's work, one firmly welded to the *avant-garde*, the other sitting uneasily within art cinema, the uncharted territory between the two opens up limitless possibilities for radical textual engagement with and within narrative cinema.

Richard Kwietniowski

THE AMERICAN TRAUMA

Paris, Texas (1984)

The title is a deliberate provocation – Paris, where? It provides, however, a neat summary of Wim Wenders's continuing preoccupation with the cinematic dialogue between Europe and America, and more specifically the problem of European affiliation to American cinema history.

The problem is more acute for German, or more correctly New German film-makers than it is, for example, for their British counterparts. After World War II, it was the United States which guided the rebuilding of West Germany along the lines laid down by the Marshall Plan. As a result, and aided by the desire to forget or 'overcome' a traumatic past which had created Hitler, West Germany found itself effectively severed from its own cultural history. New-generation post-war German film-makers were thus faced with cinematic values and archetypes which originated from Hollywood. Some, like Rainer Werner Fassbinder, responded by dreaming of bringing Hollywood to Berlin, and set about making films which depicted a German consciousness trying to come to terms with this new America-Germany. Some, like Werner Herzog, sought to recover and renew contact with elements of the Germanic past, particularly its more folkloric and fabulous moments. Others, like Wim Wenders, have attempted to transplant themselves into American cultural history.

This divided Euro-American consciousness is evident in the teaming of Wenders with the American screenwriter, Sam Shepard, whose work is very much concerned with the re-presentation of American dreams and mythologies, principally the modern reworking of the western. It is a source of thematic concern that goes much further than its appearance in the film's title. For example, Walt's household in *Paris, Texas* includes a French wife and a Volkswagen Beetle. Even, or perhaps especially, here, in the home of a successful designer of advertising billboards in wealthy Los Angeles, the traces of a European past have not been wiped out completely. If, in West Germany, Wenders could represent America, in films like *Kings of the Road* and *The American Friend*, as a possible 'ideal' which might point towards some kind of resolution or reunification with a parent-model of some description, his experiences in America, from *Hammett* and *The State of Things* up to *Paris, Texas*, have found him increasingly insisting upon the preservation of a European identity in the face of a post-capitalist anomie founded in American commercial imperialism. And the result of this has been that his subsequent film, *Wings of Desire*, and especially the projected *Till the End of the World*, bear some resemblance to apologies and elegies for high European culture. The wheel seems to have turned full circle.

Yet it is the radical classicism of Wenders's approach to film language and film history which makes the turns of his career appear as so many pre-figurations and illuminations of the European-American cinematic debate. More than Jean-Luc Godard, Wenders makes modernistic essays within classical film narratives. In *Alice in the Cities*, which is very much the sister film of *Paris, Texas*, a journalist is given the commission to produce a magazine article on America and returns with 'just' a number of Polaroid photographs. Photographs occupy a privileged, almost religious position in a Wenders narrative, where the complications of individual desire and loss of identity receive a figurative and symbolic expression of virtual permanence. In *Paris, Texas*, the photograph of Travis's empty lot, representing the place of his conception and hence a sense of self ('Paris, Texas . . . where Momma and Daddy first made love . . . where I began. Me, Travis Clay Henderson . . . I started out there . . .'), has an indestructibility about it which transcends the medium of impermanence through which it is recorded. The same is true of the photographs in the family album and from the photomat (another similarity with *Alice in the Cities*), as well as the Super-8 home movie. The photographs of the journalist in *Alice in the Cities* have not yet achieved that transcendence, but they are trying to find a way there. Undoubtedly, it is through memory and imagination that Polaroid photographs can be transfigured into possible communion with the sacred. However the critical fact, not least for any outsider to this process (including, in *Paris, Texas*, Hunter as well as Walt), is that this sacred dimension is far from being immediately apparent and borders on perversity. Hunter enquires whether they are supposed to live on dirt; the magazine editor in *Alice in the Cities* sees the

Still: Paris, Texas – *Travis (Harry Dean Stanton), 'A human man way out on a limb'.*

Polaroid photographs as wilful non-communication on the journalist's part. And in this he is only half wrong: against the highly structured framework of the magazine article, the journalist's impulse is towards discontinuity, dissipation, a series of images without commentary. And for many spectators a series of images is all a Wenders film ever finally amounts to. Indeed this has come to be a sign of the 'Wenderesque' to the point that it can now easily be pastiched.

