I suggested earlier that "the musical" was problematic for comparative work, firstly because it masks the evident diversity of musical films (arguably upholding "integration" as the teleological end of the genre) and, perhaps more crucially, for upholding a hegemony by which "the musical" means "Hollywood". For this section, there is less inherently at stake in the category of "historical films", a category too broad for most people to consider it a genre in itself. In the analysis of such films, emphasis is generally placed on the way they represent history. However, one still needs criteria by which to select a more manageable corpus, and an analytic framework to make that corpus more manageable theoretically. With regards the choice of films, Robert Rosentone's comments can help to clarify:

> To be considered "historical", rather than simply a costume drama that uses the past as an exotic setting for romance and adventure, a film must engage, directly or obliquely, the issues, ideas, data, and arguments of the ongoing discourse of history.[1]

Like Rosenstone, I shall elide the costume drama as well as the majority of 1930s films that fall within the cycles of "the western" or "swashbuckler", genres defined, partly at least, by their "use of the past as an exotic setting for romance and adventure". However, I will consider westerns or swashbucklers that engage with historically recognized people or events. An important *raison d'être* for the films examined here is their representation of particular Histories; [2] they do not simply use "the past" as a backdrop.

One might say what we really consider here is a particular strand of "Prestige production".[3] Cinema's ability to render the past visually was one of its earliest claims to prestige, and the prevalence of "historical scenes" among early film underlines the cinema's particular fascination with "the historical", a fascination that clearly continues to this day.[4] Such prestige renditions of history are often "flagship productions", noteworthy for their higher production values, longer running times, and their privileged position in studio/production company promotion and expenditure (as Neale and Hall's work on the blockbuster attests[5]). This degree of commercial visibility was not matched by critical attention, at least until well into the twenty-first century and certainly not within film studies (as opposed to scholarship emerging from university history departments). Historical films are not sufficiently prominent in film studies scholarship focused on classical French or Hollywood cinema, and this is because perhaps they lack the subtlety favored by "mise-en-scène criticism", and are often too conservative (formally and politically) to be attractive to critics with more ideological preoccupations. One considers here a predominantly middlebrow cinema.[6]

In terms of cultural status then, historical cinema is a long way removed from musicality, which, particular forms apart (some of the operetta-based films for example), is perhaps 1930s cinema's most brazenly low-brow mode. However, the analysis of historical cinema complements the earlier

discussions of musical spectacle and visual display. Though by definition more narrative-oriented (they tell particular his*tories* after all), historical films are very often the most spectacular (especially and stereotypically the "epic") and the most insistent on various lavish visual pleasures (i.e., costumes, décor, etc.). Moreover, the correspondences between musicality and the historical mode can be crystallized in more narrational terms. Whereas musical films prepare the viewer for the inevitable number, the historical film, particularly when dealing with the best-known historical material (the French revolution and the life of Abraham Lincoln, for example) prepares the viewer for the already-known climaxes of history (occurring at, say, the guillotine and Ford's Theatre respectively).

In a highly influential treatise on *Young Mr. Lincoln* (1939), the editors of *Cahiers du cinéma* emphasize the centrality of the future perfect tense to its narrational discourse: "*... what I will have been for what I am in the process of becoming*".[7] This mode of narration is an important characteristic of all historical films, and can provide a challenge to the emphasis on inference, hypotheses and goal-orientation central to Bordwell's fabula-shyzuet model. Whereas classical cinema for the latter engages the audience by making us ask, "what will happen next?", the future perfect of histories like *Young Mr. Lincoln's* holds a known future in tension with an emerging present, revealing the process of Lincoln's *becoming* "Lincoln". When the historical climax is known, films emphasize another set of processes that work alongside the kind of viewer activity Bordwellian classicism stresses. Therefore, as I discuss different varieties of historical filmmaking, the role of rhetoric within their narrational strategies is something that will recur.

Of course the analytical framework used here further shapes the selection of films. To outline this framework, Marc Ferro's writing on historical films provides a useful point of departure, part of a body of work that has successfully shifted the terrain from considerations of history and film (and often the latter's failure to respect the former) more towards filmic *historiography*:

> Thus, since any theme can be manipulated, the principal distinction is not really between films where history provides the setting (such as *La Grande illusion* or *Gone with the Wind*) and those whose subject is history (such as *Danton*). The distinction is rather between films inscribed in the flow of dominant (or oppositional) currents of thought and those that propose an independent or innovative view of societies.[8]

Ferro's "currents of thought" are much the same as Rosenstone's "ongoing discourse of history". Ferro is less concerned with the prominence of history within certain films, or whether a film represents history accurately (as the accuracy of professional history is itself always contingent in a number of ways), but rather with what forms of history or *histories* films offer. Clearly

the cinema cannot compete with professional/academic history on the latter's terms.

This study is concerned primarily with the formal and stylistic qualities of particular kinds of French and American films of the 1930s. However, the concern for the formal (particularly spectacular) qualities of historical films is inevitably influenced by questions of historiography and what are considered different kinds of "historytelling". Indeed, an emphasis on historiography can reveal the shallowness of the above separation of *Gone with the Wind* (1939) and *La Grande illusion* (1937) from *Danton* (presumably Andrzej Wajda's 1983 version). Both the Hollywood blockbuster and Renoir's films could be said to have, on some level, "history as their subject".[9] One embeds a critique of the nationalism that caused the Great War within a narrative of prison escape (*La Grande illusion*), the other (*Gone with the Wind*) charts a white, Southern female perspective on the American Civil War, and renders particular moments in the conflict's "big History" in truly spectacular fashion. However, the historiographical distinctions between these films are more revealing than what unites them as "historical films". More than anything, one needs a means of understanding the uses being made of history, and Friedrich Nietzsche has provided one of the most influential frameworks for doing this.

Nietzsche's essay, "On the uses and disadvantages of history for life" has clearly inspired many subsequent discussions of filmic histories and cinematic historiography, and provides the basis for the aesthetic categories pursued through this chapter.[10] Nietzsche divides historical representations into the "monumental", "antiquarian" and "critical" tendencies.[11] His "monumental history" is, as Marcia Landy underlines, the approach most relevant to mainstream cinema:

> Monumental history is an "engagement with the classic and rare of earlier times ... the greatness that once existed." ... Monumental history as purveyed in the cinema has certain defining characteristics. In its use of narrative it relies on a vision of the past during moments of crisis and heroic conflict, and it reveals a penchant for the actions of heroic figures, such as Napoleon, Elizabeth I, Rembrandt and Louis Pasteur.[12]

Monumental history emphasizes moments of crisis and conflict shaped by narrative concerns; monumental history centers around the individual heroic figure, and this is echoed in the cinema most clearly in the biographical film, or "biopic", perhaps the most common form of historical film.

Nietzsche's concern for the uses and *disadvantages* of monumental history foreshadow criticisms made of cinematic representations of the past that still recur today:

> Of what use (...) is the monumentalistic conception of the past, engagement with the classic and rare of earlier times, to the man of the present? He learns that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again. And yet (...) how much of the past would have to be overlooked if it was to produce that mighty effect, how violently what is individual in it would have to be forced into a universal mould and all its sharp corners and hard outlines broken up in the interest of conformity. (...) monumental history will have no use for that absolute veracity: it will always have to deal in approximations and generalities (...); it will always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations so as to exhibit the *effectus* monumentally (...), at the expense of the *causae* (...) it of course incurs the danger of becoming somewhat distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention.[13]

Nietzsche's account of the dangers and disadvantages of the monumental view of history could read as a summary of the main criticisms levelled at, particularly, Hollywood representations of the past: i.e., that historical films reduce the "sharp corners and hard outlines" of historical events and figures, forcing the past into a universalizing mold of individual "triumphs against adversity"; that for the sake of drama, "veracity" is sacrificed in favor of "approximations and generalities", and even more extreme, "free poetic invention"; similarly, the *causes* of a particular historical situation will be ignored and only the *effects* will be rendered "monumentally". In these negative terms, monumental history encompasses so many historical films that it might be considered *the* mainstream cinematic rendition of history.[14] However, to rely on this as a catch-all term for prevailing cinematic representations of history would be somewhat reductive. Nietzsche's considerations of antiquarian history and critical history give us the opportunity for more nuanced understandings of the possibilities available to filmmakers working in the 1930s (and even beyond).

> History (...) belongs *in the second place* to him who preserves and reveres—to him who looks back to whence he has come, to where he came into being, with love and loyalty (...). But this *antiquarian* sense of veneration of the past is of the greatest value when it spreads *a simple feeling of pleasure* and contentment over the modest, rude, even wretched conditions in which a man or a nation lives ... [emphases added].[15]

This second, "antiquarian" mode of history differs from the monumental in its focus on, in Landy's words, "the artifacts [sic] of the past in minute detail".[16] While the monumental emphasizes the grander actions, the exultant (or even terrible) heroism of the past, the antiquarian sensibility is more concerned with the details, we might say "décor of history". For Nietzsche, the danger of this vision of history is less its ability to be distorted,

but more the danger of encouraging a deadening, "mummifying" attention to the past at the expense of the present.[17] If we were to project Nietzsche's comments onto the cinema, his discussion of the "simple feeling of pleasure" evokes the "escapism" (from the "modest, rude, even wretched conditions in which a man or a nation lives") that is so often seen as an affect of historical films in the mold of the costume drama, and what has come to be known as the heritage film.

For Nietzsche, because of the problems of distortion, abstraction and flight from reality that plague the monumental and antiquarian approaches to history, a third approach is required, that of "critical history":

> Critical history attempts to "break up and dissolve a part of the past", concerned with what is deemed to be a necessary reexamination of the methods and values that have animated historians; but this form of history can also be excessive. In challenging the past without a regard for what is to be maintained and what is to be forgotten, the historian employing this method can end up disillusioned, completely denying the past.[18]

Landy suggests this third approach as one that has particularly animated critical discussions of history after Nietzsche. Groups/peoples who feel oppressed by a society's rendition of history (often the monumental) can use the critical mode as a means of freeing-up the representation of history, and even more radically to ask "What *is* history?"[19] Robert A. Rosenstone sees his parallel category of "history as experiment" within more avant-garde cinematic works like those of Eisenstein and Rossellini.[20] The extent to which one might find a vein of "critical history" in popular cinema, particularly of the 1930s, is more questionable, and something one must engage with if one is to employ the Nietzsche categories, however obliquely.

Taken together, Nietzsche's three categories are suggestive of particular cinematic approaches to history, though one is certainly not suggesting that these were, or are, the only approaches available to filmmakers, or are even entirely discrete. Below we shall examine historical films through the notions of "*history as monument*", "*spectacular vistas* and *the décor of history*" and the question "can there be a classical '*critical history?*'" These concepts form the core of the three following sections and acknowledge and differ from the Nietzschean categories in ways that are worth outlining.

In Chapter Four, "History as monument", I follow Nietzsche's emphases, but suggest characteristics particular to the cinema of 1930s France and America. The films examined here comprise firstly "biopics", one of the most pervasive forms of historical filmmaking, and, in their attention to exceptional individuals as primary agents of history, one of the most clearly monumental. I also take Nietzsche's term more literally, by looking at filmic monuments to the First World War, specifically *All Quiet on the Western Front* (1930) and *Les Croix de bois* (1932). I also consider a less somber, more loosely "historical" war film, *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936). The imposition of the iconography of war monuments onto the latter film represents one of the key characteristics of the historical filmmaking I consider as monumental, and the remainder of section one considers the role of this iconography in the pronounced narrational rhetoric of many historical films. While spectacle enters into much of the analysis of "monumental history", in the interests of a fuller sense of the formal characteristics of French and American historical filmmaking of the 1930s (it should be remembered, the monumental is considered in many ways the "norm"), I focus at least as much attention on the films' rhetorical style of narration. I take this to be a necessary corrective to the particular formalist emphases of Bordwellian classicism.

The middle chapter of this Part Two of the book, "spectacular vistas and the décor of history", focuses much more on the issue of spectacle. I begin by examining the correlation between the research and promotional activities of studios and production companies and the varieties of spectacle and display offered by the films. This section marks the most explicit departure from Nietzsche's historiographical categories, though "the décor of history" represents the cinematic equivalent of "antiquarian history". I consider "the décor of history", or the "décorative", in terms of forms of cinematic spectacle and display which stress aspects of the mise-en-scène—I include costume in this but devote more space to the consideration of space and décor. "Spectacular vistas", on the other hand, indicates a different kind of cinematic spectacle, one more attuned to the grander actions of History and particularly "epic" visions of the past—as French 1930s cinema did not produce any epics that I have found, I consider "spectacular vistas" only in relation to some Hollywood films. (Note: there is a close relationship between spectacular vistas and the monumental approach to history: the use of spectacular vistas generally indicates a monumental vision of the past; however, monumental histories do not necessarily use this kind of spectacle, and may also employ the more intimate techniques I associate with the "décor of history".) As forms of spectacle and visual pleasure, the difference between the spectacular vista and the décor of history could be symbolized by, respectively, the bombastic iconography of a triumphal arc (which is itself spectacular, and offers expansive views from its summit) and the lavish interiors of a stately home (which only become 'spectacular" through particular cinematic treatments).

Chapter Six, "Critical history?", again takes its cue from Nietzsche's analysis of the uses and disadvantages of history. It contains a question mark because, providing a conclusion to Part Two, I consider the *extent* to which some of the most famous historical films and filmmakers of the 1930s fashioned narratives that self-consciously reformulated and put into question the monumental edifices of the French and American national pasts.

4 Monumental History

BIOPICS

Biographical pictures, or "biopics", are probably the form of historical film most prevalent in 1930s Hollywood. An important strand of critical thought on popular biography/film biographies leading up to and including the classical era can be traced through Leo Lowenthal,[21] Thomas Elsaesser[22] and George F. Custen.[23] All three have underlined the social function of biography-as-entertainment, and the forms into which the lives of the great and the good are shaped for popular consumption, though Custen's is by far the most sustained analysis of film biographies. As the biopic has been more underexamined within French cinema studies (echoing the, until fairly recently, relative paucity of genre-centered study), I shall devote some more space to notable French biopics of the period. The comparison of French and American practice shall be pursued largely through the analysis of two particular films.

Louis Pasteur

I have chosen to examine two biopics of the same year about this celebrated French chemist, one French, one American. The aim is to situate the two films within the broader national traditions of their time, and the ways they reflect and complicate notions of these kinds of films as "classical". *The Story of Louis Pasteur* (1935) illustrates the marked narrational rhetoric of the 1930s Hollywood biopic, a rhetoric that seeks both to educate the viewer as to the perceived historical significance of the individual, at the same time as appealing to the contemporary viewer's knowledge of the course of History—e.g., the present in which the film is made in which certain discoveries, points of view, etc., can be presented as "common sense". *Pasteur* (FR, 1935) makes similar claims, but where Dieterle's American film uses the rhetoric of Hollywood montage,[24] Guitry's rhetoric is primarily oratory. *Pasteur* is indicative of Guitry's individual style, but it is only an extreme example of French classical cinema's "post-theatrical", more declamatory style. I will be focusing on the differences between the two films (for there are many), but there are obvious similarities too: both

films treat Pasteur as one of the great scientific innovators of the nineteenth century; the two leads (Sacha Guitry and Paul Muni) repeat famous quotes of Pasteur; unsurprisingly perhaps, both feature the highly dramatic incident in which Pasteur saved the nine-year-old Joseph Meister from rabies. However, stylistically, the films are far removed, and it is the two different rhetorical regimes I want to emphasize here.

The opening minutes of the films, and even their titles, are immediately suggestive of the different approaches to the life on show. The single-word title *Pasteur* is firstly redolent of Guitry's much more minimal (or, in less neutral terms, "flatly theatrical") style, and its literally monumental image of the hero. Indeed, the first image of the film takes the place of a title caption, and is of "PASTEUR" engraved onto the base of a bust. *The Story of Louis Pasteur,* on the other hand, evokes the American film's much more dramatic, narrative version of history and the inclusion of the forename not only suggests that American audiences were likely less familiar with the figure, but anticipates a story in which the hero is normalized or familiarized through an exposition of a family life completely absent from Guitry's version—one might offer "familial-ized" as a clumsy neologism. Throughout *The Story of Louis Pasteur*, the hero works from home, and the first assistant we see is his wife (Josephine Hutchinson). This conceit allows the film to emphasize the tension between professional success/the "good of mankind" and familial happiness, a domestic tension pretty much absent from Guitry's version.[25] In *Pasteur*, a more "statuesque" vision of the great chemist, Pasteur's wife is briefly mentioned but is never on-screen. The introductions to the two films are illustrative of many of their key differences.

Pasteur was famous playwright and actor Sacha Guitry's first foray into sound film production and his imprint is literally all over the film. After the bust of Louis Pasteur has faded from the screen, the credits tell us, "This film was conceived and directed by Sacha Guitry". Like many of his films from the 1930s, Guitry is also the star, and here he even appears as himself in a prologue of approximately five minutes announced by the caption, "L'AUTEUR". Seated at a desk in a study, Guitry explains to an unidentified guest (the man's back is always to the camera) his passion for Pasteur. Guitry admits relative ignorance of the scientific details, but claims it is the man's "ardent life" ("vie ardente") about which he is "impassioned". This is an interesting comment given that we have very little of the personal life of Pasteur, but certainly a vivid account of the man's character (or at least Guitry's take on it). The prologue promotes the sense that we (through the surrogate figure of the faceless observer/reporter/student?) have been privileged an audience with "the prince of Paris" (one of Guitry's nicknames). The opening image of the bust of Pasteur, and Guitry's introductory speech on the scientist's greatness combines with Guitry's own verbal sophistication and loquacious delivery (Guirty's trademark) to underline the sense of one great man honoring another. Indeed, in the background there is a bust of what seems most likely Guitry's father, Lucien, whom Sacha idolized

(see Figure 4.1). This illustrates Guitry's very "patriarchal" view of history. *Pasteur* is arguably the far more insistent of the two films on the seriousness of its tribute, its "monument-like-ness" to Louis Pasteur. However, it is also very much about Guitry's Guitry-ness.

Figure 4.1 *Pasteur* (1935): Guitry as gentleman scholar with bust pointing to paternal lineage.

The prologue to this French film also serves to emphasize what Hollywood studios normally sought to achieve through promotional activities: the depth and accuracy of research undertaken. Guitry hands the faceless man a book of photographs of Pasteur's childhood home, copies of drawings Pasteur had made as a young man, and other official documents like his birth certificate—these are all subsequently presented to the camera as if the observer's optical point of view. Thus Guitry presents himself as something like a gentleman scholar, undertaking a cinematic project through passion and respect for a French national and historical treasure. The transition to the film story/history proper is also interesting because it lingers on the idea of recreating the past through verbal means (playwright Guitry's cinema is an overwhelmingly verbal one), while offering an image reminiscent of previous portraiture—the film slowly dissolves from Guitry-as-Guitry to Guitry-as-Pasteur framed by a doorway, creating an image directly recalling a well-known painting of the chemist (Albert Edelfelt's 1885 "Louis Pasteur," held by the Musée d'Orsay). As the camera tracks in through the door, to move closer in on Pasteur, Guitry-as-Guitry continues his voiceover: "Imagine hearing one of his statements so simple but so profound." Then

Pasteur speaks of the impossibility of life without work. Thus present (1935) and past are joined through the seductive tone of the biographer's voice, taking us into a dramatization of the subject's life that is predominantly shot in long-takes, and fixed shots. As Guitry's first major film, *Pasteur* is the least technically "cinematic" (in the sense of deploying a range of shots and transitional effects), but is as insistent as his subsequent films on the power of his speech and delivery. The predominance of long fixed close shots of "Louis Pasteur" underline the link to busts, paintings and monuments of the great man.