The classical framework of *Paris, Texas*, however, is clearly that of the western, which at first seems an odd genre to be working in, even given Shepard's presence. After all, Wenders is often seen as a filmmaker primarily concerned with urban alienation and human sensitivity at the mercy of post-industrial, consumerist and technological forces. Hence one might have expected Wenders to stay with the thriller, the framework for most of his previous work, especially since the contemporary tendency for European film-making when looking towards American forms is to embrace the thriller and gangster movie with a fetishistic fascination. Yet on further reflection, it can be seen that the western has always been inherent in Wenders's work, concerned as it often is with male bonding, kinship ties and nomadic encounters in vast and unpopulated landscapes. If John Ford looms constantly as a presence in Wenders's imagination, it is because he, too, represented a sense of dislocation within a nomad/sedentary paradigm, and conjured out of the past an

idealism of and nostalgia for family and community life at a humanistic scale which, from *Kings of the Road* onwards, surfaces constantly in Wenders's work, at a variety of levels and with a range of nuances. One of these nuances is that of the existence of such an idealism – in short, such a genre – in a modern, technological and urbanised setting. In this light, teaming up with Shepard becomes predictable. After all, Wenders was by this time known as an impassioned defender and innovative exponent of the road movie, itself the modern offspring of the western. If in *Kings of the Road* and *The American Friend*, the VW Beetle represented the possibility of a romance with mobility and the nomadic – a romance that can also be read pessimistically as a death-wish – in *Paris, Texas* the VW Beetle is nostalgically, but firmly and permanently garaged. Hunter sits behind the wheel, locks himself in and dreams of 'just driving', obviously remembering the car's meanings. *Paris, Texas* figures the repression of that VW Beetle, a repression which is the cause of Hunter's schizophrenia (two fathers, two mothers, two forces pulling him in opposite directions) and which is linked to Travis's nervous breakdown and subsequent regression (significantly Travis does not want to get into Walt's car at the beginning of the film.)

The car is, of course, the symbol of modern, urban America and as such perfectly serves the purposes of a playwright such as Shepard, for whom that ethos involves alienation – the alienation of, for example, the madman on the bridge preaching doom to the endless stream of cars on the freeway below, and whose malady Travis is very close to, as the affectionate moment between them suggests. Shepard frequently depicts situations in which characters remain true to authentic American roots which are as yet untouched by modern acculturating processes. For Travis to be suspicious of cars is a sign that he is affected by a divided American consciousness, in which the pioneering origins and the modern chaos contradict each other and yet are forced to coexist. The western traditionally explores this division through a complicated mythology of origins in which the past is located both as source of an imagined plenitude of American experience and as seed of an expulsion from paradise. Jacques Derrida has shown that all narratives which attempt to recreate a sense of lost innocence must always represent this double identity of the past as being both before the fall and yet also paradoxically the fall itself, in which case the plenitude must also contain its own negation. As we know, the Bible introduces Woman as the agency of that negation, and in *Paris, Texas* Jane fulfils a similar function. What is most crucial for the film, however, is acceptance of the mythology of the western. Whatever the difficulties experienced in renewing contact with it, this mythology is seen as vital and valuable; all of America might issue from it.

Contact with the mythology is difficult and incomplete, because of urban alienation (the same problem is evident in *Midnight Cowboy* and *Taxi Driver*). Travis returns to Texas and Mexico, sites of so many westerns. He wears cowboy boots and a hat, and pauses to slake his thirst. But something is not quite right. The hat is a baseball cap, the boots are sandals wrapped in bandages, the water canister is a plastic container, and Travis wears a suit and tie. His urban life (the life of work and socially ordered sexual relations that destroyed his relationship with Jane) inhibits his ability to renew contact with the American West; the return is a regression – traumatic and producing something close to insanity.

At the beginning of the film, Travis tries to walk everywhere. His cowboy-type name, recalling that other (but more schizoid) urban cowboy, Travis Bickle (Robert De Niro) in Martin Scorsese's *Taxi Driver*, is associated with travelling. Whilst alienated, Travis just walks in a straight line, maniacally. He refuses to get into Walt's car. Once in Los Angeles, he refuses to use a car to pick up Hunter from school. He insists on walking everywhere. Travis's rejection of cars (as also of aeroplanes and fast food) is a rejection of modern America. That he should insist on identifying one hired car out of hundreds of similar models is indicative of his desire to retrieve something of personal meaning in a mass-produced environment. Travis is the man who walks – something Walt has long forgotten, something Hunter needs to be taught (hence the long scene in which Hunter imitates Travis's walking movements). On arriving in Walt's household, Travis's first action is to clean everyone's shoes – to get them ready for walking. He himself exchanges a new pair of boots for an older pair. Travis wants to remind everyone of their American origins, of their western roots. Significantly the only other form of transport apart from walking with which Travis shows some affinity is the train. On the journey back from Texas, Travis at one point tries to walk along a railway line. Walt says, 'There's nothing out there!' But Walt is wrong. Out there is the origin of America, and a potent memory of the western genre.

We can see how all this fits into what we might expect from a representation of the divided American consciousness as depicted by a writer such as Shepard. But what of Wenders? In similar, but different ways, the western enables Wenders to bring to completion the affiliation process by which he as film-maker has been fathered by American cinema history (although 'fathering' is always fraught and highly ambivalent if nonetheless absolutely necessary in the work of Wenders). For Travis and Shepard, the western is a search for a real American identity; for Wenders, it is the orphan's search for paternity. This becomes more clear if we examine the western which lies at the heart of *Paris, Texas*, John Ford's *The Searchers*.

The landscape in which we first find Travis and against which he is frequently framed bears great resemblance to Ford's Monument Valley. The Texas of Shepard and Wenders is very like that of *The Searchers*, where human presence is a temporary and vulnerable feature amongst harsh and intractable desert and mountains. When Travis stumbles into the lonely gas station at the beginning of the film, a sign ominously reads 'The dust has come to

Still: Paris, Texas – *Travis, Jane (Aurore Clément) and Walt (Dean Stockwell). Travis's homecoming - the configuration of looks strongly echoes that of Ethan, Martha and Aaron at the beginning of* The Searchers.

stay. You may stay or pass through. Whatever.' There are many strong similarities between the two films ranging from the topographical to the stylistic (the use of dissolves and fades to black, for example, where Wenders seems to be echoing Ford's film; the framings around the 'looks' of characters, particularly in domestic scenes where Walt, Travis and Anne occupy a similar configuration to that of Ethan, Aaron and Martha), to the scenographic (the saloon-type bar Travis enters in Houston is not unlike that where Ethan meets Futterman), even the musical (both are heavily scored films with repetitive leitmotifs). The films are both organised around journey/search narratives – two men from different generations and cultures undertake to find and restore to a lost woman a familial identity which they, too, have, in complicated ways, lost. But it is particularly in the richness of thematic areas explored by the films that the deep affinity between the two is most revealed, as well as the crucial differences.

In *The Searchers* a 'prodigal brother' (Ethan) returns to the home of his more conventional brother (Aaron) in Texas. The return is far from easy, like that of Travis to his own brother's home, partly because Ethan's values conflict radically with those of Aaron. Ethan remains loyal to the Confederate flag and is not prepared to accept the new status quo of 1868, the year of the film's opening action. As he puts it, 'Don't believe in surrenders . . . I've still got my sabre . . . didn't turn it into no ploughshare neither.' Aaron is more integrated: unlike Ethan, he is married and has an apparently happy family, and this, as one would expect in a Ford film, is a mark of being part of the community. However, the community is still at its beginnings and is serviced in a rudimentary fashion. Its motley representatives and leaders include a Confederate captain turned preacher and a variety of limited, if well-intentioned 'rude mechanicals'. The domestic and communal rituals are makeshift and inconclusive – a wedding easily gives way to a more enjoyable fist fight. As for the settlements themselves, they are few and scattered and intensely vulnerable. The tiny, struggling communities of farmers, at the beginnings of a developing America, are attempting to cultivate this wilderness and bring civilisation to this wasteland, while against these precarious efforts the Texan landscape towers impassively, dwarfing its temporary inhabitants. In the words of Mrs Jorgenson, teacher and mother of the only other featured family, '. . . we just happen to be Texicans. Texican is nothing but a human man way out on a limb, this year and next, maybe for a hundred more. Someday this country's going to be a fine, good place to be. Maybe it needs our bones in the ground before that time can come.'

'A human man way out on a limb' is certainly a good description of Travis as he stumbles across the Mojave desert. In fact, he is hardly even that, since the doctor in the medical clinic where he ends up after collapsing can find no human identity for him, and refers to him only as 'the newt'. The vestiges of a human identity become retrievable *only* through establishing that Travis does in fact have a relative, and can be relocated through the family back into the human. The role of the family in rediscovering that lost human element of identity is not only one of the most crucial themes in *Paris*,

Still: Paris, Texas. *Anne and Walt – a symbolically sterile marriage.*

Texas, whether through actual parents, adopted children, relatives or surrogates, but it is a continuing narrative thread in all of Wenders's works. As has often been pointed out, it is a Fordian motif as well, and it is a central pivot in *The Searchers*. In many ways, Ethan's regressive and archaic tendencies place him ouside the human – certainly he is outside the familial and the communal, to the point that his search leads him back to the most reduced human habitation available, the cave. If there is any way back for him, it can come only from his re-establishing his familial relationship with his niece, Debbie, from whom, for most of the film, he is radically and, indeed, unnaturally estranged. That the re-establishment of this relationship occurs in front of the cave has a formal and symbolic significance (it is one of the very few occasions where Ethan is not framed against a habitation from the inside looking out) that has often been commented upon.