The opening of *The Story of Louis Pasteur* employs very different rhetorical strategies. Where Guitry's film is a slow, loquacious, and considered account of some key scenes in Pasteur's life, Dieterle's film shapes Pasteur's life into a dynamic and dramatic narrative. The American biopic opens in a cluttered room with the caption, "1860. A doctor's office in Paris". A doctor hurries around his room gathering his instruments—an off-screen voice tells him his carriage is waiting. He clumsily handles his instruments, drops one on the floor, and then wipes it off with some spittle. A shadowy figure enters through a window, addresses the doctor then shoots him. We then cut to a scene in a police station with an officer asking the gunman why he did it. The latter responds that the doctor killed his wife, gave her "childbed fever with his dirty hands". When the gunman hands him a pamphlet by way of explanation, the inspector sees the authors and says, "Louis Pasteur. Who is he?" The question is answered in the next shot by a character we will come to know as Dr. Radisse (Raymond Brown), who is addressing a group gathered round a table: "He is a menace to science. The shooting of Dr. François proves it." He says, "You have all read his pamphlet", picking up a piece of paper on the table. There is then another cut to Napoléon III (Walter Kingsford) holding the same pamphlet in his hand, a graphic matching of the paper's position in frame to that of the previous shot managing the transition. Another doctor, Charbonnet (Fritz Leiber), is complaining to the emperor about the preposterousness of Pasteur's claims for scrubbing hands and boiling instruments. (Charbonnet, along with Radisse, will be Pasteur's chief antagonist throughout the drama.) The empress interjects that if Pasteur is wrong, why do so many people die in a hospital. The emperor says, "Yes, Charbonnet. Why?" The image cuts to an image of germs under a microscope with Paul Muni/Louis Pasteur's voice stating, "Because of criminal disregard for germs ..." The above extracts moments from a sequence of less than five minutes comprising five different scenes and compressing an indeterminate amount of time. (In Guitry's version, the first five minutes comprises Guitry performing himself in his study, indicative of his loquacious style.)

This degree of exposition is offered for a number of reasons: firstly, it is hoped that the description is recognized as fairly standard Hollywood procedure; the sequence's economy is noteworthy for its introduction of one of the medical problems with which Pasteur is associated, and the hostility that surrounds his theories, including that from two of the principal antagonists; the sequence uses fictional characters (Dr. Charbonnet and Dr. Radisse) in combination with Historical figures (Napoléon III, Empress Eugénie and, of course, Pasteur) to paint an historical truth in broad but dramatic brushstrokes (e.g., the innovations of scientists like Pasteur met with considerable skepticism by established institutions); formally, also, the grammar of classical Hollywood editing (for example the match-on-action and match-on-dialogue that conjoins different spaces) is used in a fashion that is not necessarily self-effacing. Where Guitry's approach to Pasteur is rhetorical in the original sense related to oration, the American biopic employs a different kind of rhetoric in which history is visibly shaped by an expository structure and editing techniques that put the individual/performer in a much more subordinate, less determining role.

The rhetorical differences between the films can be illustrated also by the moments in which Big History in the shape of the Franco-Prussian War crosses into the individual history of Louis Pasteur. In Guitry's much more "stagey" version, the outbreak of war is mainly signified off-screen by the noise of a crowd outside his laboratory and through the departure and enlistment of two of his assistants. Guitry/Pasteur speaks to his young helpers about the importance for France of scientific *and* artistic advancement.[26] Two shots are interspersed into his speech showing an official proclamation of the war being posted to a wall. The scene ends with Guitry/Pasteur telling his students: "Our cruellest enemies are ... microbes." Guitry/Pasteur remains the central focus of the moment and is granted the autonomy to relate his story to wider Historical events.

The Story of Louis Pasteur evokes the war through a montage sequence which simultaneously delivers simpler, clearer historical details, and is more structurally didactic, but in a way that enables and prepares for the continuing personal, "familial-ized" story of the Pasteur character. The montage sequence begins with captions flashing "1870" and "Franco-Prussian War" over images of period troops rushing over a battlefield. The image dissolves to a multilayered shot of Pasteur at a microscope mixed with an image of germs accompanied by the text: "While men fought and killed one another, Pasteur was fighting microbes—the real enemy of all mankind". The image then cuts to another dense image of a battle scene dissolving slowly into an image of Napoléon III's portrait. The portrait is removed and replaced by another with the excessively explanatory plaque at the bottom reading, "Louis Adolphe Thiers—First President of the Republic of France". This then takes us into a scene in which Thiers (Herbert Corthell, who looks remarkably like the real Thiers) is explaining that the fate of France depends on the revenue she can gain from her livestock, livestock which is being ravaged by anthrax. As the conversation continues, Thiers underlines the importance of discovering why the sheep in only one region of France have been untouched by the disease. The next scenes take us to this region, where, one is scarcely surprised, it is discovered that it is Pasteur's

vaccinations that have saved the sheep. In these scenes, there begins the romance between Pasteur's daughter and the young doctor Jean Martell, a narrative strand that will run through the rest of the film. In this, his first of many scientific triumphs, he is figured as the literal savior of France, and this occurs in relation to the grand spectacle of History (evident mainly as brief text and image inserts in a montage sequence), the discourses of great men ("the first democratic leader of France") but principally through a domestic sphere that doubles as Pasteur's workplace.

Both films employ a strategy fairly typical of the biopic, and certainly biopics of innovators like Pasteur, by encouraging the recognition by modern viewers (that is of 1935) of the hero's opinions as "common-sense" (by modern standards). The historical figure, as a man "ahead of his times" is somewhat like a modern figure in an anterior world. This is evident in a scene at the "Académie de médecine" in *Pasteur* when, following a rather heated exchange, the scientist is challenged to a duel by a disgruntled elderly peer. Guitry's performance of Pasteur's reaction brilliantly evokes the madness of this *anachronistic* gesture, without quite stepping out of the film world of Paris 1870. *The Story of Louis Pasteur* similarly works on this recognition of now-commonsensical knowledge contrasted to historical ignorance. In the more liberal embellishments to history (with Pasteur's daughter being in mortal peril from the ignorance of contemporaneous doctors), Dieterle's film underlines this visually, by making Muni's Pasteur teach Charbonnet how to *perform* properly as a doctor (the holding of the washed hands aloft in the air is performed by Pasteur then mimicked by Charbonnet). This illustrates the particular relationship to the spectator that biopics like this set up. The question is clearly not simply the delivery of a smooth flowing, self-effacing, character goal-oriented narrative (though this is an element of course), but a direct engagement with the historical knowledge of the audience and a "worthy" aspiration to teach the audience more of this history and underline the true significance of the great achievements of the past. This worthy, declamatory stance is also evident in more "theatrical" moments, most evident in the climax of *The Story of Louis Pasteur* where the great chemist is feted by the Academy of Medicine. Overwhelmed and, for once, lost for words, Muni's Pasteur's gaze falls upon the highest balcony of the auditorium and he addresses, "You young men: doctors and scientists of the future ..." He tells them of the need for scientific progress, even during "the sadness of certain hours that creep over nations". Not only does he address the young faces in the diegetic crowd but posterity itself, a "Historical gaze" that transcends the present of narration and addresses the present of the film spectator. The sense of Pasteur's worth is then underlined in the standing ovation of the diegetic audience that ends the film.[27]

Other French Biopics

Without undertaking research far beyond the range of this study, it is impossible to get an accurate picture of the quantity of biopics in the

French cinema of the 1930s relative to contemporary American production. In a 2005 chapter charting the reception of the French biopic historically, and its production more recently, Caroline Vernisse suggests that biopics constituted 0.5 percent of French production between 1929 and 1989 and that this proportion has increased substantially to 2.24 percent 1990–2005.[28] However, as Vernisse's time period includes the 1980s, a period of apparently very steep decline in biopic production, the figures are of limited use for assessing production in the 1930s. Furthermore, no extensive filmographies exist to match those compiled by George F. Custen for the period 1927–1960.[29]

Custen's study of the biopic remains useful for the analysis of many of the formal characteristics of the French films. One central tenet of the monumentalism of the biopic shared by many French and American examples is the sense of the *predestined* greatness of the subjects:

> Among the most distinctive aspects of the cinematic life was that the biopic almost always started *in media res*, with the figure past the age where his or her values can be influenced by the family. Because of this structure, explanations of causality other than those involving the family come to dominate the lives of the famous. In place of the family as a model of causality, Hollywood inserted self-invention, that most characteristic American form of personality construction.[30]

This is relevant, not only to the approach to Pasteur's life in both French and American biopics, but echoes Nietzsche's observation that monumental history will exhibit "the *effectus* ... at the expense of the *causae*".[31] While self-invention is still important to many French biographical films, particular institutional perspectives available within French cinema of the 1930s encourage alternative responses to the genre's visions of greatness.

L'Appel du silence (1936) is in fact a cradle-to-grave biopic as opposed to an *in media res* representation. However, the French film does equally stress the predestined greatness of a man who, as an orphan, is free from the determining influence of the family. However, Poirier's film introduces a very different causality into the breach left by upbringing: divinity. *L'Appel du silence* illustrates that, though it may be hard to be definitive about the relative frequency of the French biopic of the 1930s, the examples that remain demonstrate a different range of approaches to the Hollywood context. The French cinema's much more open and diverse system of production and distribution, its far greater reliance on independent production in comparison with studio-era Hollywood is in evidence. The very individual "gentleman scholar" presentation of Guitry's *Pasteur* can be said to illustrate this in stylistic terms, but Poirier's film is a more extreme example of an ideological and financial undertaking entirely alien to studio Hollywood's modes of production. *L'Appel du silence* is in many ways the mirror image of Renoir's *La Marseillaise* (examined below in the context of

"critical history?").[32] Both were funded by subscription and both are highly political renditions of historical subjects. Whereas the funds for Renoir's film were organized by the French Communist Party, the production costs of Léon Poirier's film were raised by the Catholic Church.

As with many of the films examined in this section, *L'Appel du silence* opens with a visual signifier of its "monument-ness". A text foreword takes the form of an engraved tablet resembling a tombstone (of the kind seen on the floors of cathedrals). It reads, "By national subscription and by the will of 100,000 of French people, this film has been made in memory of Charles de Foucauld and follows his heroic life, 1858–1916 [my translation]". This foreword not only posits itself as a monument through its visual and graphic qualities, but also underlines that this is a monument paid for by the French people themselves (or at least 100,000 of them). While this means of funding (a national subscription service organized by the Church) might make *L'Appel du silence* a marginal exercise even in French production terms, the film was in fact an enormous commercial success. According to Colin Crisp's figures, Poirier's film was the number-one box office attraction of the year, bringing in 887,000 Parisian spectators,[33] indicative, at least anecdotally, of the considerable power of Catholicism in 1936 France and the high status of de Foucauld in Catholic milieux.

The film follows the life of de Foucauld (Jean Yonnel) from his aristocratic birth and subsequent rebellious and dissolute youth in a military academy. Thereafter we see his transformation from a young officer, to celebrated explorer of Morocco's deserts, and finally, the emerging religious devotion which leads him to the founding of the Catholic mission in Morocco where he is finally killed by Touareg rebels. The film's title (meaning "the call of silence") refers to the solitude and peace of the desert to which de Foucauld is irresistibly drawn. The silence represents a space for spiritual devotion against which the chaos of modern French/Western life is contrasted. Thus, as with most biopics, the film does not just tell the story of a life, but uses that life as a barometer against which to measure broader historical concerns.

The director, Léon Poirier, is better known for his silent film work, and *L'Appel du silence* was only his third fully sound feature. In fact, Poirier would make just four more films after *L'Appel*, his career ending thanks to his pro-Pétainist filmmaking during the war.[34] Poirier's politics are not hard to spot given *L'Appel*'s approach to its subject and the rhetoric of military and religious colonialism, but his filmmaking past is also evident in the photography of desert locations. Poirier made a series of documentary or semidocumentary films during the silent era, many of them set in France's imperial colonies, including North Africa, and he is seen as an innovative filmmaker in the use of location shooting.[35] Poirier was also brought in by André Citroën to reedit a documentary on the crossing of Africa by new Citroën vehicles, *La Croisère noire* (1926), because the original filmmaker was apparently promoting an anti-colonialist perspective.[36] Where the latter film (as edited by Poirier) is said to promote French technological prowess

as a part of colonialism, *L'Appel* is profoundly antipathetic towards technological progress (though this does not prevent the credits acknowledging the use of Citroën cars for the film's Saharan expeditions).

The historical sweep of the narrative (covering a period of time of enormous social and technological change) was further underlined in the wider promotion of the film. For example, the illustrated script (a promotional publication) is organized into a timeline, with the entry for 1886 underlining the historical significations of de Foucauld's story as conceived by Poirier: "The explorer of Morocco returns to Paris and finds a world in transformation; the era of material progress begins, one speaks only of the telephone, the automobile and aviation. Jaurès is the prophet of the future city; Jules Ferry of secularism [*laïcité*]" [my translation].[37]

The above text refers in particular to a scene at a Parisian party at which de Foucauld is a rather reluctant guest. He longs to return to the desert and is depressed by the bourgeois hostess's dismissal of religion as a topic of polite society, a comment she makes in response to a guest who seeks to engage de Foucauld in a discussion of Jules Ferry's promotion of *laïcité*—Ferry was the education minister who had overseen the act enforcing the separation of education and religion. Jean Jaurès (uncredited), the famous French leftist politician, also provides an historical cameo, and speaks passionately, but rather pompously, about the technological supremacy of "the city of the future", a speech to which de Foucauld appears to respond more favorably. (Jaurès talks of a pacifist future, which despite the supposedly benign colonial militarism the film also promotes, corresponds with the Christian ideals embodied by de Foucauld). As Ungar notes, curiously, the zoetrope (famous precursor of the cinema) is also presented for the amusement of the guests in a scene clearly meant to underline the spiritual bankruptcy and shallowness of modern life.[38]

The film reaches its conclusion at the time of the First World War and this modern conflict is set against the tranquility of de Foucauld's mission—of course anxieties about the war are frequently linked to anxieties about mechanization and modernity. De Foucauld's spiritual enlightenment (rendered concrete in his visions of Christ) parallels his disillusionment with the material world outside of the desert. On a structural level, the film contrasts the rapid and sometimes cataclysmic changes of 1858–1916 with the solidity of faith and the promise of eternal salvation. As Ungar remarks, de Foucauld's death "is prepared throughout the film as the culmination of a spiritual—specifically Christian—quest".[39] The narrative begins in 1858 with de Foucauld's christening in Strasbourg cathedral and a discussion between the priest and a friend of the family (both uncredited) about the long line of de Foucauld martyrs that precede Charles. The conversation turns to the cathedral's famous astrological clock which, they remark, embodies the passage of time itself. This scene of birth ends on a note of particularly Catholic morbidity as the clock's figure of death strikes a bell. This bell signals a jump in the narration to 1864 and de Foucauld's orphaning. From here on, the text inserts throughout the film are accompanied by the figure of death striking the bell.

The astrological clock is not only a structuring device, but is also a constant reminder of mortality, and the permanence of the church contrasted with the rapid and destructive changes wrought by modernity. The film puts the rest of its faith in the honor of the French army, culminating with the burial of the other main historical character of the film, General Laperrine (Pierre de Guingand), alongside de Foucauld. A soldier standing by the grave underlines the link between devotion to faith and devotion to imperialist France: "Henceforth, here lie side by side; the soldier of faith and the soldier of France". The bombast music swells and the film ends on an image of sunlight breaking through the clouds above the graves. Through the visualization of Christian ideology, the film makes literal the sense of "god-given greatness" that many biopics promote.

Raymond Bernard's *Marthe Richard au service de la France* (1937) tells the story of a famous First World War French spy. Richard was a one-time prostitute who first achieved fame through tales of her wartime exploits and then became an important political figure: the 1946 act that closed France's brothels carries her name.[40] Bernard's film was partly based on the highly romanticized memoirs of former French spymaster Captain Ladoux (1937), the relevant volume of which, "Marthe Richard espionne au service de la France", gave the film its title. Consequently, the actions of Edwige Feuillère's heroine are always shown to be at the service of France, but in line with the goal-orientation of "classical" cinema, her patriotism is fueled by personal sentiments. Following the murder of her family during the Prussian War (recounted in a prologue) and the subsequent death of her husband during the First World War, we see Richard's desire to serve France in some way. A French official offers her the opportunity to work as a spy, primarily to ensnare the military attaché and spymaster played by Erich von Stroheim, "Baron Erich Von Ludow", clearly a version of the real historical figure Von Crohn. In a coincidence typical of many Hollywood biopics, it turns out that Von Ludow killed Richard's family, and her quest is thus fueled by the desire for revenge. In Madrid, Richard competes for Von Ludow's affections with famous courtesan and spy Mata Hari (Délia Col). The theme of prostitution is sublimated in favor of sexual sacrifice for patriotic ends, and Richard is contrasted to the more threatening sexuality of Col's Mata Hari. (This is a much more decorous film than Feuillère's previous major biopic role in Gance's Borgia film, examined below.[41])

Geneviève Sellier discusses the moment in the film where Richard finally reveals her true identity to von Ludow, and the latter, heartbroken and bitter, kills himself. It is a classic von Stroheim moment of pain visible through his elegant, "Germanic" restraint. His performance is matched by Feuillère's intensely conflicted emotionality:

> This very elaborate sequence in fact marks the real end of the film, where the victim is the woman who, for the sake of revenge, has lost her last chance at love. The reference to the real figure of Marthe Richard did not, unfortunately, allow the filmmaker to follow through the logic of the melodrama, and the film suffers from this heterogeneity.[42]

Sellier's account expresses the not-uncommon feeling that historical or biographical films are limited by their real-world referent. While Sellier suggests the film's melodramatic logic should dictate the death of Marthe Richard, history dictates otherwise. In fact, the actual ending of *Marthe Richard au service de la France* sees the intrusion of the common rhetoric of monumental historytelling into the interpersonal drama.

Richard's betrayal of von Ludow is followed by a montage sequence telling of the United States' apparently decisive entry into the war. Images of American battleships are accompanied by the "stars and stripes" that meld with the *tricolore*. A montage of trench scenes (some of which seem to have been borrowed from Raymond Bernard's earlier war film, *Les Croix de bois*) end in a sequence beneath L'Arc de triomphe. Richard is a spectator in a crowd watching the French soldier's victory procession. She bumps into a pompous middle-aged woman who admonishes her for obstructing her view of the military heroes. She asks derisorily, "what did *you* ever do for the war effort?" The film has stressed the considerable military significance of Richard's earlier actions, but here she is resigned to her lack of acknowledgment and she walks away. While the film has offered Richard as an image of feminine French resistance, the final sequence sees her exclusion from the celebrations.

As Sellier notes, this ending rather undermines the force of the melodrama surrounding Richard and von Crohn, and the heavy rhetoric of the final montage is discordant with the style of the rest of the film. However, it is a recurring strategy of historical films to relate, and often put into conflict, the actions of individuals with the historical events bigger than themselves. This conflict is often expressed through the rhetoric of the montage sequence, which seems, often, a kind of default rendition of the grander movements of History. Often also, the rhetoric of the montage sequence is complemented by literally monumental imagery like that of L'Arc de triomphe—in *Marthe Richard au service de la France*, Bernard also seems to have reused footage of L'Arc de triomphe (specifically Francois Rude's sculpture "La Marseillaise") originally seen in *Les Croix de bois*.

Abel Gance is perhaps the most prominent practitioner of film biographies in French cinema of the 1930s. Like Léon Poirier and Marcel L'Herbier, he is more famous for his silent work, especially *Napoléon* (1927), a film which is seen to make 1927 the "apotheosis of French historical film".[43] Thanks to his subsequent 1930s films, Gance is seen (in negative terms) as intimately bound to a certain grandiose form of historical cinema. Writing in 1987 about recent rereleases of *Napoléon* (distinguished largely by their different scores), Ferro makes a link to monumental architecture, particularly the cathedral:

> Whereas Eisenstein *asks questions about history* and its modes of representation, Abel Gance is above all a man of *spectacle*. His maître

> à penser is neither Marx, nor Auguste Comte: as Jean Tulard points out correctly, his ideal is Edmond Rostand [most famous as the playwright of *Cyrano de Bergerac*]. Unbearable in the eyes of the avant-garde, this grandiose academism has always pleased institutions, because it comforts and reassures them.[44]

While Ferro places Eisenstein in what I refer to as a "critical" approach to film historytelling, Gance's approach seems to be pure monumentalism. Questions of politics and aesthetics are so often entwined, but particularly so in the case of Gance. Where the artistic avant-garde loathed his academism and conservative aesthetics, he would also be vilified for his Petainism. Ferro describes Gance in another essay as a "Bonapartist and pre-Fascist, glorifying the man of destiny".[45] This emphasis on great men of destiny, so central to many monumental visions of history, is coincident with Gance's belief in *Maréchal* Pétain.[46] Aside from the taint of Petainism that would make many reject Gance after the war, his films from the 1930s (at least the ones that are still readily available) do bear out the perception of his work after the disastrous production of *La Fin du monde* ("The End of the World") as struggling to adapt to the introduction of sound. After the commercial catastrophe of this 1931 "disaster movie", Gance went from being a celebrated auteur to a *metteur-en-scène*-for-hire.[47] Of *La Fin du monde*, Billard suggests the attempt to integrate the new sound technology into the film meant, "the film went from grandiose to chatty [*bavard*], grandiloquent, outlandish [*outrancier*]";[48] this could be taken as a summary comparison of his silent and sound work.

We see in *Lucrèce Borgia* (1935) and *Un Grand amour de Beethoven* (1936) an uneasy combination of the monumental academism Ferro cites with an outlandish, even titillating sensationalism. *Lucrèce Borgia* is perhaps most famous for showing Edwige Feuillère, in the title role, half-naked.[49] Moreover, the film combines a salacious story of the Borgias, the family who effectively ruled Italy around the end of the fifteenth century, with a discourse on written history and the legacy of Renaissance art. The film is initially structured around Machiavelli (Aimé Clariond) as he sits at his desk writing "Le Prince" (*Il Principe*, originally published in 1513). Machiavelli writes with an ironic sneer on his face, the film intercutting between his expression, the text on the page and images that illustrate the text. For example, he writes of the terror of life under the Borgias before we see one of the mounted entourage of Pope Rodrigo Borgia (Roger Karl) indiscriminately bludgeon a passing peasant. As he sits, Machiavelli is surrounded by Renaissance art, and at one point Gance's camera picks out Botticelli's *Primavera* from the lush décor.

The structuring device of Machiavelli's writing recedes as the film progresses and begins to focus on the political and romantic intrigues surrounding Lucrèce, most of which are instigated by her evil brother César Borgia (Gabriel Gabrio). However, Machiavelli returns to a prominent position in

the narration during the film's conclusion. After the loss of a line of lovers to the murderous ambitions of César, Lucrèce renounces personal happiness. She admits to Machiavelli that her one ambition is to remain a strong patron of the arts: "I want history to remember Lucrèce Borgia as their protector". As evinced by many of the films examined in this chapter, this kind of historical foresight (granted, of course, in retrospect) is quite particular to this mode of filmmaking. Also typically however, it is a great *man*, Machiavelli, who through his writings, and in the film's final moment, is granted this foresight in less equivocal terms. In a moment of near-direct address, he turns towards the camera and states, "With history and legend, Lucrèce Borgia will never fade".

The patriarchal bias this implies is evident in much historiography, clearly not only in the cinema. Clemente Fusero's rather populist book, *The Borgias*, is preceded by a revealing statement: "They [the Borgia men] fascinate because they are men of action and their traits of personality go to make up the supreme example of the Renaissance type of individualism: vigorous instincts, gifts of character and intelligence, capacity for calculation."[50] These gifts of character and calculation, the determined, instinctual individualism of the great men of Renaissance history (including *notorious* figures like the Borgias) are embodied in the Historical gaze. Female figures like Lucrèce, who in Gance's film is the victim of the ambitions of her brother, find themselves in a more difficult position. The main assets Feuillère's Borgia has to play with are her sexuality, yet ultimately this becomes a form of political currency controlled by her ruthless brother.

Gance's romantic vision of a tortured commitment to art is more thoroughly pursued through *Un Grand amour de Beethoven*. Like *Lucrèce Borgia*, Gance's biography of Beethoven is wedded to written history, or at least its affect. The film starts with a quote from Wagner, "I believe in God and in Beethoven", and begins the narration of the almost magical musical powers of the composer (Harry Baur) with an image overlaid with text: "Passing by the house of a neighbor, Beethoven is surprised to see the shutters closed". Beneath this text there are some smaller words resembling a footnote for a written source: "Improvisation of the *Pathétique*". *Pathétique* was the name given by Beethoven for his Piano Sonata No. 8, a famous piece of music we see Beethoven play in the subsequent scene. He enters the house and comforts a bereaved mother (Sylvie Gance) with the, apparently improvised, piece of music—she ends by saying "Merci, merci!", the pathos of Beethoven's music reaching her in a way her fellow mourners cannot.

The historical source for this scene or for the text which introduces it is not clear, if indeed there is one. However, what is important is the film's affecting of scholarly seriousness. Throughout the rest of the film, Gance ties various aspects of his dramatization of Beethoven's life to written documents and even the subtitle of the film, "*L'immortelle aimée*", is taken from a letter written by the real Beethoven. Scholars are said to have debated the real identity of this "immortal beloved", and the film uses this confusion as the basis for its central love triangle between Beethoven, Thérèse de

Brunswick (Annie Ducaux) and Juliette Guicciardi (Jany Holt)—there is even a moment where Thérèse mistakenly identifies herself as "l'immortelle aimée" by finding a letter really meant for Juliette. The film also reconstructs the writing of the "Heiligensdat testament", in which Beethoven is said to have admitted contemplating suicide.

Written text plays its role in the final, rapidly edited conclusion to the film, in which Beethoven's death grants the tortured soul the final popular recognition denied him in his lifetime—the film's narrative has Beethoven become penniless and unappreciated, when in reality he was neither. After recreating the famous anecdote of Beethoven's final deathbed rail against a storm raging outside, Gance cuts to the priest and other friends of Beethoven leaving through the door. These doors take on the function of stage curtains, as a series of cuts show the rapturous applause of an audience who, it seems, have been attending a Beethoven recital concurrent with the deathbed scene. These express the composer's popular recognition through "theatrical" means, in some ways reminiscent of the endings of *The Life of Emile Zola* and *The Story of Louis Pasteur*; only here it comes marginally, and tragically, too late. We then cut back to Baur/Beethoven's face frozen as if a death mask. An unseen figure closes the corpse's eyes and Baur and Gance's names appear before "Fin" finally zooms outwards. This final image is accompanied by the composer's "Ode to Joy" (Beethoven's 9th symphony). Like *Marthe Richard* and like the fictionalized ending of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (see below), the film thus posits itself as a monument capable of celebrating a life, which in its time went unappreciated (at least according to the film's mythic view of Beethoven and other romantic myths of tortured genius). It is also a typically "Gancian" gesture to emboss his name on the final image, though he does also find space for his star: "Gance expresses through Beethoven a common obsession with genius. A cineaste [composer of images] [celebrates] music, symbol of all art ... Romanticism is its subject; Romanticism is its form. The cinema becomes music; Gance becomes Beethoven".[51]

French and American biopics share many important characteristics, but there are subtle differences arguably resulting from the different industrial makeup of the two industries. Custen argues that classical Hollywood biopics would regularly promote their producers' visions of what constituted a great life, and often this corresponded to visions of their own rise from adversity to greatness. The lives of important historical figures[52] were not only submitted to the dramatic and narrative conventions derived from other genres, but to models of fame derived from the industry itself:

> Whether one is a performing artist or not, the "star turn" and the notion of "overnight star" became an established part of the biopic repertoire for all professions, a legacy of the entertainment superstructure as an explanation of fame.[53]

While the biopic is one of 1930s Hollywood's most verbose and middlebrow genres, the films are still greatly informed by the popular cultural structures of the entertainment industry. French biopics on the other hand demonstrate a more "official" perspective, in the sense of the academism that Ferro remarks of Gance.[54] Gance's approach is echoed by the "gentleman scholar" posturing of Guitry, and *L'Appel du silence* offers a rigorous theological, *explicitly institutional* perspective somewhat alien to Hollywood.

WAR FILMS

The war film is clearly a very particular kind of historical film, generally considered a genre unto itself. Moreover, this type of film encompasses a range of approaches to its subject, from the more worthy, prestigious reconstructions/analyses of an historical conflict to war films that might be considered rather a subset of action-adventure films. Therefore, the films I will focus on here range from the most serious, memorializing responses to the First World War (*All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Les Croix de bois*) to a notoriously gung-ho approach to historical conflict and historical accuracy (*The Charge of the Light Brigade*).

All Quiet on the Western Front and *Les Croix de bois*

The films examined here were particularly prominent internationally amongst early talkie productions about the First World War (James Whale's 1930 British film, *Journey's End* and Howard Hughes's Hollywood blockbuster of the same year, *Hell's Angels*, being other famous examples). *All Quiet on the Western Front*, a rather didactic *anti-war* film, was one of the most lavish and prestigious Hollywood productions of its year—the film won Academy awards for best picture and Lewis Milestone for best director. In the French context, *Les Croix de bois* was an equally prestigious production (even more so as "prestige productions" were comparatively rare in early 1930s French cinema) and its style combines a harsh "realist" depiction of the war with passages rich in symbolic effects. The two films are similarly somber in tone, but their stylistic treatments of, then, very recent history reveal many other differences.

All Quiet on the Western Front was a prestige production in manifold ways: the budget was a considerable one for the time (approx. $1.2 million), so too was the running time (131 minutes) and it was based on a very successful novel (by German veteran Erich Maria Remarque) concerning the Great War. The combination of literary source and historical subject matter can be seen to confer a film such as this strong middlebrow cultural capital. The title on the opening credits reads "All Quiet on the Western Front ... by Erich Maria Remarque" and one notable poster for the film showed soldiers emerging from Remarque's book. Stylistically too, the film quickly avows its status as a "quality" production, and employs a rather didactic mode of narration to project its message. All the characters, to a greater or lesser extent, represent particular types, the film focusing on a group of young

German volunteers led by Paul Baumer (Lew Ayres), whose character arcs require them principally to go from naivety to bitter-learned experience and/or death in the trenches.

The opening scenes of the film present the inculcation of schoolboy recruits in a small German town into a nationalist view of the conflict. This is dramatized most forcefully in a sequence that begins with a technically sophisticated crane shot. The camera begins by framing a parade of soldiers through a window, then cranes back to reveal a schoolroom in which the teacher is addressing his class. The crane shot immediately presents the high "artistic" and technical ambitions of the film. Indeed, *All Quiet* was signaled out for praise at the time of its release as a film in which, in David Bordwell's terms, "camera movement had become a significant instance of virtuosity, a source of spectacle in its own right".[55] While one might be cautious of seeing technical virtuosity as spectacular "in its own right", in this case the crane shot does frame a particular kind of spectacle (that of bellicose nationalism)[56] in a quite critical way. Furthermore, as one also sees in many of the more ambitious early talkies, the sound design is used self-consciously: the sound of the military band outside competes with the voice of the teacher until the latter dominates the mix, his words becoming clearer as he says, "Join our armies", his right hand pointing in the same direction in which the soldiers visible outside are marching. The studied construction of the scene underlines that this space, traditionally symbolic of education and enlightenment, is here a tool for nationalist propaganda. Indeed, via the clashing sound and imagery (the blackboard in between the windows framing the soldiers), one gets an initial sense of competition between the spectacle of the soldiers outside and the rhetoric of the teacher inside, until his words become clear and we realize all is working in rhetorical harmony. The scene reaches its climax as the boys are convinced to enlist in a cacophony of shouts and series of rapid-fire cuts somewhat reminiscent of Soviet montage.[57]

The scene in the classroom, with the marching soldiers outside, frames a particular kind of spectacle (patriotic, nationalist, militarist) with a high degree of irony. Similarly the battle scenes, which in many war films offer exhilarating spectacular set pieces, are never allowed to be "just" spectacular. The first major battle scene comes roughly a third of the way through. It clearly aims to be an as-authentic-as-possible recreation of the trench warfare of the First World War, but on a structural level, its status as a recreation of an individual battle is subordinate to its representation of a perceived historical truth: that the trench warfare was a brutal but generally pointless game of give and take. Here, spectacle and narrative serve the film's rhetoric.

The main battle scene begins from the point of view of Paul and his comrades as the French soldiers attack the German lines. Long-shots show the French soldiers running across no-man's land from left to right. As they draw closer, we have a series of rapid tracking shots moving from left to right from the point of view of the German lines, which evoke the firing line of German machine gun posts—it is as if the camera itself shoots down the

opposing troops. After images of horrific hand-to-hand fighting, the French troops capture the German trench, forcing Paul and his comrades further behind the German lines. The German soldiers then attempt (after what seems like only a minute or so) to regain the ground by running back in almost identical shots to those of the French running across no-man's land (the Germans are shown running from right to left). There is then a repetition, but reversal, of the machine gun tracking shot (now moving right to left) until the Germans manage to destroy the French machine gun post. The movement of one set of soldiers is always matched and canceled out by the movement of the other—this underlines that while taking the point-of-view of some German characters, this is not a German view of the war, but a consciously internationalist one. The scene uses a very deliberate style to not only represent a single battle but to represent what is perceived as the wider futility of trench warfare 1914–1918.[58]

Before we examine Raymond Bernard's film, it is worth briefly sketching the wider array of cinematic approaches to the war during the decade. In the US, Howard Hughes's *Hell's Angels*, was released only a month after Milestone's film, and could scarcely be more different. The predominant image of the First World War, trench warfare, is almost entirely absent from *Hell's Angels*, which instead focuses on the exploits of pilots.[59] The film might be said to "engage with the ongoing discourses of history" by presenting the callous ease with which commanding officers sacrificed their men, but this is projected solely onto the Germans (the film's heroes are English) and into one scene in which German soldiers are forced to jump to their deaths in order to save a sinking zeppelin. However, the film's attention to history is expressed primarily in the apparent authenticity of the airplanes (indeed, the one "real" historical figure who is present is famous German flight commander, von Richtoffen, "the Red Baron" [Wilhelm von Brincken]). Spectacular dogfights sit alongside a melodramatic narrative which sees Jean Harlow's woman of loose morals come between two morally opposed brothers, one a hero (James Hall), one a coward (Ben Lyon).

As with *Hell's Angels*, it is an overarching tendency in Hollywood films to use the war as a backdrop to romance. For example, Fox Studio's *The World Moves On* (1934) is like an American version of Noel Coward's play *Cavalcade*, in charting romance across the generations; in *The World Moves On*, this is against the backdrop of the American Civil War, the First World War and the Great Depression. It is something of a truism that historical films made in Hollywood make history subservient to its characters' personal histories (which almost always include romance). The tagline for the film version of *Cavalcade* (1933) is revealing in this regard: "A love that suffered and rose triumphant above the crushing events of this modern age! The march of time measured by a mother's heart!"[60] On one level, this underlines the orientation of classical Hollywood cinema around individual character concerns—"a mother's heart". However, we need not leave it there. One might also stress the fact that such personal narratives are a means of making

history intelligible and affective for the spectator. History underscores the characters' emotions, but emotions also underscore the history.

In France, the situation was "officially" different, with legislation introduced in 1928 aiming to prevent the use of the Great War as a mere romantic backdrop for characters' dramas,[61] an example of the state directly advocating a respectful, memorializing approach to national History. However, how such dramatic strategies might be measured by a piece of legislation is unclear, as the various points of exchange between French and American cinema of the 1930s attest. For example, Howard Hawks's *The Road to Glory* (1936) is something of a remake of *Les Croix de bois* (partly through its reuse of battle and trench footage from Bernard's film). However, in narrative terms, Hawks's film is actually closer to Anatole Litvak's version of *L'Équipage* (1935); both films rely on love-triangles between a soldier, his partner, and one of the soldier's friends and comrades. *L'Équipage* was perhaps a sufficiently respectful representation of the war because, as the title suggests ("equipage" means "crew"), the central dramatic conflict is that between responsibility to one's comrades and personal desires—this features in many representations of the war throughout the decade and effectively balances concerns for the "bigger picture" of history with the requirement for dramatic individual stories.[62] Ultimately however, *Les Croix de bois* represents the decade's most important and most "official" French cinematic testament to the Great War; its cast was populated by veterans and it was first projected to a select council of prominent war heroes and government officials.[63]

Les Croix de bois ("*Wooden Crosses*" on international release) appears to occupy very similar territory to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, as it concerns the horrors of the trenches, and was also based on a successful novel by a war veteran. As in the American film, the original author's name, Roland Dorgelès, appears with the title in the opening credits.[64] However, where Milestone's is an American film using the point of view of some German soldiers to make a *supranational* statement about the First World War (and even war in general), Raymond Bernard's film represents a "French" perspective. *Les Croix des bois* is undoubtedly a "prestige" production like its American counterpart, memorializing the Great War and drawing on a literary antecedent. According to Joseph Daniel, the prestige was matched by considerable success at home and abroad, particularly in the US.[65] In order to convey a more "real" experience, the film's promotion emphasized its cast of veterans,[66] and the palpable atmosphere of fear Bernard creates was apparently aided by working in real locations, for example in former battlefields, where an unexploded bomb or a mutilated corpse would and could hold up production.[67] Actor Charles Vanel apparently remarked, "We didn't need to act, we only needed to remember".[68]

Les Croix de bois has a more marginal position in Anglophone film history, being overshadowed by the English-language films, *All Quiet on the Western Front* and *Journey's End*. Where the film is discussed, discourses on realism feature prominently. For example, in an American journal, William Everson considers the film "a kind of dramatized documentary".[69] Indeed,

Les Croix de bois does achieve a quasi-documentary authenticity that the other two films do not, which is not entirely explained by budgetary or technical limitations. In fact, *Les Croix de bois* was in many ways technically very sophisticated. The production was apparently the first time filmmakers in France had succeeded in mixing twelve tracks of sound.[70] Furthermore, the scenes in the trenches are a remarkable achievement in capturing the (historically sanctioned) reality of the trenches. For this reason, Fox studios brought the rights to the film, inserting scenes from Bernard's production into both *The World Moves On* and *The Road to Glory*, as if it were stock footage.[71] There is a much greater reliance in *Les Croix de bois* on location shooting, which does not allow for (nor aim for) the elaborate camera movements or didactic spectacle of *All Quiet*, but which clearly helped convey the cramped and claustrophobic conditions of the trenches.

The breadth and complexity of issues surrounding cinematic realism are beyond the scope of this study but, for the moment, certain discourses on realism might help us situate *Les Croix de bois* and its critical reception. In *Mists of Regret*, Dudley Andrew's brief discussion of the film situates it within the parameters of classic realism:

> *Les Croix de bois* stands in a tradition of "intimate epics" inaugurated in cinema by *Birth of a Nation*. Spectacle underwrites and inflates the sentiments of the characters who draw the audience into a pathetic mise-en-scène. Clearly indebted to novels like those of Victor Hugo, this kind of cinematic realism ratifies the melodramatic through a display of history that is both massive and yet subordinate to the emotions it brings to a few characters and to the millions of spectators identifying with those characters.[72]

Andrew undoubtedly favors the more "modern" cinematic realism of Jean Renoir's *Toni* (1935), which he discusses just prior to the passage cited. Classic literary antecedents are emphasized. Andrew goes on to discuss Bernard's lavish adaptation of Hugo's *Les Misérables* (1934)[73] and the mention of the "millions of spectators" (not to mention "melodrama") hints at some distrust of widespread popular appeal. Certainly Bernard's realism is less radical than Renoir's. However, it would be unfortunate to leave the analysis there. Bernard's film is consonant with various aspects of French classical cinema, but is also distinctive. Its combination of scenes which are almost documentary in style, with highly symbolic imagery of complex dissolves and superimpositions works as both a monument to the French experience of the conflict, as well as offering a more poetic commentary on War generally. Its aesthetic is generally unspectacular; "spectacle" for Dudley Andrew seems to be, like melodrama, merely a pejorative term to indicate a suspect appeal to a popular audience.

As it is a term that has meant quite different things in different contexts, when one talks of the "realism" of *Les Croix de bois*, the connotation one should

stress describes the film's relation to and clear construction of a representative social space. From early in the narrative, there is an insistence on the troop of soldiers as a microcosm of the French class structure. These relationships are made clear during the introduction of the main character, Gilbert Demachy (Pierre Blanchar), to the troop of soldiers whose experiences of the trenches he and we shall share. Gilbert is a law student, and is presented to the group by Corporal Breval (Charles Vanel), who we learn is a shopkeeper. Other members of the group are to a greater or lesser extent defined by their regional and class identities. For example, one character is referred to as "the peasant" (Geo Laby) and is frequently the butt of jokes by Sulphart (Gabriel Gabrio). The latter is defined by his working-class Parisian origins—his accented speech is filled with Parisian *argot* and, in a flashback to the prewar lives of Gilbert, Breval and Sulphart, we see Sulphart walking through a popular Parisian *quartier*. Of course, this being a 1930s French film, *Les Croix de bois'* realism is also highly theatrical. As Vincendeau underlines, the prevalence of two, three, or tableaux shots in classical French cinema emphasizes characters in their social environment as well as the more theatrical, more frontal relationship of performers to the camera/spectators.[74] Figure 4.2 comes from our first meeting with the troop, part of a series of images that emphasize the soldiers' solidarity and playfulness through a "popular French", post-theatrical relationship to camera and mise-en-scène. It is a scene that reminds us of the comic, often musical genre of the *troupier*, until their jollity is cut short by the sight of a coffin and a wooden cross ("*croix de bois*") passing by their barracks. This moment anticipates the dying Gilbert's final vision of legions of ghostly French and German soldiers carrying their own wooden crosses.