Estrangement, lost relatives, interrupted kinship ties – these are almost obsessively recurrent themes in Wenders's films, achieving their most archetypal expression in *Paris, Texas*. That it should be in this film more than, say, *Alice in the Cities* (to which, as mentioned, *Paris, Texas* has its own kinship ties) that these themes are handled with an almost quintessential economy is attributable to the strict generic framework of the western in which it is produced. Inevitably, one thinks of Nicholas Ray's *Johnny Guitar* as a similar exercise in generic concentration (all the more so when one recalls Ray's status as – yet another – father-figure for Wenders); but the choice of *The Searchers* for, as it were, role-model goes beyond a simple espousal of the western form.

In *The Searchers*, a cultural polarisation (between Indian and white American, between an archaic consciousness fixated on the past and a modern and more tolerant consciousness looking towards the future) is worked through. Traditional allegiances to rigid notions of honour, morality and justice are shown as problematic. *The Searchers* is probably the key western for subsequent film-makers in Europe and America. For the French New Wave, it was simply *the* western, whilst Martin Scorsese includes a sequence from it in *Mean Streets*. It is easy to see why the film had this kind of impact. Scorsese's film is also concerned with cultural polarities – the Italian and the American; the spiritual and the worldly – whilst European consciousness involves by definition involves an awareness of the heterogeneity of its own cultural and historical past and present. Integration is one of the great themes for a generation aware of a strife-torn past and a continually shifting and divided present. Wenders himself is aware of his place within this tradition of film-making and of his indebtedness to Ford's work. However, *Paris, Texas* casts the terms of the cultural polarity somewhat differently and resolves them in a way which is illuminating in respect of the differences between the two films.

There was strong disagreement as to how the film should end: Shepard wanted Hunter to continue his travels with Travis, while Wenders was unhappy with this, as was Harry Dean Stanton, who plays the part of Travis. Shepard's preferred ending is understandable in view of his particular emphasis as a playwright: he is interested in the father-son relationship, in getting Hunter – the name itself suggests a return to a more primitive mode of being – to retrieve his American identity, away from the bourgeois alienations of the world of

Still: Paris, Texas – *Hunter (Hunter Carlson) and Jane (Nastassia Kinski). Joyous or closed circle? Compare with Ethan's embrace of Jane at the end of* The Searchers.

Walt (whose name suggests the unreal Disneyland of wealthy Los Angeles – Walt does, after all, produce cartoon billboard publicity) and commit himself to the early western simplicity they have rediscovered together. Through the son, the father overcomes his alienation, finds out how to keep the myth alive by moving it one generation on (cars instead of horses, whose galloping hooves now just light up on the neon of a Houston motel title). Through the father, the son finds his origins (in Texas) and a future direction, a set of authoritative meanings given to him by a real father. In short, the classic western ending: present and past reunited in a commitment to traditional values.

The ending which we actually have in *Paris, Texas*, however, is a lot more problematical. It is with the mother that the son is reunited. The father is reduced to solitude despite achieving knowledge; his alienation continues but in an attenuated form which is no longer traumatic. Yet the son is still without a father (though he has gained a mother). Moreover, whilst Hunter is without a father, Walt and Anne are without a child – what is going to happen to them?

This actual ending does, of course, bear some formal relation to that of *The Searchers*. The famous sweeping gesture by which Ethan lifts up Debbie is exactly matched by Jane's taking up of Hunter in her arms. Travis, like Ethan, witnesses the familial re-unification from a space outside the home, and then 'rides away' in his pick-up. But, of course, there are crucial differences. The family that Debbie is returned to is entirely adopted; no blood kinship exists between Debbie and the Jorgensons or Martin. Yet there is a sense of fullness, virtual plenitude, to which Ethan would be supererogatory. The home has been re-established. If Ethan cannot

be a part of this, it is because he is a wanderer, a man born, in the words of the song, to 'turn his back on home. . .' and 'ride away, ride away. . .' Yet such a man can contribute indirectly to the family by, paradoxically, not being of it and not being bound too much to its literal interpretation.