Figure 4.2 *Les Croix de bois* (1932): A "post-theatrical" introduction to the French troop.

The film displays its literally "monumental" approach to the history of the First World War at the start of the film. Beneath the credits, we see a torch burning, reminiscent of the "eternal flames" one often finds at war memorials such as at the "tomb of the unknown soldier" at L'Arc de triomphe. After the credits have disappeared, the image of the flame, partly enveloped in an ethereal mist, lingers for a moment before the screen dissolves to black. The somber, eulogizing tone is underscored by music. There then begins a visual dedication to the dead of the war through a series of dissolves that begins with a field of soldiers who seem to become a field of crosses, ending on a cross inscribed with "IN MEMORIAM" held partway through a dissolve. Similar imagery ends *All Quiet on the Western Front*, in which the now dead young German soldiers turn to the camera, their faces superimposed over an enormous field covered in graves. These dedications to the war dead, their allusions to official war memorials are an important feature of these films' aesthetic approaches to the history of the Great War. It is interesting however, how such literally monumental imagery appears across a wide variety of French and American historical films of the 1930s. Where *Les Croix de bois* is more distinctive, is in the highly symbolic scenes that punctuate otherwise "realist" passages, and evoke the wider pain of the war through complex sequences of cuts, but most strikingly, dissolves and superimpositions.

The opening of the film combines what appears to be real, documentary footage of celebrations that accompanied the outbreak of war with staged images. The documentary footage was clearly carefully chosen to create a complex flow of movements on-screen. There are numerous shots of trains filled with soldiers and garlanded with flowers moving away from the camera, combining with shots of a queue of men waiting to enlist, moving in the same direction. These images suggest an inexorable movement away, away to the front. The people in these images are excited as if part of an enormous festival. However, beneath this surface, an ambivalent attitude to this history can be seen to develop through the sequence. In one shot, one can see the mixing of an image of a statue (one cannot see what of exactly) with one of a train of soldiers. This appears to evoke a straightforward sense of national pride and heroic expectations for the troops. However, subsequent dissolves complicate this impression. For example, the images of the mobilization come to an end through shots that comprise an almost continuous dissolve from the famous sculpture on L'Arc de triomphe of Marianne in battle (a sculpture by Francois Rude commonly known as "La Marseillaise"), to an official notice of "General mobilization" and then finally, and the most fleetingly, an older woman, crying, in a black headscarf. (As noted earlier, some of the imagery described above would be reused in *Marthe Richard au service de la France*.)

The soundtrack is also richly textured, matching each image with an aural counterpoint. During the dissolve from the Marianne figure to the official notice of "Mobilisation Générale", we hear the transition from a sung rendition of "La Marseillaise" to an orchestral version. This transition

from a "popular" rendition of the national anthem to a more "official" one could be said to underline the force of the notice as an expression by the State. The image of the official notice is held for a few moments until the sound of a tocsin replaces the Marseillaise. The tocsin continues as the image dissolves again to the image of the tearful face of the woman. She might be a mother, or a wife tearful at the departure of a loved one. However, the sounds of the bells combined with her black headscarf seem to project her into the future of the conflict, and the overwhelming sense of loss associated with it. This is no clumsy portentousness, however, because the bells retain their ambiguity through their additional function as marking the transition into the narrative-proper. In the subsequent image, of a small town or village, a church tower is seen in the background, presumably the source of the continuing sound of the bells. In the foreground, a line of peasants advances towards the camera before a column of soldiers enters the foreground. In the following shot, we see more peasants leaving their village, moving towards the camera. It is a mark of the richness of this opening that Bernard combines apparently stock footage of the French mobilization of 1914 with recreations of the excitement and clamor of the moment, while introducing a note of discord at the end via slightly overbearing patriotic music and imagery and a presentiment of the legions of war widows and bereaved to come. It is also a powerful statement, subtly made, to introduce your viewer to "the front", not with the advancement of troops, but with the displacement of civilians.

The Rhetoric of Monuments: *The Charge of the Light Brigade*

Both *Les Croix de bois* and *All Quiet on the Western Front* are particularly somber, memorializing and literally monumental visions of the Great War. Based on texts penned by war veterans, these films are imbued with a particular kind of "authenticity". Monumental approaches to historical conflicts are often far less heavily respectful and, especially in comparison with Bernard's film, rarely have so "official" an aura as filmic memorials. As is often remarked in literature on historical filmmaking, most cinematic renditions of history are, to echo Nietzsche's critique of the monumental, found to be "somewhat distorted, beautified and coming close to free poetic invention".[75] *The Charge of the Light Brigade* (1936) is one of the most famously distorted visions of military history, and conforms to Nietzsche's warnings against monumental history's tendency to have the past "forced into a universal mould and all its sharp corners and sharp outlines broken up in the interests of conformity".[76]

In Curtiz's *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, a loose account of British military involvement in India and the Crimea plays a somewhat subordinate role to a love triangle between two officer brothers (played by Errol Flynn and Patric Knowles) and a young society lady, Elsa Campbell (Olivia de Hallivand). This conventional, "universal" narrative structure prepares for

the final eight-minute spectacular set-piece of the charge itself, a famous military blunder and/or heroic defeat depending on the historical perspective. Flynn's character is shown to fake the documents ordering the charge so that he might avenge a massacre of innocent British civilians earlier in the film and, in effect, sacrifice himself so that his brother and Elsa might live happily ever after. Ethical arguments about historical accuracy are to remain marginal to the aesthetic concerns here, but it is worth emphasizing the imposition of a monumental framework and monumental imagery even onto films like Curtiz's, which, despite its title, is more readily identified as an adventure story than an historical film.

The credit sequence combined with the film's climax is another example of such film's frequent recourse to *literally* monumental imagery, and underlines the willingness of 1930s Hollywood to embrace the chauvinistic language of British imperial History. At the opening of the film, after the Warner Brothers insignia has faded from the screen, the Latin text, "Quis superabit" appears as if carved in stone. It dissolves to the translation "Who shall excel them", before dissolving to the Latin again. The image pulls back to reveal the rest of a military memorial or plinth, with a dedication to the light brigade "who died victorious in a gallant charge at Balaklava for queen and country, A.D. 1856". The camera then appears to move up the monument, past "quis superabit" to fix on what appears to be an engraving or frieze of a line of cavalry in the thick of battle; all the while, a mix of bombast militaristic music plays on the soundtrack (at times, "Rule Britannia" is just about identifiable). Just before the film's title appears, we see another text foreword citing Tennyson's famous poem, "The Charge of the Light Brigade", the language stressing British royalty and military heroism. The credits continue, the last being for a former royal engineer as "technical advisor". Finally, another foreword works as a disclaimer marking out its convoluted relationship to history:

> This production has its basis in history. The historical basis, however, has been fictionalised for the purposes of this picture and the names of many characters, many characters themselves, the story, incidents and institutions, are fictitious. With the exception of known historical characters, whose actual names are herein used, no identification with actual persons, living or dead, is intended or should be inferred.

The inaccuracy of the film explains the rather complicated disclaimer but, in fact, the actual film's relationship to "historical veracity" could be said to be a fairly typical one.

One can see in this opening a rather incoherent combination of literally monumental imagery (the column is not dissimilar from the "eternal flame" that opens Raymond Bernard's film) with allusions to the expenditure on historical research and accuracy (the military "technical advisor"), and then a disclaimer underlining the largely fictionalized narrative. Structurally, and

historiographically, the most significant reference is to the poem by Alfred Tennyson (whose royal appointment is also mentioned). This opening reference to Tennyson's "The Charge of the Light Brigade" is followed up in the climactic charge itself: the rapidly edited mass cavalry charge through a vast valley is interspersed with superimposed verses of the poem. The film thus aligns itself with a high(er) cultural and historical artefact at the same time as setting a tone where "free poetic invention" is somewhat permitted. Where Parker Tyler cites the montage sequence in historical films as "Hollywood at its most pedantic",[77] one might say this is also often where popular American cinema is at its most pretentious. Furthermore, where the climax of *The Charge of the Light Brigade* reemphasizes Tennyson's poem in order to hyperbolize the historical spectacle, the film ends with a curious gesture towards historiography.

At the conclusion of the film, Sir Charles Macefield (a fictionalized character played by Henry Stephenson) is in discussion with a group of officers who sense that he is shielding someone by refusing to deny he gave the order for the charge. In truth, he is shielding Major Vickers (Flynn's character), and conceals a letter in which the latter has admitted faking the order. The film ends with Macefield, alone, somberly throwing the letter on the fire, muttering ironically, "For conspicuous valor". (The scene between Macefield and the other officers has been at pains to underline that though "a magnificent blunder", the charge turned the tide of the war. In reality, it did no such thing.) The moment is tinged with bittersweet sentiments (Vickers' reputation is saved but there is the irony in the combination of "conspicuous" with the image of oblivion). On another ironic level, Macefield's gesture can be allied with the film's metaphorical burning of official, "real" and documented history. But also, at this moment the film makes the tentative claim, "it *could* have happened this way" (the real circumstances behind the order for the charge have never been firmly established). The film posits itself as *the* monument to the military valor next to the expediency of politicians. Indeed, as the frieze that opened the film returns as the background to "The end", the film evokes the "honestly mythic", and iconic history of war monuments and obelisks. The effect of this kind of filmmaking seems to depend so much on the recourse to a sense of imperial pride (even in an American film) underlined by the thrill of a spectacular battle scene and the iconography of official monuments.

All Quiet on the Western Front and *Les Croix de bois* display striking stylistic differences. Moments of Milestone's film use editing techniques reminiscent of Eisenstein montage to fashion its rather didactic vision of First World War history. For example, along with the battle scene, the scene in the classroom contains a striking rapidly edited sequence, wherein characters we will come to know as the leads stand up and declare they will go, while a number of others who remain unnamed throughout the film do not speak and are only shown as faces cheering, in shots that last less than a second. This introduces the film's combination of the "historically

representative" characters we are asked to identify with, and the anonymous masses who will surround them in the trenches. *Les Croix de bois* relies more consistently on editing *within the frame*, particularly dissolves and images overlaid one over another. For example, at the start of the film, the visual dedication dissolves from a series of anonymous soldiers to a grave dedicated "in memoriam". In these images, any individuality of the soldiers is absent, the figures signifying the almost countless and faceless dead. The film thus begins a dual schema where the "realist" passages, with their relatively long-takes and predominance of medium to long-shots, grant the actors the "classical" French post-theatrical performance space, and figurative passages that transcend the reality of individual characters to represent a greater loss. However, both these films share with *The Charge of the Light Brigade* the recourse to literally monumental imagery. In Curtiz's film, this imagery combines with the film's narrational rhetoric in a way one sees across various genres that fall within the broader heuristic of "monumental history".

THE RHETORIC OF INSTITUTIONS

The way in which the narratives of historical films are framed is often revelatory of their particular approach to history. The importance of particular rhetorical strategies (such as *The Charge of the Light Brigade*'s combination of the Tennyson poem with hysterically patriotic imagery) is particularly evident as a film's "historytelling" is introduced and then draws to a close. Attention to these moments may be used to challenge the emphases of prevailing formalist notions of a "classical (Hollywood) film". Yet the emphasis on the rhetoric of a film's opening and closing sequences (including credits) does coincide with Bordwell's observation that at these points, "a high degree of narrational presence is conventional".[78]

Bordwell's uses *Miss Lulu Bett* (1921) to historicize the use of "expository intertitles" (as opposed to dialogue intertitles) in classical narration from the silent era through to the sound:

> Many of these passages show the extent to which expository intertitles relay story information to us. Like most silent films, *Miss Lulu Bett* is reluctant to relinquish such traces of self-conscious narration, even though the number of such titles diminishes sharply across the film ... A film from later in the decade will typically have a higher proportion of dialogue titles to expository titles, but it is the rare film that does without the latter. Such titles, usually placed at the start of a segment, accord with the greater self-consciousness of the scene's expository phase. In the sound era, these titles would be replaced by less overt devices like signs, establishing shots, and other transitional material.[79]

My intention is not to question the empirical accuracy of Bordwell's overall survey. However, it is worth noting the extent to which classical historical cinema of the 1930s may constitute an exception to the apparent erosion of self-conscious narration generally, and the expository intertitle in particular. The "expository intertitle" punctuates the narration of various American historical films examined through this part of the book—for example, *The Scarlet Empress* contains thirteen expository intertitles, while other films, *Cimarron* and *Gone with the Wind*, from either end of the decade, use fewer but extremely prominent and/or didactic text inserts. And many films that may not use expository intertitles throughout will often use a "text foreword" at the beginning in order to mark out their relationship to history (e.g., as a sort of disclaimer) and/or to give a brief, broad historical context for the action to follow. Rather than seeing this as a hangover from the necessarily more rhetorical intertitle strategies of early cinema, and as a part of an evolutionary account in which "narrational self-consciousness" becomes increasingly marginal in classical Hollywood, one should try to understand the role of such strategies within the monumental historytelling of particular films.[80] For example, the uses *Mutiny on the Bounty* (1935) makes of historical text and other expository strategies illustrate the importance of rhetoric to the monumental mode.

Mutiny on the Bounty (Frank Lloyd 1935)

In the case of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, there are striking contradictions between the narration's structuring rhetoric and the way the mutiny history was framed even by some of MGM's promotional and ancillary materials. While the original theatrical trailer states that the source was "a romantic novel", the credits of the film are more discrete about Nordhoff and Hall's largely fictionalized book. Indeed, the film as a whole is at pains to stress the historical and moral significance of the mutiny; significance, in reality, it lacked. The text foreword describes the mutiny thus:

> ... mutiny against the abuse of harsh eighteenth century sea law. But this mutiny, famous in history and legend, helped bring about a new discipline, based upon mutual respect between officers and men, by which Britain's sea power is maintained as security for all who pass upon the seas.

Not only does the film portray Captain Bligh (here played by Charles Laughton) as an evil and dishonest tyrant, but the story is framed so as to be "about" the injustice of the former naval system, and the associated, more universal themes of the conflict between duty and freedom.[81]

Following the foreword, we see a scene of Fletcher Christian (Clark Gable) press-ganging a group of hapless men to serve on *HMS Bounty*'s two-year voyage. There then follow scenes stressing the trauma of their impressment, and an introduction to the sadism of Bligh, who has a man flogged to death,

and then, so as to properly exact the official punishment, orders his men to continue to flog the corpse. As the *Bounty* sets sail, the sequence ends with voices singing "Rule Britannia" and the image fades with the chorus ringing out, "Britons never, never, never shall be slaves." These lyrics are clearly used ironically, as the subsequent narrative further insists on the sailors' status as little more than slaves. This irony is only exorcised in the closing minutes of the film, where Bligh is officially castigated for his treatment of the *Bounty*'s crew in the theatre of a tribunal. The film ends by reinforcing the "historical message" outlined by the foreword.

Sir Henry Stephenson (Joseph Banks) implores the king to pardon Roger Byam (Franchot Tone), one of the men implicated in the mutiny and thereby sentenced to death. Stephenson tells the king, "a new understanding between officers and men has come to the fleet. By returning Byam to duty, your majesty will confirm that understanding. Not for today only, but for all time to come." Demonstrating the clairvoyance often granted characters of historical films, Stephenson anticipates the historical outcome of the mutiny (described with words of, if it weren't a film, an absurd certainty) and prepares for the narrative resolution where we see Byam warmly welcomed on board another ship as hero of this "new understanding". The film ends as this ship, in almost identical shots to those of the *Bounty*'s launch, sails off to the chorus, "Britons never, never shall be slaves."

As the text foreword demonstrated, the ultimate historical outcome of the film is always already known and, though this outcome is, in historical terms, largely an invention, it is greatly insisted upon by the film's structuring rhetoric. The dramatic and personal narratives of its heroes are of course largely organized around individual character goals (the goal-orientation of Fletcher Christian's personal conflict with Bligh, the former's attempts to escape naval justice). However, these story goals are submitted to another logic, that of the "history of naval barbarity" as it gave way to a more democratic and humane "understanding between officers and men". In Greg Dening's words, this communicates that: "the extravagant violence of authority excused rebellion but did not legitimate it; a sense that institutions of power were ultimately goodwilled and responded to the ideals of men committed to them".[82] Seen through films like *Mutiny on the Bounty*, the notion of "goal-orientation" might describe something other than personal, character goals. *Mutiny on the Bounty* submits the personal narratives of its characters to the ultimate goal of working-through the history of the reform of an institution. Such films of course orientate themselves around individual goals and the drama represented by "what will happen next?", but the questions it poses might also often be rhetorical.

Marcel L'Herbier

After François Truffaut's famous attacks on the *cinéma de papa*,[83] retrospectives of 1930s films and filmmakers would keep L'Herbier and other

purveyors of *cinéma de qualité avant la lettre* at the margins. Marcel L'Herbier is consequently a filmmaker whose importance to the French film industry of the 1930s is not matched by critical attention. In fact, L'Herbier can be seen as something of a barometer for understanding the production and reception of mainstream French historical filmmaking of the period.

While L'Herbier has been celebrated for his silent filmmaking (not quite as popularly as Gance, but more consistently than Poirier), his sound work is rarely discussed. This is despite the fact that between 1933 and 1939 he averaged almost three films a year. In his book on the director, Noël Burch makes little or no reference to any L'Herbier film from after the introduction of sound. In Burch's introduction, he admits his is only the first step in a potential rediscovery of L'Herbier's work. However, apart from the 1931 *Le Parfum de la Dame en noir*, all the films he says require greater critical attention are silent ones.[84] L'Herbier was an important practitioner of "quality" historical films throughout the 1930s, films which included a biopic of the famous eighteenth-century actress *Adrienne Lecouvreur* (1938), another 1936 tale of French colonialism in Morocco (*Les Hommes nouveaux*), *La Tragédie imperiale* (1938), about Rasputin's role in the fall of Russia's Romanov dynasty, and *Entente cordiale* (1939) examined below. However, his aesthetic politics, his resolutely middlebrow style and, arguably, even the prominence of the serious historical film in his oeuvre (a form, that for its marked rhetoric may be felt to "date" more obviously than other genres) make him antithetical to the dominant paradigm of poetic realism.

In Crisp's quantitative account, L'Herbier is accorded greater significance:

> *La Route impériale* [1935], *Les Hommes nouveaux*, *La Porte du large* [1936], *La Citadelle du silence* [1937], *Nuits de feu* [1937], *La Tragédie impériale*, *Adrienne Lecouvreur*, and especially *Entente cordiale*, all of which figured amongst the most successful films of their respective years, did everything to confirm [L'Herbier's "remarkable" reputation] (...). Like others, but more successfully, in the second half of the decade he consistently exploited a nationalist sentiment fostered by the approach of war, and he must rank high among directors who attracted the most spectators to their films in the 1930s.[85]

This list of successful films might be said to make L'Herbier indexical of a key strain of French spectators' tastes through the 1930s. Aside from the historical films already mentioned, all the films are, at least, in related genres. For example, *La Route impériale* is said to be an "historical romance",[86] probably something akin to a "costume drama", *La Porte du large* is a military costume drama, and *La Citadelle de la Silence*, like *La Tragédie imperiale*, is an historical film set in imperial Russia. As Crisp suggests, *Entente cordiale* represents the height of a certain kind of conservative French historical filmmaking, one that underlines the importance of history for understanding the present—e.g., his exploitation of "nationalist sentiment fostered by the approach of the war". *Entente cordiale* also represents a more explicitly political (rather than more loosely ideological) approach to history than Hollywood films like *Mutiny on the Bounty* and *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, but uses quite similar rhetorical strategies.

Where Curtiz's *Charge of the Light Brigade* opens and closes with a memorial to the heroes of the Light Brigade, *Entente cordiale* begins with the opening of a pair of doors embossed with the French and British coats of arms, and ends with their closure and a final text dedication "aux ouvriers de la paix" ("to the workers of peace"). This is the rhetoric of institutional progress—i.e., the institutions of the French Republic, and more enthusiastically in fact, the British monarchy. While it is arguable that films like *Marthe Richard au service de la France* had one eye on a future European conflict (its ending celebrates the role of the US in defeating the Germans eighteen years before), without more information one would not wish to assert such claims. However, as the subject of *Entente cordiale* is explicitly the need for French-Anglo cooperation in the face of German aggression, it is impossible not to see it in the light of the impending war in Europe. Though L'Herbier was engaged in political-professional activities one could call leftist, the politics and aesthetics of his films are more conservative.[87] This is explained by the pressing concerns of Nazi aggression: "L'Herbier was worried about the dangers to peace, the diminishment of military resources, the German threat, the 'climate of moral dissolution and the abdication of national responsibility' and led a crusade for the patriotic and moral reawakening of the nation".[88] Thus L'Herbier's turn to the past reminds one of Nietzsche's observations that the reader of monumental history "learns that the greatness that once existed was in any event once *possible* and may thus be possible again".[89]

Entente cordiale is based on the play *Edouard VII et son temps* ("Edward VII and his times") by André Maurois. This source underlines L'Herbier's predilection for aristocratic narratives of courtly intrigue with an academic provenance—as with many films seeking to manifest their quality, the credits inform us Maurois is "de l'Académie française", so too the dialogue writer Abel Hermant. The major historical narrative focuses on the Fashoda incident in 1898 (in which France and Britain were pushed to the brink of war due to competing colonial ambitions) as well as the succession of Queen Victoria (a heavily made-up Gaby Morlay reprising her stage role) to Edward VII (Victor Francen) in 1901. Much of the film focuses on the latter's triumphant visit to France in 1903, where, according to this account, his charm and well-established love for French culture helped smooth over simmering tensions left over from Fashoda, paving the way for the signing of the *Entente* in 1904.

As is typically the case, the film combines major historical figures like the British King, General Kitchener (Jean Galland) and Georges Clemenceau (Jacques Baumer) with fictional characters. Indeed, the *entente* itself is personalized through the love triangle between Capitaine Charles Roussel

(Pierre Richard-Wilm), his journalist brother Jean (Bernard Lancret) and English heiress Sylvia Clayton (Janine Darcey). The father of the Roussel brothers is a politician, newspaper editor and vehement Anglophobe (Jacques Gréttillat) and would oppose either of his sons' marrying an English aristocrat. The brothers are thus torn between their loyalties to each other, their father and their love for Sylvia. Moreover, as Captain Charles Roussel is figured as the commander of French troops at Fashoda (an incident shown to be a humiliating compromise for the French), his patriotic fervor conflicts with his growing romantic feelings for an English woman. However, such conflicts are ultimately resolved through L'Herbier's vision (following Maurois) of the great man as embodied by Edward VII. During his visit, King Edward's charm and flattery win over the crowds lining the streets, as well as the aristocratic audience of the opera, even managing to soften Roussel *père*'s anti-English attitudes.

The political is highly personal in many monumental renditions of history in the cinema, and in this film, Queen Victoria is, respectfully, represented as a rather fusty barrier to better relations between France and Britain, while the more worldly, and, crucially, Francophilic Edward achieves *l'entente* largely through the force of personality alone. L'Herbier's film stands for the triumph of aristocratic style and decorum, which could be taken as a description of his own stylistic preoccupations. The film opens with a scene featuring Morlay's Queen Victoria, setting the stylistic tone for the film. Frequent long-takes and long-shots, key dimensions of "classical French cinema"[90] and "stately" camera movements, more peculiar to this tradition of filmmaking, are predominant. These allow the viewer's attention to linger on lavish costumes and décor of the Buckingham Palace setting. The subsequent scene creates a contrast as Edward is shown enjoying a Parisian music hall. However, L'Herbier's camera brings an aristocratic hauteur even to this more *mondain* world. In the music hall, Francen's Edward speaks slowly, with considerable poise, the dialogue and editing maintaining steady attention on his words. The later scenes at the court of King Edward, in particular the ball that provides the backdrop to the signing of the treaty, are extremely luxurious spectacles partly filmed in crane and tracking shots that follow the aristocratic dancers—these dancers are clearly metonymic of the political and diplomatic maneuvers occurring elsewhere in the palace. (This scene typifies important aspects of "the décor of history", examined in greater detail below.)

The conclusion to the film, in classic monumental style, reasserts the rhetoric of the film's message. As the king lies on his deathbed he expresses his belief in his legacy of closer French and British ties. The film cuts to an intertitle signaling "1914" accompanied by an image of an explosion. We then cut to a scene between Kitchener and Roussel, who had earlier been on opposing sides of the Fashoda conflict. They discuss the war and Kitchener proclaims, "But we will vanquish the enemy ... because our two peoples fight together for the first time". The scene ends on a dissolve from a close-up of Kitchener and Roussel's handshake to L'Arc de triomphe. "1918" appears on screen and a final montage sequence uses multiple dissolves of French and British crowds celebrating, even superimposing Nelson's column over the Eiffel Tower, signifying, graphically, the alliance of peoples and a vision of complementary cultural heritage. After another dissolve, a final dedication to "the ouvriers de la paix" is placed over the closing doors engraved with the French and British coats of arms.

This ending is reminiscent of many monumental histories from both sides of the Atlantic, and has a particular resemblance with the finale of *Marthe Richard*. Here however, the horrors of the First World War are entirely absent, and the victory appears predetermined by the actions, and crucially, foresight of Edward VII and achieved in the handshake. This emphasis on the historical foresight, "the Historical gaze" of a few great men is a recurring trope of historical cinema, especially of the monumental variety. The conservative, "stately" aesthetic of the film, coupled with its rhetorical use of history to comment on the present/future (fears about renewed conflict with Germany) evoke a sense of the "decorum" and "harmony" associated with notions of "the classical", but represent different narrational processes than the ones stressed by Bordwell et al. For where Bordwellian classicism stresses the self-effacement of overt narration for the sake of clear, linear temporal and spatial unity, this kind of quality cinema seeks to avow its own construction, and seduce/convince the spectator though a manifestly narrated, highly rhetorical organization of historical arguments and data.

Before concluding the main part of the discussion of monumental historytelling, it is worth citing some of the contemporary criticism of *Entente cordiale* as it typifies reactions to cinematic representations of history and anticipates some of the debates pursued through the next chapter. The film's reception was generally positive, but as is so often the case, contemporary critics took care to delineate its failures as history. A recurring criticism is the addition of a "weak romantic element" that involved the substitution of the real Major Marchand (who had commanded at Fashoda) for the fictional Captain Roussel. The far-right publication *L'Action française* suggests that this fictionalization means the filmmakers can avoid a fuller portrayal of the "betrayal" of French soldiers by weak and duplicitous politicians, something the "régime" would not permit.[91] (Though we must be wary of the rhetoric of an *Action française*, it is perfectly plausible that the representation of Fashoda would have been subject to censorship or at least self-censorship—French censorship tended to focus on political issues rather than, say, sexual.)

The reviewer of *Figaro* offers a haughty but incisive evaluation of the film, using it to make broader points about the problems with the history of historical films: "Cinematic history cannot help but take the antecedent for the cause ... [but] the relations between events are clearly more complex" [my translation].[92] The reviewer's words are almost identical to Nietzsche's

concern that monumental history "will always have to diminish the differences of motives and instigations so as to exhibit the *effectus* monumentally at the expense of the *causae*",[93] and indeed this is a fairly common reaction to this mode of cinema. So too is the parallel but somewhat more aesthetically oriented criticism about the tendency to beautify the past: "The important thing is that it's extremely agreeable. If one wants to look at it from another angle, one must recognize that screen historians engage in an enterprise which is exactly the same as that which made the fortune of M. Grévin and Mme Tussaud" [my translation].[94] The allusion to Madame Tussaud's waxwork museum and its French equivalent, the Musée Grévin, is exactly the same comparison made by some critics of Sacha Guitry's similarly popular historical films,[95] films that are examined below in the context of "the décor of history".

Similar allusions to the decorative arts are used in a very negative review in the fascist newspaper *Je Suis partout*: "[the film] corresponds with salon painting [*peintures du salon*] of French artists. But this is without doubt an important quality for the clientele of such a film. It is beauty, grandeur, pomp in the best possible taste".[96] One cannot entirely separate the monumental from the decorative, or, in some appropriate, less explicitly pejorative *franglais*, "décorative" approach to history. Indeed, L'Herbier's mastery of "grandeur" and "pomp" largely derives from his luxurious period mise-en-scéne, and he could certainly be discussed in the context of "the décor of history". However, the monumentalism of L'Herbier, and the use of highly rhetorical devices is felt to be his most pertinent characteristic, and I shall devote more space in the latter half of the next chapter to films and filmmakers that can be said to make more dynamic, sometimes ironic use of period settings and costumes.

NOTES

1. Robert Rosenstone, "The Historical Film: Looking at the Past in a Postliterate Age", in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 62.
2. As many film historians have noted, the bringing to life of the momentous and often bloody events of history was evident from the beginning of cinema—in the context of French production (see for example: Richard Abel, *French Cinema: The First Wave, 1915–1929* (Guildford: Princeton University Press, 1984), 160–205; and Laurent Véray, "1927: The Apotheosis of French Historical Film", *Film History*, 17 (2005), 334–351.
3. Tino Balio's discusses Prestige as a production trend, which includes many films we would recognize as belonging to the genres of the western, the war film, the costume drama and even the musical. However, from Balio's examples, it seems that films with historical subjects were particularly "prestigious" (Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1929–1939* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 179–211).

4. For a more "theoretical" analysis of cinema's fascination with historicity, see Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
5. Sheldon Hall and Steve Neale, *Epics, Spectacles, and Blockbusters. A Hollywood History* (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 2010).
6. See Tom Brown, "Consensual Pleasures: *Amazing Grace,* Oratory and the Middlebrow Biopic", in *The Biopic in Contemporary Film Culture,* ed. Tom Brown and Belén Vidal (New York: Routledge, 2014), 118–139 for a discussion of the category of the middlebrow as it intersects with certain strands of historical filmmaking.
7. A quote from Lacan, "John Ford's *Young Mr Lincoln*: A collective text by the Editors of *Cahiers du Cinéma*" 13:3 (Autumn 1972): 15. (Published originally in France 1970.)
8. Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1978/1988), 161.
9. See Tom Brown, "Spectacle/Gender/History: The Case of *Gone with the Wind*", *Screen* 49:2 (summer 2008): 157–178, for a detailed discussion of *Gone with Wind*, its spectacle and its relationship to history.
10. Nietzsche's essay was originally published in 1874, but all subsequent references will be to a 1983 collection of his writings. As Marcia Landy has emphasized, Nietzsche's work has been highly influential on twentieth century debates over historical representation (Marcia Landy, "Introduction", in *The Historical Film: History and Memory in Media*, ed. Marcia Landy (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2001), 2–3), and in the same volume, Robert A. Rosenstone's division of historical films into the categories of "history as drama", "history as document" and "history as experiment" ("The Historical Film", 52) is clearly inspired by Nietzsche's categories.
11. Fredrich Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 66–77.
12. Landy, "Introduction", 3.
13. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 69–70.
14. Marcia Landy suggests it is the dominant approach up to the Second World War (in Landy, ed., *The Historical Film,* 8). It should be noted that Landy does not distinguish between different national cinemas, but the majority of films she cites are American.
15. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 72–73.
16. In Landy, *The Historical Film,* 3.
17. Nietzsche, *Untimely Meditations*, 75.
18. Landy, *The Historical Film,* 3.
19. Ibid., 4.
20. Ibid., 52.
21. Leo Lowenthal, "Biographies in Popular Magazines", in *Radio Research: 1942–1943*, ed. Paul Lazarsfeld and Frank Stanton (New York: Duell, Sloan and Pearce, 1944).
22. Thomas Elsaesser, ed., *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, London: BFI, 1990.
23. George F. Custen, *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History (*New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).
24. By "montage", I do not simply mean editing, or even what is often referred to as "Eisensteinian"-style montage, but certain quite "visible" editing strategies,

5 Spectacular Vistas and the Décor of History

The Nietzschean historiographical categories that were the jumping off point for the delineation of historiographical approaches are actually more distinct from each other than the categories used here. This seems to me entirely appropriate, first because my concerns are exclusively mainstream, "classical" films (Nietzsche's object of study is obviously different and more varied). Furthermore, aside from differentiating between different means of pursuing written history (presumably what Nietzsche was mainly concerned with), Nietzsche's monumental and antiquarian histories can perhaps best be represented by, respectively, the official monument/memorial (normally war-related) and the museum display case. One seeks to represent the great or terrible actions of the past largely through iconic imagery and text, the other through the "authentic" artefacts of the past. These forms of historicism clearly fulfill very different social functions. However, in the cinema, popular historical films almost always combine their monumental narratives (to paraphrase Nietzsche, the simplified vision of right and wrong, the eschewing of the causes in favor of the effects) with at least a surface attention to the artefacts of the past.

In order to underline the interrelationship between the monumental and antiquarian drives of the films, I shall begin by briefly returning to a movie examined in the section above. Greg Dening's essay[1] on *The Mutiny on the Bounty* echoes the work of other critics who find parallels between a film's historicity, and the promotional and publicity materials surrounding that film. In examining the marketing of research and production process, I shall draw particularly upon the work of three important writers on historical cinema: George F. Custen,[2] Vivian Sobchack[3] and Philip Rosen,[4] who are each concerned with Hollywood cinema.[5] The discussion of this scholarship will culminate with discussion of a Cecil B. DeMille film through which I shall provide further delineation of what I take "spectacular vistas" and "the décor of history" to represent. Because of the imbalance in scholarship of historical cinema favoring Hollywood, there will then follow some of my own analysis of French promotional materials, principally of a sample of advertisements from *La Cinématographie française*. I have chosen to emphasize these ancillary materials much more than in the previous chapter on musical films because I feel, here, there is a more revealing

correlation between the advertisements and the films themselves. To echo Vivian Sobchack, the promotional activities of the Hollywood studios and the French production companies are often "onomatopoetic" of the spectacles their films offered.

THE SPECTACLE OF RESEARCH AND PUBLICITY

In his analysis of the figure of Captain Bligh as a "mythic cliché", Greg Dening finds in the promotion of all three of the major versions of *Mutiny on the Bounty* (the 1935 version, Lewis Milestone's 1962 version, and Roger Donaldson's 1984 *The Bounty*) an insistence on the authenticity of visual detail and mise-en-scène:

> Authenticity in each of these movie versions was a propman's concern, not a scriptwriter's goal. Exact re-creation of the visual environment made a living museum for the actor's actions. What actually happened was subordinated to what it would look like if it happened. The Campaign Books which publicity agents put into the hands of the media (...) were full of the energy and cost that it took to be visually accurate.[6]

In the previous section, the focus was predominantly on the monumental vision of history evident in the narrative structures of various films. However, as Dening suggests, in historical films like the various dramatizations of the *Bounty* mutiny, the historicity of the film often lies less in narrative than in its props, décor and costumes. Indeed, the allusion to a "living museum" provides a more apt metaphor for the antiquarianism of the cinema than the museum display case previously mentioned. Vivian Sobchack, quoting Janet Staiger, suggests similarly, "the film implies that what's historical is a physical reality. It is the mise-en-scène, the props, the costumes and the people that are historical".[7]

It is striking that a film like the 1935 *Mutiny on the Bounty*, whose narrative bears such a scant relationship to historical fact, so heavily stresses the accuracy of the recreated costumes and the ship, and went as far as to publish a Teacher's Manual for US high schools.[8] Dening assigns the twin drives of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, what I have called the monumental and, now, décorative approaches to history, to the personal preoccupations of, respectively, producer Irving Thalberg and director Frank Lloyd.[9] On the one hand, the film's monumental approach is manifest in the meaning ascribed to the mutiny particularly by the film's text foreword and its conclusion (in Dening's words, "a sense that institutions of power were ultimately goodwilled and responded to the ideals of men committed to them"[10]); on the other, the décorative equates to the "propman's concern" for the accuracy of detail.

The sources for Dening's personalization of these drives are not clear enough for one to be sure of his conclusions, and the emphasis on the preoccupations of Thalberg and Lloyd arguably misses the point: such meanings seem almost a requirement of this overtly rhetorical brand of 1930s filmmaking, and this monumental vision of history is almost always married to an attention to the visual pleasures offered by a period mise-en-scène. These drives can of course be explained by ideological issues, alongside the fact that rich, "accurate" or "authentic" historical detail seems to have been a significant attraction of these films, and indeed, continues to be more widely. Here one should strike a note of caution in making an implicit link between these Hollywood activities and Nietzsche's view of antiquarian history. Of course Nietzsche is concerned with the excesses of an antiquarian approach that may lead to a "mummifying" historicity, something to which no popular film producer would aspire. As Custen puts it, "historicity and accuracy were attractive as long as they remained selling points".[11]

While it is important to recognize that studio research departments worked on all kinds of films,[12] their activities are particularly prominent in discourses circulating around historical films. What's more, the quasi-academic rhetoric visible in the promotional materials chimes with the degree of narrational rhetoric noted earlier. To put it in more negative terms, this kind of filmmaking is often remarkable for its self-importance—of the promotion of *Mutiny on the Bounty*, Dening observes, "The logistical feats accomplished during the eighty-eight days of filming became, like the price paid for masterpieces in an art gallery, a sign of the film's greatness".[13] In her essay, "'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic", Vivian Sobchack makes a more radical link between the mode of production and the formal and historiographical characteristics of "epic" Hollywood films. This kind of filmmaking is perhaps the most commercially visible form of monumental Hollywood historytelling; monumental in narrative scope and in production logistics, expense and research. The latter qualities are often insisted upon in publicity materials: "(...) the genre *formally repeats* the surge, splendor [sic], and extravagance, the human labor and capital cost entailed by its narrative's *historical content* in both its *production process* and its *modes of representation*".[14] As the title of Sobchack's essay suggests, she is concerned primarily with the phenomenology of the epic, but the aura of grandiosity she traces through the films and their ancillary materials is pertinent to more straightforward aesthetic concerns.

Sobchack draws on a range of promotional materials that reveal some of the ideological operations underpinning arguably the key defining characteristic of the epic, its duration:

> (...) in the case of the Hollywood historical epic, temporal excess tends to be encoded as *empirically verifiable* and *material* excess—entailing scale, quantification, and consumption in relation to money and human labor.

> Consider the rhetoric of a press book memorializing the production and release in 1962 of Hollywood's first narrative film made in Cinerama: the 155-minute historical epic *How the West Was Won* [Ford/Hathaway/Marshall/Thorpe] (...) They write: "Never has so vast a chapter of our American heritage been seen by motion picture audiences; never has any film process encompassed such grandeur of sight and sound".[15]

There is a link, instinctively felt, but here made explicit, between the form of the film (its duration, even the technology used) and the historical content it portrays.

As its subtitle suggests, George F. Custen's book, *Bio/Pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* has relevance not simply to those looking at the historical subcategory of the biopic. Custen's attention to Hollywood as a part of "the machinery of public history", in particular its promotional strategies, underlines the often complex, multilayered relationship historical films established with their audiences: "Research data was also used as selling points in exploiting a film's unique qualities. ... Such exploitation of the research effort was a clever public relations gesture, for it appeared to be a flattering and favorable estimation, on the producer's part, of the audience's intelligence and worthiness".[16] Implicit in this flattery of the audience is a very particular kind of engagement with the film spectator operating outside the immediate experience of the film itself. This engagement with the spectator is a two-way process. As Custen notes, many moviegoers (though of course a small minority) would write in to the studios to point out some historical anachronism in the narrative or mise-en-scène.[17] Philip Rosen calls this exchange "Everett's Games", so named after a certain Mr. Everett who wrote in to Warner Brothers to admonish them for *The Life of Emile Zola*'s confusion of *langoustes* with lobsters.[18]

As Rosen also notes, there is something "excessive" and "defensive" about the lengths to which Hollywood studios would go in their research, and this excess is illustrated in a press book featured in Custen's book for MGM's lavish production of *Marie Antoinette*.[19] Herein, the excess of information is arranged graphically as a corollary to the famously "epic" production of the film, which was begun by Irving Thalberg as a vehicle for his wife, Norma Shearer, and was completed after his death. It was one of the most expensive and successful films of the year, and "taking three years to produce, the film probably involved more period research than any other picture of the decade".[20] The page from the press book is filled with abundant and arresting visual and textual information about the making of the film. The "priceless art objects" underlined *Marie Antoinette*'s own status as a luxury object, and "infinite [!] historical research" its claims to historicity. (One finds here a parallel with the *quantitative*, attractions-oriented marketing of the musicals in terms of how many "numbers" they possess). Indeed, this is an example for Custen of a "marketing strategy in which a

film could be exploited for its 'spectacular' research".[21] For the most part, the elements stressed are aspects of mise-en-scène, like costume and décor, for which MGM productions were particularly renowned. It is worth saying something of the film itself to uncover different aspects of the audience's interaction with the filmic history.