Paris, Texas completely reverses this conclusion. An adopted family is replaced by one based on blood kinship, and consisting only of a mother. The 'home' is a temporary location – a hotel room high up in a Houston apartment block. An old and regressive model of the family is re-established, however imperfectly, and with whatever degrees of irony and pessimism – arguably none, since, as the script reads, Jane and Hunter 'turn and turn in joyous circles', whilst, as Travis drives away, 'his features soften, and he smiles.'

Hunter's situation is similar to that of Wenders. Brought up in the American and European cultures of Walt's household (a little like Martin Pawley's mixed relatives in *The Searchers*), he cannot identify fully with the western mythology of Travis (and Shepard). Significantly, he sees Paris, Texas, not, like Travis, as being close to the Red River, but as a place full of dirt. The ambivalence of Wenders as film-maker fathered by both European and American cultures is close to that of Hunter.

Fathers are usually absent figures or failed presences in Wenders's films. In *Paris, Texas*, there are two of them – in itself a sign of failure, since neither is adequate. As the Spanish maid says to Travis while he tries to dress and walk 'like a father', there are only two kinds of father, rich and poor, which might translate as Walt and Travis. You can have only one, and each has his obvious faults – Walt is prepared to be a father in the socialised world of urban Los Angeles, but the marriage between him and Anne is symbolically sterile. Travis can reproduce blood kinship and short-term nomadic adventure, but he cannot fulfil any modern fathering function.

Of his own father, Travis has little to say, except that he was also called Travis, in which can be read the closed circle of kinship inheritance, another sign of Travis's regression. That inheritance includes the 'sickness in the head' which caused Travis senior to imagine his wife as 'an idea', a 'fancy lady. . . . from Paris', and not the 'plain, good woman' that she was. Travis himself confuses his wife, Jane, with 'an idea', which becomes the occasion of his schizophrenic turn.

It is not about their father, however, that Travis talks when Walt drives him back from Texas, but about their mother, of Spanish extraction, whose name Travis has forgotten. Travis, too, is trying to find a way back to his mother, and this similarity between beginning and ending of the film establishes yet another circularity to echo those 'joyous circles' in which Hunter and Jane turn.

The returning of children to their mothers or grandmothers is probably one of the key impulses in Wenders's films. In *Alice in the Cities*, the need is to find the grandmother in the absence of the mother. *Paris, Texas* is dedicated to Lotte Eisner, the spiritual grandmother of New German Cinema. The apparent failure of the fathering function results in the need for reunification with the mother, which itself involves a cultural pessimism and an abdication of social identity, while, by the same token, the repressed father can return with the potential and authority of myth. What is left is a prolonged adolescence, which can make a child an old man and vice versa. It is a familiar romantic paradigm which frequently informs the road movie – the adolescent version of the western – and which is explicit in, for example, *Kings of the Road*. As Hunter expresses it to Travis through the walkie-talkie from the back of the pickup: 'Dad, if a guy put a baby down and travelled at the speed of light for an hour . . . he would come back . . . an hour older, but the little baby would be an old man.'

The walkie-talkie is significant. As so often in Wenders, the moments where the crucial conflicts are addressed always involve an indirect mediation, whether through a walkie-talkie, a telephone (Hunter telling Walt and Anne he is leaving), a cassette recording (Travis telling Hunter of his decision to leave him), a peep-show screen (Travis and Jane telling each other about themselves), a Super-8 movie (Travis and Hunter recalling their relationship), a Polaroid or photomat picture, or, as in *Kings of the Road*, a printing-press. Part of the source of Travis's inability to reconcile himself to Jane lies in the technological alienation of the cinema. The confessional scene between Travis and Jane is mediated entirely by technology (telephone and screen.) Humanity is reduced to expressing itself visually and orally through a network of indirect and technologically mediated relations. Wenders himself is working within that very technological medium. The one-way mirror *is* the cinema screen, the voyeurism of the client *is* the voyeurism of cinema. Even the history of the relationship is conceived in cinematic terms – cast and preserved in the Super-8 home movie. Immediate human presence and immediate human contact are obliged to express themselves through the very medium which denies them. We are faced here with something of an obsession with cinema, an inability to escape it (but it is also a refuge – it can be used to avoid contact, like the use of the telephone by which Hunter is able simply to 'hang up' his relationship with Walt and Anne). And Wenders himself is no less a victim. Technology – the very thing which divided Shepard's American consciousness – here subdivides the already divided Euro-American consciousness of Wenders.