Being very much a star-driven, individual-oriented monument to Marie Antoinette, we see very little of the revolutionary events occurring outside of the palace walls until they intrude on the life (and precipitate the death) of the royal couple (Robert Morley playing Louis)—this is in complete contrast to Renoir's *La Marseillaise*, which is discussed later. As one of histories most famous "idols of consumption", *Marie Antoinette* provides a perfect example of the close relationship of the monumental and the décorative in Hollywood's prestige renditions of history. Appropriately, the first image of the film is an outrageously ornamental clock, underlining that the subject of monumental biopics is often time itself (at two hours and twenty-three minutes, *Marie Antoinette* is justifiably cited as an epic in Sobchack's account,[22] and the ornamentation that is so important to this brand of décorative historytelling.

While it may be churlish to criticize Custen for an approach he is so careful to outline, there is something of a tendency in his accounts to elide the storytelling operations of the films themselves, and to offer an implicit view of narration (as opposed to the more dynamic field of publicity) as something of a one-way process. In fact, attention to the film itself strengthens Custen's point about the "clever public relations" and "flattery" of the audience evident in the marketing of an historical film like *Marie Antoinette*. Van Dyke's film includes a classic example of engaging the audience's historical knowledge, a process that is particularly forthright in the opening of such films. The naive young Austrian princess is summoned to see her mother, the empress Maria Teresa (Alma Kruger). When told she is to wed the dauphin of France, she is overcome with excitement. As she is about to exit her mother's room she turns and exclaims, "Oh mama! Oh mama! Think of it! I shall be queen ... I shall be queen ... of France!" She is held in near full shot for the duration of her speech, her face full of joy. After a couple of beats, the camera then tracks quite rapidly towards her, a sinister chord growing louder on the soundtrack. Some brief hint of apprehension or perhaps nerves flickers over Shearer's face, and she subtly moves her hands as if to cup the neck that will be so famously severed—Shearer's famously glacial, rather inexpressive face is effective here. This is a brief moment of historical foresight, unconscious on her part, foresight that is, as already suggested, so often a part of the cinematic performance of the great men of history. However, the film and the viewer know more than the naive young princess, and the camera's now tighter framing anticipates the decapitation that will provide the film's historical climax. The moment, and particularly the music, may not be subtle (and the historical knowledge required certainly not as recherché as the difference between *langoustes* and lobsters), but, indeed, the point is, it is certainly not self-effacing. Where the promotion stresses efforts at creating a lush, rich, and *accurate* décor of history, the narration self-consciously addresses the spectator's knowledge of the historical narrative surrounding Marie Antoinette.

Rosen, DeMille and Spectacle

Philip Rosen begins his chapter on "Detail, Document, and Diegesis in Mainstream Film"[23] with quotations from Frankfurt school critic T. W. Adorno and from Cecil B. DeMille, a director synonymous with epic visions of mainly ancient or biblical history. Where Adorno regrets cinema's failure to embrace the radical naturalism for which, he feels, it is so well suited, DeMille exalts the capital expended on historical research for *The Ten Commandments* (1956; and an "epic" 220 minutes in length), which helped "bring out the majesty of the Lawgiver [Moses] and the eternal verity of the law [of God]".[24] Rosen uses these two quotations to introduce his discussion of Barthes's "reality effect"[25] because they offer entirely different views of cinema's ability to represent "the real". While Adorno wishes cinema would "dissolve all surface coherence of meaning" (for Adorno, a bourgeois illusion), DeMille sees "truth" unproblematically attainable through a detailed reconstruction of the artefacts of the past.

Through DeMille's epic, lavish films, the director has become perhaps popular culture's most famous teacher of bible stories. It is ironic then that the stylistic and erotic excess (an excess bordering on camp) of *The Sign of the Cross* (1932) and *Cleopatra* (1934) surely made them films that must have strengthened the Catholic League of Decency's determination to strengthen the Production Code. For example, *The Sign of the Cross*, which tells an emblematic story of Christian martyrdom against the backdrop of the reign of Emperor Nero (Charles Laughton), is filled with images inconceivable in Production Code-era Hollywood. For example, the camera looks almost fetishistically at the feet of Dacia (Vivian Tobin) as she removes her clothes, following the orders of Empress Poppaea (a sexually predatory Claudette Colbert) to join her in the bath. In the still shocking amphitheater scene examined below, a naked woman is seen tied to a stake, a large gorilla stalking her before cutting away, implying a sexual element to the sacrifice. As MacDonald Fraser writes, "On the face of it, both films [*The Sign of the Cross* and LeRoy's 1951 *Quo Vadis*] are about the triumph of the Christian faith; in fact, what drew the customers were the strong central love themes and the promise of lurid spectacle".[26] Given DeMille's status as one of classical Hollywood's most famous showmen (emphasized by the hyperbole of studio publicity), his historical films provide an opportunity to be more precise about what, in this context, is meant by "spectacle".

In the first half of this book, we looked at musical spectacle in terms of human performance as much as in terms of the more expansive spectacle of a production number (this range of spectacular elements can be historicized

in terms of vaudeville versus revue). Spectacle in historical films is of a quite different order, and is perhaps even more loosely defined in film scholarship. Thus Philip Rosen's insights into "The Spectacle of History"[27] constitute a welcome intervention. Rosen considers the nature of spectacle in relationship to *Cleopatra*'s "Tarsus sequence", which takes place on the royal barge of Cleopatra (Claudette Colbert) as she seeks to seduce Marc Anthony (Henry Wilcoxon): "The Tarsus sequence as a whole manifests great narrative attenuation, taking approximately one-fifth of the film's running time (about 18 minutes). As filmic performance and profilmic display, it is arguably the most sustained spectacular construction in a film that constitutes itself as historical spectacle".[28] Rosen discusses spectacle as performance in this sequence, but performance *by the film*—this is evinced in the marked symmetry of the extras arranged for the camera, particularly in the final shot of the sequence which Rosen examines in detail (see Figure 5.1).[29] The arrangement of elements is much reminiscent of a Berkeleyesque musical number, something remarked by Martin Rubin (and by contemporary critics of Berkeley's stage shows), though Rubin notes that, importantly, DeMillesque spectacle has a less conflicted relationship with narrative.[30]

Figure 5.1 Cleopatra (1934): The Tarsus sequence and its Berkleyesque spectacle.

Rosen emphasizes the lavish décor of the barge, which is marked by a high degree of overt artifice. Ironically perhaps, the surface artifice of the scene is grounded by the discourse of research—the head of Paramount's Special Effects Department claims "the barge was painstakingly constructed from historical records".[31] It is important to emphasize how Rosen brings the excess of DeMille's mise-en-scène (lavish décor and costuming excessive to the requirements of establishing a sense of place and time, excessively presentational in the marked symmetry of its filming) back into the historicity of historical cinema:

> [the Tarsus sequence] demonstrates how concern for the detail in a historical film can go well beyond the goals of the reality-effect, and become transformed into a virtuosity of spectacle comparable to that of the musical. (...) if spectacle is a form of excessive profilmic detail, excessiveness does not in itself radically separate it from the kind of reality-effect usually associated with the more sober representations of history.[32]

Rosen's emphasis on display, virtuosity and spectacle as an excess of detail in the historical film provides *one* strand pursued through the rest of this chapter. In the "décor of history", this shall be illustrated by, for example, the extraordinary sets by Lazare Meerson for the production of *La Kermesse héroïque* (1935), sets which recreate classic Flemish painting and, according to Dudley Andrew, are used to "satirize spectacle"[33] (which, for scholars such as Andrew, seems to be the only critically valid approach to spectacle).

Rosen's emphasis on "filmic performance and pro-filmic display" is useful in helping to define the spectacle of historical décor. In cinematic spectacle discussed here, DeMille's Tarsus sequence represents the extreme end of a kind of décorative spectacle. This kind of spectacle (the heightened display of historical mise-en-scène) is recurrent in historical films, though commonly less "camp" than the DeMille example. One can contrast this to the other main kind of spectacle examined below, "the spectacular vista". The latter can be illustrated by one of the clichés of cinematic spectacle (clichés that often stand in for more direct analysis): the grand vistas of a Monument Valley. (In American culture, the latter has assumed something of the role of the monumental iconography, like L'Arc de Triomphe, cited above.)

Where "the décor of history" is consonant with "costume drama" approaches to history, "spectacular vistas" connotes the "epic" approaches to history examined by Sobchack. The difference can be summarized as that between spectacle as an *excess of detail* emerging from the décor of history, and spectacle as the *excess of action* in the more expansive historical views or "spectacular vistas". Such "excess" can of course just be "excessive" (*The Scarlet Empress* shall be offered as an example of excess *as* excess). It should be stressed that spectacle only emerges through a particular way of framing an excess of detail or an excess of action. As the terms seek to stress, "the décor of history" is not *necessarily* spectacular—costume dramas are typically concerned in displaying the *visual pleasures* of period detail, and spectacle only becomes a useful way of considering the way these visual pleasures are framed at particular moments. Thus the "décor of history" is a category term that includes the spectacular, whereas "the spectacular vista"

is a term with a narrower focus, designating a particular (and different) form of spectacle.

One can cite another example from DeMille to illustrate this latter strand of historical spectacle. The amphitheater sequence in *The Sign of the Cross* is an obvious choice, first because it features the kinds of action that are so central to this kind of cinema and "sword and sandals epics" before and since and, second, because the arrangement of "attractions" is so deliberate. Indeed, the introduction to this climactic sequence of the film provides a sort of diegetic timetable reminiscent of the timetable of attractions used to advertise *Ben Hur*,[34] a story to which *The Sign of the Cross* is clearly indebted. The poster is originally shown in Latin but dissolves into English (a common device of Hollywood history films of the period): "On the Last Day of May, NERO CLAVDIVS CAESAR will fvrnish 30 pair of gladiators [...] against 30 pair of gladiators [...] and 30 barbarian women from the north to fight pygmies from Africa. There will be wild beasts and a hvnt with other great events and 100 CHRISTIANS taken in treason to be EXECVTED ..." (I have capitalized the boldest text and recreated the rather incoherent use of the Latin "V"s "U" in the already "translated" text.) The text is accompanied by the off-screen commentary of a group of Roman onlookers. One complains, "It doesn't say how [the Christians] are to be killed, just 'execution'". His companion responds, "You leave that to Nero. It's bound to be some interesting way!" This commentary introduces the dual play—one might say hypocrisy—of the subsequent scene, which seems to condemn the bloodthirsty attitude of the pagan crowd while piquing the film spectator's interest in the variety of spectacular deaths.[35] Not only does the commentary make us wonder what Nero has up his sleeve, but one wonders what the modern showman DeMille will cook up. It also illustrates the "libidinal economy" of many Hollywood films, in which the spectacular affect is inscribed even before the spectacle itself is offered—remember *Golddiggers of 1933*'s Barney Hopkins's (Ned Sparks) anticipation of the "My forgotten man" number: "Don't it just get ya?"

In a bravura crane shot, the camera moves down the poster and passes through a seemingly solid grate to reveal the Christians in the dungeon below. They are clearly terrified and the heroine Mercia (Elisa Landi) comforts her young brother Stephan (Tommy Conlon) and the others with the promise that God "is nearer to us now than he has ever been". The scene beneath the amphitheater ends as the Christians hear the trumpets above marking the start of the games. There then follow ten minutes comprising mass and individual gladiatorial contests, and a series of grisly representations of Roman violence: a man is crushed and then stretched by a pair of elephants, a woman is mauled by a tiger, a young woman naked but for a carefully arranged garland of flowers is eaten by crocodiles, another mauled, perhaps violated by an ape. The scene provides a painfully drawn-out build-up to the killing of the Christians, but also an excessive (quantitatively *and* qualitatively) panoply of spectacular violence.

As Steve Neale writes, spectacle is concerned with "the processes of rendering visible and of looking themselves".[36] DeMille's construction of the scene illustrates this schema quite literally, as rapid editing moves between a series of spectacular views and a series of diegetic viewers. For the latter we see an array of responses, from Roman spectators within the diegesis, from grotesque enjoyment, fascination perhaps tinged with sexual arousal and momentary horror (in another view, a woman winces and covers her face). With the latter, DeMille dramatizes the process of rendering visible by creating a contrast with what is hidden from view. Not only are the bloody conclusions to the various tortures evoked off-screen, but the final martyrdom of the Christians remains tastefully unseen. DeMille is one of the most blatantly spectacular filmmakers of classical Hollywood not only through the kinds of cinematic display he offered, but in the clear way in which he addresses the act of looking itself.[37]

La Cinématographie française

Many narratives of 1930s French cinema describe the boom and bust of the first half of the decade. The subsequent recovery is seen to result from the increasing consolidation of production into a smaller group of "quality" films.[38] This was even remarked by commentators of the time, particularly in the industry organ, *La Cinématographie française*. Around 1935 critics sense that the French cinema was beginning to recover. Commentators speak of "the dramatic recovery of the French cinema" and call 1935 "the year of fine films ... with grand and sumptuous sets".[39] With "grand and sumptuous sets" being greatly valued by the industry, the "quality" and "prestige" of historical productions is clear to see. The period's film advertisements go some way in suggesting the importance the industry places upon historical films and the décorative aesthetic pleasures they could offer.

The prominence of promotional materials for French historical films in the pages of *La Cinématographie française* is striking. The specially extended 1000th edition of the magazine claims "1937 French Production equals Quality Production".[40] It is a revealing coincidence that on the opposite page, a gold and grey illustration, bordered by a faux-picture frame shows an image of the Imperial Russian court, with resplendent décor and costume.[41] What's more, on the first page of the article, the three films featured are period-set: *Un carnet de bal* (1937), *La Grande illusion* and *Les Perles de la couronne* (1937). Overleaf, there are images of five other historical or costume drama films, including Carné's Victorian London-set comedy *Drôle de drame* (1937). The captions emphasize the latter film's "very fine décor" ("des décors très soignés") and note the "impressive décor" ("un décor impressionant") of *Double crime sur la ligne Maginot* (1937). Not only do the images illustrate the article, on a more abstract level such imagery could be said to signify a certain kind of cinematic achievement. The quality of the industry is demonstrated in its ability to stage lavish recreations of other

places and other times. While the more intimate dramas of poetic realism would gain a different kind of prestige, the cultural associations of historical cinema made it the middle-brow cinematic mode *par excellence.*

Other noteworthy examples of promotional material for historical films of the period include that for L'Herbier's *Entente cordiale* and Renoir's *La Marseillaise.* For the former, a double-page spread advertisement for the film shows a gallery of stars/gallery of great historical figures. Each actor shown in character, emphasis is clearly put on the impressive makeup used to bring to life major figures like Clémenceau and Chamberlain. Here, the film's own marketing strategies seem to anticipate the comparison with the waxwork Grévin Museum made by the critic cited earlier.[42] Also, though a commercial failure and something of an anomaly as an historical film (the reason it shall be discussed in relation to "critical history"), the extensive publicity for *La Marseillaise* in *La Cinématographie française* stresses the apparent lavishness of its recreation of the nation's most heroic past. The film featured on the cover of at least three issues,[43] all three covers making similar use of the French flag's red, white and blue. In the 1000th issue of *La Cinématographie française*, the film has an eight-page advertisement, stressing the subject is "The greatest page of our history" and presenting a closing dedication "To the glory of France". Another double page advert for the film uses an engraving of a Revolutionary scene, evoking something akin to an *image d"Épinal* (eighteenth to nineteenth century popular engravings). The kind of decorative, rather twee art on show here has been associated with the historical cinema of Sacha Guitry[44] but is rather incongruous with what Renoir's filmmaking represents. Indeed, one finds a peculiar mismatch between the iconography used for publicity, with the clichés of historical film promotion (vivid period colors, heroism, monumental actions, etc.) and the words of Renoir which accompany them—I shall examine this text later. It is an ironic combination that underlines the cultural values with which historical cinema is often associated, even if those values will be used, on screen, in a contrary fashion.

Perhaps the grandest and most lavish film publicity from the *Cinématographie française* of the period is for a film that was never made, Abel Gance's "*Christophe Colomb*" (Christopher Columbus). The film would have continued Gance's association with the monumental biopic.[45] The film was conceived as a grand, international, epic representation of the life of the Spanish explorer,[46] and the variety and richness of the promotional material is onomatopoetic of the film's lavish ambitions. Ranging from a "telegram" reporting the cooperation of the Spanish government[47] to a series of expensively produced multipage advertisements, the publicity stresses the enormous financial and logistical endeavor and the use of authentic locations where Columbus himself once lived.[48] The advertising includes two multipage spreads for the film. Both are bookended by red pages embossed with golden coats of arms. Each spread contains a double-page image of a different historical view; one, shows the "Triumphant entrance of Columbus

at Barcelona" (in which Columbus is seen presenting native Americans to the Spanish king) and the other has "Christopher Columbus calms an onboard revolt" (with Columbus central, between groups of threatening-looking sailors).

The advertising of such films is reminiscent of the attractions of recreated histories that cinema promoted from its very beginnings. Furthermore, the style of the imagery (the engravings as well as the regal embossing and antiquarian type-set) underlines that, not only were historical views in themselves an attraction to be promoted, but the recreation of the visual style, "the décor of history", was also an end in itself. Sobchack's comments on the Hollywood historical epic, with its "portentous calligraphy introducing us to History writ in gilt and with a capital *H*"[49] seem equally relevant to the promotional materials found in *La Cinématographie française*, materials "onomatopoetic" (for the most part) of the films' visions of history.

Without the resources of the Hollywood studios, the promotional activities of French producers were not so varied nor so carefully managed. The devoted research and education departments of the major studios manufactured an aura of learned authenticity around their films, and promoted historical movies as resources for the classroom. However, the promotional materials sampled from *La Cinématographie française* reveal parallel values, and a similar link between the films' monumental approach to revered histories, and visual qualities associated with the "décor of history". The more intimate spectacle and mise-en-scène the latter represents appears across French and American films. The more grandiose and expansive spectacle of the vistas, on the other hand, represents a mode of spectacle and corresponding mode of production (roughly "epic") that is much more alien to French cinema of the 1930s.

SPECTACULAR VISTAS

While many French historical films create monumental visions of the events and people of the past ("monumental" here designating narrative, tonal and more broadly stylistic elements), "spectacular vistas" is a way of visioning history somewhat alien to French production partly because of the financial and technical impediments French filmmakers faced relative to those in Hollywood. (One does not see many French epic films.) For this reason, this section will be devoted to just two Hollywood films.

"Fox Grandeur"

Raoul Walsh's 1930 *The Big Trail* is, in the fullest sense of the word, a monumental vision of American pioneer history. Whereas many westerns were only "historical" in a loose sense, *The Big Trail* was conceived as a pictorial and dramatic testament to the pioneer spirit of those who, in the nineteenth

century, had crossed "the Oregon trail". A commercial and critical failure, there was felt to be a mismatch between the film's serious historical aspects and "the flimsy romantic and fictional narrative",[50] in which the wagon train's scout (played by John Wayne in his first lead role) eventually wins the love of a young pioneer woman (Ruth Cameron). This apparent mismatch, this failure to balance the Historical and more intimate human drama is correlative to Peter Stanfield's assessment of the film: "The film's epic scale and emphasis on the spectacular undermines emotional intimacy between the characters".[51]

With a film like *The Big Trail*, one cannot extricate the monumental sense of American pioneer History (that capital "H" seems especially apt here) from the "spectacular vistas" offered by its camera. This link was unconsciously acknowledged by Colonel Jason S. Joy of the MPPDA[52] when he wrote to Fox to congratulate them on their production of the film:

> The picture is tremendous in scope and in a wealth of historical detail and a stirring and vividly realistic account of a pioneer wagon train from Missouri to Oregon in the days before the Civil War. It has everything, gripping story, grandeur of settings, superlative photography, acting and directing. It deserves the endorsement of every outstanding official and every educational institution, civic and patriotic organization in the country.[53]

While Joy's rhetoric celebrates, rather charitably one might say, the "detail", the "vividly realistic account" as well as the acting, it is the "scope", "the grandeur of settings" filmed through "superlative photography" that I want to emphasize. Indeed, the term "scope" is crucial to the definition of "spectacular vistas", because, like "vistas", "scope" relates to vision, and designates a particular viewpoint taken on past events. Colonel Joy's pleasure in the film's appeal to official history bears some resemblance to Marc Ferro's allusion to Gance's "grandiose academism [which] has always pleased institutions, because it comforts and reassures them".[54] The MPPDA was clearly comforted but, Joy imagines, so too would "civic and educational institutions". Where Ferro links Gance's "grandiose academism" to the architecture of the cathedral, the patrimonial heritage stressed by *The Big Trail* is rather the natural wonders and spectacular vistas of the Western plains.

As with many of the films examined in the context of "monumental history", *The Big Trail* begins with a text foreword dedication:

> Dedicated—to the men and women who planted civilization in the wilderness and courage in the blood of their children.
>
> Gathered from the north, the South and the East, they assembled on the bank of the Mississippi for the conquest of the West.

This historical rhetoric is grandiose, and so too is the technique used to realize it. The film was one of the first to be filmed in 70mm, in a widescreen

process known fittingly as "Fox Grandeur". In terms of width, the image was comparable to later widescreen westerns like John Ford's *The Searchers* (1956). However, as exhibitors had quite recently upgraded to the new sound technology, they were unwilling to spend money on a new, untried format, and the film was shown in 35mm at all but two theatres – the film had to be shot in two different versions and this was one reason for its failure to recoup the considerable production costs.[55]

Figure 5.2 The Big Trail (1930): The 70mm "Fox Grandeur" process is onomatopoetic of the vision of frontier history.

While *The Big Trail* may not be epic in running time, as Peter Stanfield suggests, it is epic in terms of scope, action and spectacle. As cited earlier, Vivian Sobchack's discussion of the historical epic discusses "the content of the form" in terms relevant to Walsh's film:

> Thus, the genre also constitutes its historical field as literally and materially—onomatopoetically—extended and expanded. An excess of temporality finds its form in, or "equals," *extended duration*: films far longer than the Hollywood norm. Correlatively, an excess of space finds its form in, or "equals," *expanded space*: Cinemascope, Cinerama, Superscope, 70mm.[56]

Aside from the pictorial beauty of the film's widescreen images, they are, in Sobchack's terms, "onomatopoetic" (or "onomatopoeic") of *The Big Trail's* vision of history. Literally "spectacular vistas", the images show a grand

landscape that is filled with the grand actions of its protagonists. This spectacular affect is still achieved in the squarer image of the "academy ratio" versions but not to the same degree.[57] The spectacular *events* of the film include the lowering of the wagons over a cliff, the passing of the wagons through river torrents, and a vast stampede of buffalo. The actions of the pioneers are rendered, visually, on a grand scale, and are also grand in terms of historical significance—indeed, what could be more Historical or more spectacular than "the taming of a continent"?

It has been remarked that "true epic films can only be made [and properly received by audiences] at a time when a country's national myths are still believed".[58] This link between the dominant view of a national past (in Nietzsche's terms, when history's use is monumental rather than critical) and the epic form is fitting for *The Big Trail*, which was made at a time when the frontier myth was the dominant, even defining view of the national past. However, contemporary with Walsh's film was *Cimarron*, an "anti-epic" made long before that term gained currency.[59] Though the latter film has an epic running time of 131 minutes, covers forty years of frontier history and opens with vistas of pioneer history comparably spectacular to images such as Figure 5.2, *Cimarron* offers an, arguably, more critical and sophisticated vision of American pioneer history. (We shall look at *Cimarron* and J.E. Smyth's analysis of it in detail in the next chapter.)

Gone with the Wind

While *The Big Trail* might be felt to have failed to balance interpersonal drama with its grand historical scope, another epic at the end of the decade would combine historical grandeur with (melo)dramatic romance and achieve unprecedented commercial success. At approaching four hours, few Hollywood films have been as long as *Gone with the Wind* (1939), few are as famous or have been as successful—when figures are adjusted for inflation, *Gone with the Wind* is the greatest box-office draw of all time. To quote Sobchack again, "the defining characteristics of the Hollywood historical epic translate the sense of temporal *magnitude* and the existential *weight* of being in historical time into visible size and scale and quantity and extravagance".[60] The film's length endows its heroine's story with the sense of "the existential *weight* of being in historical time", and the tumultuous events she must survive. Moreover, while the film is not a technological novelty in terms of a physically larger image, its use of Technicolor (in a period in which color films were still comparatively rare) was certainly a major attraction, and enables particularly rich views of its *quantity* (of extras, for example), its *extravagance* (of costumes, etc.) and its *visible size and scale* (of sets, locations and of course running time). Indeed, in the combination of extraordinarily rich mise-en-scène, and the spectacular rendering of vast historical set pieces, the film combines spectacular elements associated with

both the "décor of history" and "spectacular vistas", and underlines the permeability of these concepts. I have written about the film extensively elsewhere, first of all (and at greater length) in relation to the broader categories of historical film spectacle under consideration here and in terms of the operation of the "Historical gaze",[61] and also in relation to more meta-critical questions of how one values spectacle in relation to traditions of "textual analysis" and/or mise-en-scène criticism.[62] I shall therefore limit myself here to some brief comments on the film so far as they provide a segue into the next section of analysis.

Gone with the Wind more vividly than most classical films demonstrates the particular value of forms of spectacle as a part of a film's signifying systems. Its use of spectacular vistas of the cataclysmic history of the American Civil War is "onomatopoetic" of the individual dwarfed by history and, more broadly, spectacle, including the more intimate spectacle of décor and costume, which "actualizes" meaning in a phatic way arguably unavailable to the non-spectacular.[63] Crucially, it illustrates the relationship between the spectacular vista and the décor of history within a single film's gendered discourses. So, Scarlett begins the narrative as a "typical" Southern belle who is myopically concerned with issues of the present, this being vivified through her central role in the décorative "spectacle of the frou" of her dresses and costume.[64] However, her experience of the terrible vistas of the war helps endow her with a foresight that is coded as masculine and somewhat akin to "the Historical gaze". Throughout Part Two of this book, I have examined repeated instances of this kind of a look, a gaze by the characters that is not bound to the materiality of the filmic world around them, but is rather a kind of foresight into the future already known to the viewer. This gaze is quite clearly gendered, at least partly because History's great figures have generally been "great men" traditionally defined (not just in the cinema but in various aspects of culture, both popular and academic) as "men ahead of their time", "men of vision". Therefore, though the film's romantic hero, Rhett Butler (Clark Gable), represents a rougher, more aggressively sexual masculinity than had been prevalent through much of 1930s cinema, his sexual potency is at least partly tied to his mastery of Historical foresight. For example, while the women take a nap during a lavish party, the men congregate in the study to discuss the impending war. Butler offends the empty chauvinism of the younger men by hinting at the inevitability of a Union victory. As a visitor to the North, Butler knows of their vastly superior industrial and military resources and their possession of a navy big enough "to bottle up our harbors and starve us to death"—thus Butler voices historical details known to many viewers in the 1930s. Furthermore, it is this foresight that enables Butler to make a fortune from the war as a gun-runner. This may make him something of an anti-hero, but only adds to the sexual potency that ultimately seduces Scarlett. (If one wanted to push this further, one might also stress the extent to which the antebellum Southern gentleman, to which Butler is contrasted, is "feminized" in his

deportment, perhaps recalling European aristocratic values of grace and bearing that key strands of American culture, as expressed by its cinema, was suspicious of.) I would tentatively suggest that the film's successful combination of "masculine" discourses and attendant forms of spectacle with the supposedly more feminine pleasures of the décor of history was a significant part of its enormous success.

THE DÉCOR OF HISTORY

It is worth reiterating that the approach described as "spectacular vistas" and the following "décorative" approach are often closely related. The choice of films aims to give us a better sense of the range of possibilities. For this reason, *The Big Trail* and, below, Josef von Sternberg's *The Scarlet Empress* are offered as extreme examples of, respectively, a "vistas" and a "décor of history" approach. These extremes help us sharpen a sense of the distinction, while films such as *Gone with the Wind* should underline the interrelation of the grandly spectacular and the more intimate.

The mode of historytelling examined below shall also be referred to as "décorative". This appropriately *franglais* neologism stresses the importance of décor (but also, equally, costume[65]) while alluding to, but creating some distance from, the purely "decorative". (This point in an imagined spectrum of historical filmmaking, would come closest to "the costume drama", and "the heritage film", whose stories may be emptied of actual historical referents, but whose chief visual pleasure is in their use of "heritage" locations, and arresting period costumes.) Of course, "the *purely* decorative" is mere hyperbole for a narrative form like the cinema, and, amongst many critics, to refer to a film as "decorative" would be considered amongst the harshest of criticisms. However, in examining films such as *La Kermesse héroïque*, I want to emphasize what is felt to be the most significant aspect of the relationship to history: the use of décor. I shall also examine films and filmmakers who are felt to make more interesting and sometimes ironic use of décor to comment on the historical situations in which their protagonists find themselves.

I shall begin by looking at two films by Sacha Guitry. While the décor of Guitry's films may not be as lavish as some, his style of filmmaking illustrates other connotations of "the décor of history". Of course "décor" often means the stage setting for a play, and Guitry's central place in the French tradition of "filmed theatre" is illustrated by *Les Perles de la couronne* (which he directed with Christian-Jacque) and *Remontons les Champs Élysées* (with Robert Bibal, 1938). Both films overtly play fast-and-loose with historical fact, but it is precisely the insouciance with which they deal with vast swathes of history and the performative, particularly verbal, pleasures they offer that must have been important reasons in their considerable popular success.[66]

The Little Theatre of Sacha Guitry

Guibbert, Oms and Cadé provide an excellent, though brief, summary of the historical cinema of Sacha Guitry, and his long-lasting commitment to recounting the aristocratic past of France: "Sacha Guitry is without contest the foremost director of royal power. From 1937 to 1955, deaf to the criticisms from the specialist press who, in describing him, invoked the Grévin museum and *les images d'Épinal*, he created enormous machines that he justified by claiming that taught history was too boring".[67] The "enormous machines" mentioned refer mainly to the "historical super-productions"[68] of the 1950s, the two-part *Napoléon* (1955) for example. Guitry's opinion that history teaching in schools was too boring explains the way he presents himself within the films. For example, as we saw in *Pasteur*, Guitry would present himself as a kind of "gentleman scholar", guiding the viewer through the world of the past. Similarly, in *Les Perles de la couronne*, Guitry plays a French writer-cum-narrator called Jean Martin (a most common French name, perhaps chosen for ironic counterpoint to the uniqueness of Guitry), while in *Remontons les Champs-Élysées*, he narrates the film as an actual schoolteacher who interrupts a boring math lesson in order to relate the story of Paris's most famous avenue, not to mention his character's genealogy—it turns out that Guitry's narrator/schoolteacher is a descendant of Napoléon Bonaparte. The latter incorporation of Guitry's character into the historical thread of the narrative underlines the unabashed egotism of Guitry's filmmaking.

Guitry's politics were often questioned, and given his clear preference for aristocratic narratives, Guibbert et al. address the frequently asked question, was he a royalist?

> We have never clearly established this. What is certain is that he loved crowned heads [*les têtes couronnées*]: this ostentatious [*fastueux*] feeling for continuity as much explains his taste for genealogy as it does the way in which he constructed his films, where the History of France is cut up into tableaux, or rather into animated models/dioramas [*miniatures animées*]: Guitry is never anything less than epic ... His famous voice, which we hear in voiceover in all his films, directs events at a distance: he holds the strings, he is the great organizer of a causality which, without him, would escape us.[69]

As Guibbert, Oms and Cadé suggest, whether Guitry is a royalist is difficult to discern, but as with Louis Pasteur, his interest is clearly in the great men of history. His preference for "les têtes couronnées" echoes his own obsessions with his famous father, and fashioning of himself as "le prince de Paris". What's more, his treatment of all of the historical characters is defined by an amusement—even managing to be comic about the Terror in *Remontons les Champs-Élysées*—rather than any strong sense of commendation or condemnation, making the question of his own personal political allegiances arguably moot.

The most important thing however is the sense of Guitry as great puppeteer of his historical protagonists ("he holds the strings"), and whether on or off-screen (his films are thick in voiceover), he explains "a causality that would otherwise escape us". Guitry is thus generally the sole possessor of the Historical gaze, which in its comical way, is the most clairvoyant and commanding of any. However, despite the length and scope of some of his later films, it is inappropriate to label Guitry as a creator of "epic history". (It should be noted that neither of the films examined here are longer than two hours.) Epic denotes a certain scale of vision in terms of spectacle *and* means of production. The far more intimate, but multileveled narration of Guitry's historical worlds represents a décorative approach in which the chief pleasures are seeing charismatic performers (often Guitry himself) impersonating great figures form the past.

In the attempts to "rescue" Guitry for critics from the *nouvelle vague* onwards, there have been various attempts to stress Guitry as something of a modernist filmmaker. The degree of self-referentiality in Guitry's work was seen to raise him up above other ideologically suspect filmmakers of the 1930s and the rest of the aesthetically retrograde "filmed theatre". The complex narration of his films can be illustrated with various moments from *Les Perles de la couronne*. The central narrative of this film is a fictional one, concerning the search for three pearls linked to those on the English crown. This conceit allows the inclusion of a vast array of historical figures including Henry VIII (Lyn Harding), his daughter Elizabeth I (Yvette Pienne), Pope Clement VII (Ermete Zaccon), Catherine de Medici (Marguerite Moreno), to name but a few. The historical parts of the story are told through a variety of narrators, central amongst them is Guitry's writer, Jean Martin, who traces the history around the location of the pearls. At one point Martin tells his wife (Jacqueline Delubac, Guitry's frequent co-star and actual wife at the time) of the succession of French kings Henri II to François II. His words, "Henri II dies suddenly and is replaced by François II" are accompanied by images where Henri literally vanishes, and is instantly replaced by François. The narration then turns to Mary Stuart "Queen of Scots" as played by Delubac. We see her story ending with her beheading. Guitry/Martin (he is rarely not "Guitry" on some quite prominent level) then interrupts his narration to ask his wife, "What did you think of my story so far?" She replies, "It was fantastic. I imagined I was poor Mary Stuart." Having "imagined himself" as other characters, he considers, "One always fancies one's hero to be like oneself." A little later, further excited by the scope and splendor of the history surrounding the pearls (they will also take us to Agincourt, to the French revolution etc.), Guitry's narrator says, "I will make a film with this story."

While such self-referentiality via voiceover or ostentatious tricks of editing (the vanishing of Henri II for example) might be anathema to traditional views of the cinema as "classical" (*as opposed to modernist*), in Vincendeau's emphasis on the theatricality and performativity of classical French cinema, Guitry simply represents a particularly exuberant inflection of the more direct, post-theatrical relationship between performer and audience. This mode of history is "décorative" rather than "critical" because it is so strongly and obviously authored—one never gets a sense that Guitry is questioning traditional history, only injecting it with some much-needed repartee. Also, declamatory in style, Gutiry's stories emphasize continuity, the concept of a "national character"—Guitry is obsessed, like Oscar Wilde, something of an English equivalent, with concepts such as "character". For example, at one point in *Les Perles de la couronne*, he juxtaposes Henry VIII (Lyn Harding) making a speech connecting England metaphorically to an oak tree (unbending, unyielding in the face of the strong forces of history) with François I's (Guitry again) comparison of France with a ball (light, mobile, easily moved but always bouncing back).

Though it might be objected that Guitry's films are too fictional to be considered historical (the credits for *Remontons les Champs-Élysées* describe it as a "filmed fantasy, conceived, scripted and brought to the screen by SACHA GUITRY" [my translation]), they engage more directly than many "the issues, ideas, data, and arguments of the ongoing discourse of history".[70] Guitry's text foreword disclaimers do not prevent the narrators, for example, interjecting after a particularly interesting event, "That was exactly how it happened!" Furthermore, *Remontons les Champs-Élysées* was sufficiently compatible with "official" views of the national past that the French "Ministry for International Cultural Relations" sponsored a 1989 print of the film as a part of bicentenary celebrations of the French revolution.[71] Indeed, the final words of the latter film are: "The history of the Champs Elysées is the history of France".

The Tragedy of the Hapsburgs, as seen by Anatole Litvak and Max Ophüls

Another tendency one sees in films that stress the décor of history, is the way often aristocratic narratives use their royal mise-en-scène to comment on their characters entrapment within the rigid etiquette and décor(um) of the past. For example, Anatole Litvak's *Mayerling* (1936) and Max Ophüls's *De Mayerling à Sarajevo* (1940) narrate two similarly tragic histories of events befalling the rulers of the Austro-Hungarian Empire, the Hapsburgs. The first focuses on the romance of Archduke Rudolph, Crown Prince of Austria (Charles Boyer) with Baroness Mary Vertesa (Danielle Darrieux) and their eventual suicide pact at the prince's hunting lodge in Mayerling on January 30 1889—an event which inspired feverish newspaper coverage and innumerable conspiracy theories at the time. Ophüls's film is something of a remake, Litvak's having been a major success at the French box-office.[72] Despite "Mayerling" being in the title of Ophüls's film, the double suicide is only alluded to, and instead the narrative focuses on the romance and eventual morganatic marriage between Archduke Franz Ferdinand (John Lodge) and Countess Sophie Chotek (Edwige Feuillère), and their eventual assassination by Bosnian separatists in Sarajevo on June 28 1914, an event which of course set in motion the First World War.

The predominantly romantic histories these films offer are full of parallels, but fitting with characteristics of their directors' wider work (easier to identify with the much better known Ophüls), they differ greatly in tone. Litvak's film is touched by a bleakness and morbidity (of course, largely engendered by the "always already known" fate of the protagonists), which one is tempted to relate to that of "poetic realism", a mood (or mode) on the horizon of French cinematic production. Boyer's portrayal of the doomed hero trapped by social forces beyond his control could be said to foreshadow the emblematic Jean Gabin roles like François in *Le Jour se lève* (of course these social forces occur in an entirely different echelon, but they are similarly determining). Certain images of the face of Boyer's Archduke use chiaroscuro lighting that resemble the classic lighting of Gabin in his Poetic Realist films, and when the disturbed Rudolph shoots his reflection in the mirror, it again reminds one of the actions of the suicidal protagonist of *Le Jour se lève*.[73] Ophüls's film on the other hand displays his characteristic lightness of touch and insouciant ease with comedy and tragedy. This ease is less apparent in the latter part of the film, the production of which was famously interrupted by the outbreak of war[74]—indeed in the closing moments of the film, one feels a compromised return to "default Historical filmmaking" utterly incongruous with the majority of the text.

Both films are quite accurate about data surrounding the key historical events. Nevertheless, the films follow conventional romance narratives (of the more tragic "star-crossed lovers" variety). Indeed, the biographies of the two would-be monarchs clearly provided material particularly ripe for cinematic adaptation (two controversial romances, one ending in a supposed double suicide, the other, a morganatic marriage, and ultimately, a double homicide). Moreover, Litvak and Ophüls's films have in common an underlying critique of the courtly pomp and circumstance that imprison their historical heroes. As tragedies of protagonists out of step with the history in which they find themselves (one driven to suicide by the demands of royal etiquette, another victimized and eventually sacrificed by similar forces), these films make use of "the décor of history" as a part of their vision of courtly oppression. ("Out of step with history" is the tragic flip-side of "a man ahead of his time"; as in *De Mayerling à Sarajevo*, "the Historical gaze" can be a tragic device, both Sophie and Franz/François expressing apprehensiveness at visiting Sarajevo.) It is worth briefly outlining the different stylistic strategies used to achieve this, not least because it reveals the more exceptional approach of Ophüls, and thus strengthens one's sense of "the norm".

Litvak presents the gossip and excessive theatricality of Hapsburg royal life with some skill. Boyer's Rudolph is forced into a marriage by his father the Emperor (Jean Dax), and his sadness is shared by his similarly oppressed mother (Gabrielle Dorziat) and counterposed to the rich mise-en-scène which surround them. Rudolph walks with his mother along lines of splendidly dressed aristocratic onlookers. These people later provide a vicious chorus of gossipy (female) voices who comment on his flagrant affair with Darrieux's character.