This dependence on technological mediations at the expense of direct verbal address is one of the principal causes of alienation, not only in the work of Wenders and Shepard, but also in that of Ford, for whom technological innovation in the post-war films is achieved at a price. The difference is that in Ford's work direct verbal address has a fullness which for Wenders is no longer possible. Language cannot be trusted to say anything truthful or valuable, which is why the journalist in *Alice in the Cities* prefers Polaroids without commentary, and

Travis prefers silence.

In fact, however, this is not the real issue in direct address. What cannot be dealt with is less the oral than the visual; not language, but the look. Jane and Travis avoid looking at each other even through the peep-show screen. It is not the words that create a problem but the looks through which the words are articulated. The gaze in Wenders has such quasi-totemic power that it is nearly always averted or subdued and reserved for moments of introspection or potential transcendence. (The gaze that goes unreturned is, of course, the angelic, in the Rilkean sense, which structures *Wings of Desire*.) However, it is true that in *The Searchers* verbal address across cultures is highly problematic, producing confusion (the episode between Martin and 'Look'), false trails (the word 'Nawyaki' describing Scar's tribe), or alternatively unperceived clues (Martin does not comprehend the significance of 'Cicatrice'), or, more darkly, deceit (the encounter between Ethan and Scar under the pretence of the language of trade). In fact, *The Searchers* depicts many graphic, visual and oral signs – arrows in the ground, etchings in the sand, scalps on a pole, whistles in the wind, etc. – which the characters are constantly *searching* to decode, and this once more points up the affinity between this western and Wenders's work as film-maker.

The father and son quest is a very American form (inverted but preserved in, for example, Scorsese's *Alice Doesn't Live Here Anymore*.) There appears to be no real European equivalent. In *The Odyssey*, father and son are for the most part separated and do not learn dialectically from each other. In Joyce's reworking of that myth in *Ulysses*, father and son converse but they do not learn – in fact, they are figures of difference, from different cultures and religions, and they separate themselves from each other. All the examples that spring to mind are American: in *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance* (also about a schizophrenic father), father and son undertake a motorcycle journey across the vast American landscape (similar to the Texas of Ford and Wenders) in order to reconcile themselves with each other and rediscover a lost paternity. Part of the process of that rediscovery is to understand how to live in America, how to reconcile humanity and family relations with technology (the motorcycle being, like the car in *Paris, Texas*, a symbol of potentially alienating modern American technology). In short, it seems that this quest of father and son attempting to achieve knowledge and salvation through each other is an American archetype. In *The Searchers*, Martin becomes an adopted son of Ethan (at one point Ethan is prepared to have Martin inherit from him as his only kin), and, if Ethan can be seen as a sort of father, then it is true that he achieves a familial reconciliation, and perhaps some wisdom, through his adopted son, albeit indirectly. In *Paris, Texas*, Travis looks to Hunter to guide him to Houston, seeking direction and salvation through the son.

Yet the very self-consciousness of Travis's act in *Paris, Texas* is paradoxically what makes the film unable to achieve the synthesis of cultures and generations and the pointing forwards into an adequate familial identity and a socially and psychologically integrated future, which this American form demands. The notion, for example, that wisdom is to be sought in the child – an idea that pervades Wenders's work, especially his next film, *Wings of Desire* – runs against the dialectical process. Martin may ultimately be proved right in *The Searchers*, but for the most part he is naive and utterly dependent on Ethan's knowledge of language and culture.

The problem is finally in the emphasis given to mothers and fathers, men and women. In *The Searchers*, Ethan and Aaron never once mention their parents, whilst it is the first thing that Travis wants to talk about to Walt. But then, the hold of the past in *The Searchers* is nowhere near as inescapable as it is in Wenders's film. What needs to be found in *The Searchers* is a child grown into a woman, a generation pointing to the future. This generation is really what Ethan bequeaths in his own way. In *Paris, Texas*, however, it is a past that needs to be found again and reinstated. Jane must become again the mother who, according to Travis, she stopped being long ago. (The truth is more paradoxical; it was Travis who stopped being a father and Jane who took over this function by going out to work and earning money to send to Hunter, which Travis is conspicuously unable to do – the film actually demands that Jane be both mother *and* father to Hunter.)

Unlike *The Searchers*, *Paris, Texas* seems caught up in a compulsion to repeat the neurosis it is trying to work through. Hunter's rejection of his past (Walt and wife) is actually a rejection of his present for a more authentic past (the mother) – and yet the rejection of present for past is exactly Travis's schizophrenia, the cause of his breakdown. In failing to combine past and present – in attempting to hold them separate from each other – Hunter is simply inheriting Travis's alienation. That closed circle of regression, where father and son have the same name, continues, as father here hands on his sins to son. This is what Travis bequeaths to Hunter.

That narratives which feature a desire to rediscover an original experience of America are caught up in a compulsion to repeat resembling neurosis is evident from the fact that neurosis itself figures so prominently in the stories. I have already commented on the literal schizophrenia in the case of Travis (and gradations of this schizophrenia pervade the film, which figures an experience of division in virtually every area). In *Zen and The Art of Motorcycle Maintenance*, the central consciousness (as well as the alternating philosophical/narrative structure) is schizophrenic. In *The Searchers* – a film about the sickness of repetition as revenge killings endlessly repeat and destroy communities – Ethan is at the very least an obsessional neurotic until cured at the end. In *Taxi Driver*, the journey across America becomes an involuted circular movement arrested and fixated within one city, whose contrasts and contradictions (i.e. whose schizophrenia –

Still: Paris, Texas – *Travis and Hunter. Father hands on sins to son.*

emblematised by the Kris Kristofferson lyric 'He's a poet and a pusher/ Partly truth, partly fiction/ A walking contradiction') – become the ironic urban representation of the American experience, with the schizophrenic Travis Bickle as its cowboy.

The original experience of America resembles a trauma, because it is an endlessly repeated, re-enacted and reformulated scenario leading often to schizophrenia. The journey-narrative is a would-be therapy, an attempted cure, whose project is synthesis, terminable analysis (such as that effected in *The Searchers*), but whose risk is regression, going back once again over old territory, activating old fears and contradictions and falling under their spell. *Paris, Texas* and *Taxi Driver* are in this latter category of interminable analysis.

In both *Paris, Texas* and *Taxi Driver*, the journey conflates spiritual and sexual adventure, America and the woman are held in a kind of guilty complicity as the originating source of the trauma. 'Did you ever see what a Magnum .45 can do to a woman's pussy?' a client, significantly played by Scorsese himself, asks Travis Bickle, after which Bickle immediately buys the gun in a phallic gesture aimed at the city as whore. Cowboys and whores are part of the structures of male and female identity in the western. The whore is always the ideal partner for the cowboy – she complements and compliments his radical masculinity – yet the fact of her being a whore undermines his masculine self-identity. In *Taxi Driver*, Travis Bickle achieves his cowboy identity through the awakening provided by his relationship with a child prostitute. In *Paris, Texas*, Jane is represented as a virtual prostitute. To desexualise the woman and return her to some kind of innocence through a restored familial identity – Jane as mother, Iris as daughter – becomes the narrative objective.

In *The Searchers*, the abducted Debbie is described by Laurie as 'The leavin's of Comanche bucks, sold time and again to the highest bidder . . .' It is even suggested that her own mother would want her dead. And yet the narrative itself does not support this view. The narrative objective is split: Ethan wants to kill (desexualise) and Martin to find Debbie as sister (restoration of familial identity). The two impulses are in dialectical opposition, whereas, in *Paris, Texas* and *Taxi Driver*, they are monomaniacally united. This is one of the reasons why *The Searchers* is able to synthesise what the other two films cannot, and why the latter are caught up in histories of regression.

In *Kings of the Road*, the impossibility of living with women is stated, with the rider that, nonetheless, a man must try, because there is nothing else to be done. Men and women represent, in fact, the key polarity in Wenders's work and the most irreducible one. In *Paris, Texas*, that irreducibility is absolute; Jane and Travis will always occupy separate spaces and each will always be the object of the other's discourse. Travis speaks his male confession and what we see as image to accompany it is Jane, the visual and oral object of that confession. Jane tells Travis, 'every man has your voice . . .' The other is now an Other, and the four years' absence has simply enabled this recognition to achieve a catharsis through its passage from silence to speech in the form of mutual confession.

In *The Searchers*, as in Ford's work in general, it is impossible to imagine life without a woman. The film opens with a woman's gaze and ends with that gaze returned, five years later. In between is pure destruction, but it is for the continuation of that gaze that Ethan and Martin set out and Debbie is brought back. It is the guarantor of any chance of home and peace of mind, both overwhelming nostalgias in *Paris, Texas*.

David Russell

Lawrence Alloway

Lawrence Alloway, the art critic, who died at the beginning of this year, was an early supporter of *Movie*, to which he contributed a single widely quoted article ('The Iconography of the Movies' in *Movie* 7, February/March 1963).

His starting point in writing about the cinema foreshadowed that of *Movie* – the failure of available criticism to match up to the films that he liked. As he wrote in *Encounter*, James Agee's weekly film reviews 'record the dilemma of a writer hungry for masterpieces, but who had to spend most of his time seeing works intended for short, happy lives . . . there was something in the films [of the late 'forties] that Agee missed, but which, in all simplicity, paying for my seat, I got . . .' Critics writing about the popular cinema were failing to get to grips both with its Wagnerian complexities as an aggregate artform and with the ephemeral existence for which most of its products were destined – film as 'the expendable *Gesamtkunstwerk*'.

Alloway had already noted the importance of genre in the late 'fifties, when most film critics used it as a shorthand means of denigration. He returned to the subject in his most extended essay on the cinema, the immensely stimulating *Violent America: The Movies 1946-64* (Museum of Modern Art, New York, 1971), written after he had settled in the United States. Like his contemporary and fellow expatriate, the architectural critic Reyner Banham, he deployed an impressive range of references, not just the easy stuff of literature, criticism and psychoanalysis, but, for example, kitchen technology, fashion, car design or popular attitudes to communists, weaponry and assassination. Given the 'irreducibly realistic' nature of the photographic image, it followed that all manner of ephemeral data, much of it from the extra-cinematic world, was incorporated into movies and formed a significant element in their communication with their audiences (thus 'films are most efficient when new'). 'Instead of concentrating on the supposedly unique features of the medium, we need to consider the crossovers among communicative forms. Only then can we chart the forms that topicality takes in movies, often oblique but definitely present as a predisposing factor in the audience's attitudes.'

Within the cinema, too, Alloway saw it as wrong to take films out of context: 'Essential to the discussion of movies is a sense of normal images and recurrent themes, whereas the most enthusiastic appreciations of popular movies have been oriented another way. In the absence of any disciplined traditional forms of film criticism, writers have appropriated popular movies as if they were found objects removed from their original context and assigned lavish and arbitrary significance.' And again, 'It is essential to treat the popular arts as a process in time and not to arrest the succession in quest of masterpieces. Genres are useful as a descriptive technique only if we define runs or sets, not isolated works.' Through genre groupings, recognised both by Hollywood and by its audience, 'we can indicate typical patterns of recurrence and change in popular films which can be traced better in terms of iconography than in terms of individual creativity. Indeed, the personal contribution of many directors can only be seen fully after typical iconographical elements have been identified.' Twenty years later, these strictures retain much of their relevance.

Because of Alloway's alertness and the breadth of his perception, his writing on the cinema, though regrettably small in quantity, remains a pleasure to read. I can think of no other critic (apart perhaps from Banham) who could have written the following: 'Like car stylists, film-makers have to work for the satisfaction of a half-known future audience. The position of both Detroit and Hollywood resembles that of the speculative builders who erected the majority of New York townhouses; they were built for hypothetical clients on the gamble that changes in demand and taste would occur more slowly than the completion of the products. This is one source of the extraordinary quality that films have of being topical while being at the same time conservative and folkloric . . . To work for the near future, you have to extrapolate present successes into probably future trends, and you must protect your film from obsolescence during production. Fashions in the movies reveal the problem clearly; they are glamorous but not too precisely datable. In the '40s, clothes for women were often poised in a strange region of use, somewhere between negligee and ball gown.'

The majority of his writing was on art (he was assistant director of the Institute of Contemporary Arts, London, 1954-57, and curator of the Guggenheim Museum in New York, 1962-66). He may have coined the term Pop Art, and I first met him in the late 'fifties when he introduced an exhibition of Pop Art from the Royal College of Art in the unlikely setting of the Divinity Schools in Oxford. Alone among established writers in Britain at the time, he recognised that the form-versus-content argument was a phoney and saw the proto-*Movie* film section of *Oxford Opinion* as trying 'to get film criticism some decent analytical tools. Film criticism is at the stage of art criticism in the nineteenth century . . . before connoisseurship made possible the systematic study of personal style. Let's face it, how many of the critics could identify the director of a film if they missed the credits and couldn't read the handout in the dark?'

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Text set by Edition, PO Box 1, Moffat, Dumfriesshire DG10 9SU
Reproduction by BB Associates Ltd, Terminus Road Industrial Estate, Chichester, West Sussex PO19 2TP
Printing and binding by The Eastern Press Ltd, Katesgrove Lane, Reading, Berkshire RG1 2NF

Stills by courtesy of Artificial Eye, Paramount, National Film Archive, Universal. Our thanks to Michael Shaughnessy, Universal and the British Film Institute for the 'All I Desire' frame stills

MOVIE is indebted to the British Film Institute for financial support

MOVIE 34/35, Winter 1990. Printed in England

MOVIE is distributed in the United States and Canada by Bernhard de Boer Inc., 113 East Centre Street, Nutley, New Jersey 07110, USA

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