As with all historical cinema, and particularly in the décorative approaches to courtly life, there is a visual pleasure offered by the costumes and settings, but one feels the stiffness and discomfort of Boyer within this. For example, the marriage is bookended by two montage sequences (the first is almost a minute long) which use superimpositions of church bells ringing set to the somber march-like music. These images culminate in a superimposition of the Austrian flag over the palace. Such strategies are consonant with much wider historical film conventions but, here, the heavily rhetorical style of the montage also aptly underlines the weight of pageantry that pulls down the lead character.

Until its compromised conclusion, Ophüls's film is more unusual. Following a typically "Ophülsian" opening in which a court official frantically negotiates the ever-changing seating arrangements of international diplomats, the film makes extraordinary use of staging in depth to convey the contradictions of Franz Ferdinand's life. Figure 5.3 comes from a scene in which events are directed by the villainous Prince Montenuovo (Aimé Clariond), a composite figure who will maneuver Ferdinand and his wife into a dangerous position in Sarajevo. Montenuovo, a kind of nineteenth century spin doctor, dictates a press release describing the address of Franz and his father of the crowds outside in celebratory terms contradictory of the bitter "backstage" events we've just seen. We see the performance of familial love and Montenuovo's Machiavellian commentary within the same shot. As this scene undercuts the "spectacle of the balcony",[75] the scene that follows can be seen to subtly mock the montage sequence, another familiar trope of Historical cinema.

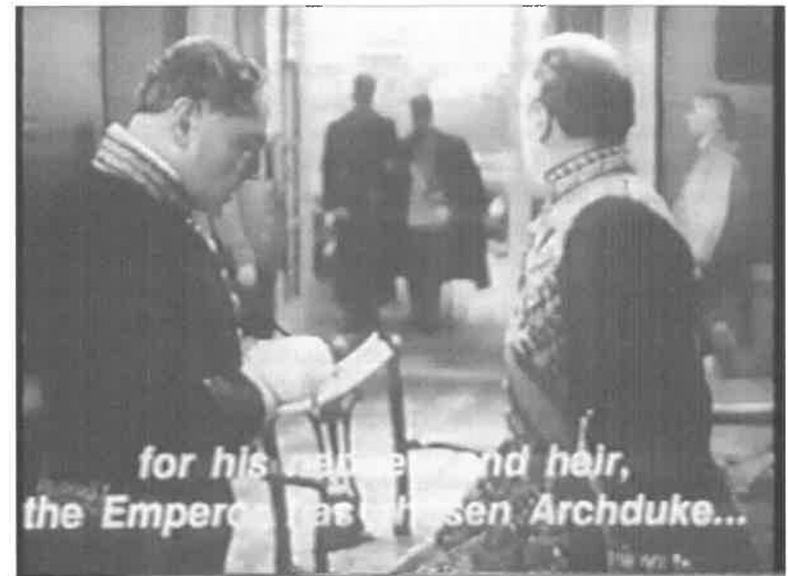


Figure 5.3 De Mayerling à Sarajevo (1940): Staging in depth undercuts the spectacle of the balcony being constructed in the background.

During the scene around the balcony, Montenuevo has been spinning the departure of Franz Ferdinand on a six-month tour inspecting the Imperial army from an effective punishment (for disobedience and expressing radical views) into a promotion. There then follow scenes mixing newspaper cuttings of Ferdinand's trips, with superimposed repeated salutes by the archduke, with a fixed smile. The energy and exuberance of this device (added to by jaunty martial music) is undercut by the automaton motions of Lodge's character, and our knowledge of the emptiness of this exercise. Rather than passing time and the progress of History, the montage sequence evokes the stasis and effective imprisonment of the hero.

One can only speculate how Ophüls would have ended the film had circumstances been different;[76] given the disparity suggested in the film between the public and private spheres of the Hapsburgs, perhaps he may have made a "critical" use of the assassination. However, what remains is an ending discordant with the rest of the film: a montage sequence (with voiceover) linking the outbreak of the First World War with the outbreak of the second. The swastika is contrasted to the flags of the "free nations", most prominent of which is that of the US, which had not entered the war at the time of the film's release. Thus a film exploring the oppressive world of courtly and romantic politics through Ophüls's mastery of mise-en-scène, becomes, in the final moments, crude propaganda encouraging solidarity in the face of Nazi aggression, reliant on the heavier rhetoric of the montage sequence some earlier scenes had done much to parody.

Parodying Historical Spectacle: *La Kermesse héroïque*

In a discussion of "the décor of history", perhaps the French reference point most obvious to us is Feyder's *La Kermesse héroïque*. The film represented the pinnacle of the career of the émigré set designer Lazare Meerson, arguably the key figure in French 1930s cinema's extremely influential "Russian school" of production design.[77] The film is generally considered a comedy, and historical only in Meerson's extraordinary sets, yet the text foreword is fairly typical in marking out its relationship to history. The foreword tells us the action takes place in Flanders in 1616, a point at which Spanish rule was less severe. The foreword notes, however that the memory of the horrors of war had not been erased from the memories of the peaceful inhabitants—this issue of memory will be returned to in a particularly memorable scene of imagined atrocities. By way of disclaimer, the foreword then adds a note on how the "subject" of the film is not from history, and is rather an "imagined serio-comic narrative". However, it is added that the film is a sincere tribute to the "humanity" and "*gaîté* of classic Flemish painting. Thus, at least as important as "History" is art history, and in fact the only "real character" is the painter Jan Brueghel the Younger (Bernard Lancret). The direct references to painting aside, this disclaimer is perfectly consonant with the majority of historical films from the period. Where the film is really unusual is in its profoundly anti-patriotic message.

With its story of a town saved by the shrewd diplomacy and "horizontal collaboration" of its female citizens, the film was something of an embarrassment to critics faced with French capitulation to the Nazis five years later, and even aroused some controversy at the time of its release, notably being banned in Belgium.[78] This is scarcely surprising given the vision of cowardly, pompous and ineffectual masculinity offered by the male "nobility" of Flanders, led by André Alerme's burgomaster. Furthermore, the attractive Spanish invaders are not defined in traditionally heroic terms, one of the infantry declaring openly that he fights for whichever nation pays the best. This vision of military history is antithetical to the majority of ("monumental") historical cinema examined here, and to those Hollywood films which even seem to enthusiastically embrace the patriotism of other countries. In terms of the décor of history, and the broader outlines I have been sketching, let us turn to the function of the set designs in marking out a more ironic take on history, and indeed on historical filmmaking generally.

Dudley Andrew writes of Lazare Meerson, "seldom can one so confidently point to an individual responsible for an aesthetic trend in an art".[79] With *Sous les toits de Paris*, Meerson began to develop a distinctively French look, "a look that can be named by a single word: intimacy".[80] If we take an aesthetic of intimacy to be one of the defining characteristics of French cinema of the 1930s (and this is borne out by the earlier analyses of French musicality), one can understand why "spectacular vistas" is somewhat alien to French production of the period. Consequently, the intimacy of classical French cinema has a greater affinity with the sensibility/approach I have been describing as "décorative". In the case of *La Kermesse héroïque*, while Meerson's sets were based on painstaking research in order to achieve a degree of authenticity, as Andrew points out, "authenticity is a far cry from realism".[81] In order to realize Feyder's love of the humanity and lightness of his native country's painters (Vermeer, who is referenced in the film, along with the two Brueghels), Meerson constructed the lavish sets in three-quarter size on the lot of the Epinay studio, "which turns the townspeople into lovable puppets even as they are satirized": "Meerson made use of extraordinary resources to construct a spectacle that lampoons the spectacular. (...) his magnificent town serves as comfortable dollhouse that maintains an intimacy with the characters who inhabit it. Nothing is blown out of proportion save their egos and nightmares".[82] In mentioning the overblown nightmares of the town inhabitants, Andrew refers to a scene imagining the horrors that will be brought by the occupying Spanish force. In this scene of extraordinary discord in the largely comic narrative that surrounds it, we see images of rape, murder, torture and the defenestration of a Flemish baby, hurled onto the waiting lances of the conquistadors beneath. These images are conjured by the innkeeper (Pierre Labry) who stands to address the town leaders, and describes the inevitable Spanish atrocities. His voiceover is interspersed with images illustrating the nightmarish fighting and the tortures of the Inquisition. This is a moment of *hysterical foresight* that bears no reality to what

follows—the innkeeper himself ends up celebrating the considerable boost the Spanish visitors give to his business. Indeed, the images can be seen to mock the kind of spectacle offered by historical cinema, and perhaps even the sometimes suspect rhetoric of historytelling more broadly. In relation to the other films examined here, the scene can be seen to lampoon the kind of predominantly masculine "Historical gaze" that has recurred. This film which is so concerned with mocking masculinity also mocks the appropriation of history, a process which must be seen in patriarchal terms.

To summarize the particularity of Meerson's practice alongside its relationship to broader traditions, let us return to Dudley Andrew's comments. For Andrew, Meerson represents a synthesis between décor and the artistic vision of some of the most important filmmakers of the period, in which a fascinating paradox emerges in relation to questions of spectacle and a kind of cinematic classicism. Indeed, one gets a sense of the incompatibility of Meerson's vision of décor and conceptions of spectacle, at least when it is conceived as a machine for distraction. In Meerson's own words: "It is much more difficult to compose a décor with ambience that, imperceptible to the eyes of the public, strengthens the scene and confers on it an authentic value than to execute a super-architecture before which everyone's mouth gapes in admiration but which totally denatures the sense and the direction of the decoupage".[83] Meerson's emphases evoke a cinematic classicism of sorts, particularly in the emphasis on "imperceptibility". However, if this connection is possible, it may not be appropriate. To make parallels with classical Hollywood, Meerson's work might participate in the classicism of, say, an Ernst Lubitsch, but not that of, for example, a W.S. Van Dyke (the director of *Marie Antoinette*).[84] Whereas the former creates a seemingly soufflé-light world of tight interconnections, the latter creates a solid mise-en-scène weighed down by a "quality" view of History. Such distinctions are of course underpinned by elitist visions of film artistry, but are evocative of the ironic use made by Feyder of Meerson's "décor of history". Meerson's critique of the affects of admiration, and creation of an awe-struck spectator are consonant with a prevailing, though often unsaid, association of such decorative spectacular blandishments with the taint of commercial concerns.

Andrew pursues his complex weave of different visions of cinematic craft by comparing Meerson's work (and that of other set designers associated with poetic realism and its relatives) with that of "good-taste" set designers like Guy de Gastyne:

> ... when Gastyne teamed up with L'Herbier for example, they aimed for what [Léon] Barsacq calls "an official looking richness. Royal reception rooms with gleaming floors and gilded ceilings, crystal chandeliers and pompous furniture"—just the kind of thing that would later adorn the cinema of quality. Some magnificent sets were built, but when seen against those that [Eugène] Lourié and [Georges] Wakhevitch built for Renoir, or against the "Meerson balance," as I want to call it, these designs always seem to preexist and outlive the stories played out on them. They are stiff, and proud of their solidity, but they scarcely bend to the flow of the characters walking through them.[85]

The aesthetic of quality cited in the sets of designers like Guy de Gastyne, who worked on numerous L'Herbier films including *Entente cordiale*, has a solidity, an "official looking richness" that matches L'Herbier's monumental, *stately* vision of the past. To continue the comparison with the avowedly "painterly" *La Kermesse héroïque*, we might recall the allusion made by one reviewer to "'peintures du salon des artistes français' (French artists' salon painting)" in his critique of *Entente cordiale*.[86] Whereas this is seen as part of the "agréable" aesthetic of L'Herbier, the allusions to the humanity of Flemish painting serve much more satirical purposes in Feyder's film, most notably where the young Breughel tries to complete his portrait of the town's leaders.

The scene takes place just before the Spanish invaders have come to upset the complacency of the burgomaster and his fellow nobles. Frustrated by their inability to maintain the same poses over numerous sittings, Breughel's irritated instructions are accompanied by the camera's rapid pan from his painting to his subjects. As the scene goes on, the commanding poses held by the men are revealed to be just that, poses. (The film clearly anticipates Greenaway's 2007 *Nightwatching*.) Their petty squabbles, the enormous pomposity and self-importance of their stances, perfectly natural in the painting, but perfectly preposterous in the flesh, are symbolic of the central message of film concerning the shallowness of appearances. This message is encapsulated in the final moments of the film, where the burgomaster's wife stands on their balcony, being congratulated by the townsfolk for her successful diplomacy with the Spaniards. Resenting her acclaim, Alerme's character says, "I forbid you to make a spectacle of yourself" ("Je te défends de te tenir en spectacle"). However, when she makes a speech crediting all the diplomacy to the mayor, he is happy to greet the adoring crowds, and takes to the balcony to make a spectacle of himself. Thus this final moment in perhaps the decade's greatest achievement in period décor costumes underlines its satirical take on the monumentalism prevalent in many historical films.

Color and Historical Décor in *The Adventures of Robin Hood*

Though arguably the most tenuous of the films examined here in its relationship to history, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938) warrants discussion in the context of the décor of history because it is arguably a limit case. Indeed, its graphical/visual excesses are particularly suited to the loose historical grounding of the Robin Hood story, and illustrate François de la Bretèque's point that films set in the medieval period "are the ideal terrain for experimentation in new means of expression" (my translation),[87] in this case, in the use of Technicolor.[88]

Though *La Kermesse héroïque* was an extraordinary technical undertaking, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* underlines how the technological prowess of Hollywood engendered novel and innovative approaches to historical filmmaking unavailable to French popular filmmaking of the 1930s. Where the technological feats of *The Big Trail* and *Gone with the Wind* are "onomatopoetic" of their reformulations of history (as grandiose monument and intense, overblown melodrama respectively), so too the extreme, vibrant color of the Warner Brothers film reflects its vision of heroism and villainy:

> Warners' early use of Technicolor on *Robin Hood* obviously enhances its visual quality, and if I have emphasised that quality more strongly than in other films so far discussed, it is because the film's impact relies more on its sumptuousness than on its action, however finely choreographed that action may be. If in *The Charge of the Light Brigade* the action is the vehicle for the morality, in *The Adventures of Robin Hood* the spectacle is the guarantee of the vaguely populist message.[89]

In his book on 1930s Warner Brothers, Nick Roddick situates the studio within the wider political situation of the time, particularly the President Roosevelt policies that give Roddick's book its title: *A New Deal in Entertainment*. Within this framework, Roddick's unsaid definition of "spectacle" is a somewhat curious one. Spectacle for Roddick seems associated with more conservative rhetorical strategies, while action is tied more to narrative. Given the particularly strong rhetoric examined in the action-packed climax to *The Charge of the Light Brigade*, which Roddick also cites, his emphasis on action in Curtiz's film seems imprecise. (For example, the force of final charge *as action* is arguably undermined by the repeated inserts and superimpositions of the Tennyson poem, though this emphasizes its rhetorical aspirations.) However, Roddick's analysis of *Robin Hood* does underline the very particular style of filming which allows for "the combination of great sweeps of orchestrated movement with sudden stasis".[90] This combination of moments of movement and moments of stillness can help us link the spectacle of *Robin Hood* back to Steve Neale's definition, with his emphasis on "the processes of rendering visible and of looking themselves".[91]

The visual display of Curtiz's film is emphasized by its fairly distinctive reliance (in a late-1930s Hollywood context) on tableau compositions and shots suited to showcasing the décorative pleasures of costume and sets. Long shots recur in order to stress the scale of settings, often as tall as they are wide. The tableaux compositions are suggestive of medieval paintings, or perhaps more aptly tapestries, in which groups of figures are arranged side by side. The film's visuals were said to have been inspired by early twentieth-century illustrated children's stories and comic books on Robin Hood.[92] They equally seek to evoke, though in an admittedly garish way, the tapestries and parchments of the "the olden days" and the elaborate "period" credits make this link explicitly. Moreover, at moments, the film shows a preference for the close shot where one might expect the close-up.

The standard close framing of characters in the film allows a fairly large portion of torso, and thus the extraordinary, colorful costumes to be seen. Figures 5.4 and 5.5 are somewhat closer examples, the first emphasizing Robin's threat to Prince John, the second a romantic moment, conventional moments for close-up emphasis. However, the image always allows us to see the "color for color's sake" of the costume and makeup. To echo Roddick, these moments underline that while *The Adventures of Robin Hood* stresses action and adventure, its use of bold and bright Technicolor engenders often more tableau framing, emphasizing the "to-be-looked-at-ness" of the image.

Figures 5.4–5.5 *The Adventures of Robin Hood* (1938): Conventional moments for close-up emphasis are often shot in close shot, highlighting color and costume.

Before we look at another differently extreme inflection of the décorative approach to history (though much less commercially successful than *Robin Hood*), it is worth noting some of Roddick's observations of another Warners "merrie England" film, *The Private Lives of Elizabeth and Essex* (1939): "... by the end it is the visual rhetoric that dominates, becoming self-sufficient and rather contradicting the established belief that the Hollywood camera is wholly narrative-controlled. Here, the narrative is itself subject to the rhetoric of spectacle".[93] Roddick sees this as a part of the increasing conservatism of Warner Bros., who earlier in the decade had been particularly associated with the "social problem picture". The complexities of this historicization aside, it is worth underlining the more general relevance of his comments to the marked rhetoric I have commented upon across a range of 1930s Hollywood filmmaking. The "rhetoric of spectacle" may be distinct from the kinds of narrational rhetoric focused on in relation to "monumental history", but it underlines the sense that such rhetoric challenges the sometimes obsessively narrative oriented summations of Hollywood classicism. Indeed, *The Adventures of Robin Hood* is just an extreme example of a fable whose narrative end is very familiar, and whose *raison d'être* lies in its visual and spectacular splendor.

The Scarlet Empress

Josef von Sternberg, and specifically his film biography of Russian empress Catherine II/Catherine the Great, constitutes a singular approach to historytelling. In critical accounts, the relationship of *The Scarlet Empress* to history is, understandably, left to one side in favour of the overwhelming "von Sternberg-ness" of his vision of the eighteenth-century Russian court—the director himself claimed that every aspect of the film "was dominated by me".[94] Indeed, this "biopic" (the quotation marks seem necessary to so eccentric a film) represents the parodic, excessive height of a décorative approach to history. Where *La Kermesse héroïque* could be said to satirize the conventions of historical (décorative) spectacle, *The Scarlet Empress* seems to entirely explode those conventions and set up an almost fantastical world through a densely packed, often grotesque décor. However, particularly in its use of intertitles, the film does engage directly with the standard rhetoric of historical films, and it is the relationship between this text and the illustrative images that I shall focus on first. Furthermore, while the film itself may be seen to create an overwhelmingly artificial historical space, the credits underline the "authenticity" and research that is so often stressed in the promotion of historical films. In particularly prominent lettering, the credits tells us the film is "based on a diary of Catherine II", and in smaller letters, "arranged by Manuel Komroff" ("arranged by" providing a sufficient disclaimer with regards historical veracity).[95]

Even for the particularly verbose form of filmmaking known as the historical, *The Scarlet Empress* has a great many intertitles, used primarily

to underline the broader historical backdrop of the images they punctuate. The thirteen text inserts are also often very long, their language entirely consonant with the rhetoric of most historical films. For example, the third intertitle introduces the departure of the young princess (Marlene Dietrich) for Russia, where she will be renamed Catherine: "On March the fifteenth, 1744, Princess Sophia Frederica departed for Russia, full of innocent dreams for the future, and completely unaware of the fate which was to transform her into the most famous woman of her day." The text contains specific historical data (the date of the departure, her original name), and underlines the predestined nature of greatness that one remarks in a great many historical films. (The intertitle thus demonstrates how the film meets Robert Rosenstone's criteria for an "historical film", as opposed to a "costume drama".[96])

Sophia/Catherine's fate is further underlined in the scene that follows. Sophia's father says goodbye to his daughter and admits they may never see each other again: "I want you to remember what I taught you: Always to be honest and truthful; to be a faithful wife and a loyal subject of your new country; be kind to the people in your service and be obedient to your husband and your superiors; and strive at all times to be worthy of your glorious destiny." The father's speech provides an outline of all the values which, if not entirely broken, will be distorted and corrupted when Sophia becomes Catherine and is faced with the treachery of Russian courtly life. For example, Catherine will learn that honesty and truthfulness are rather fatal naivety in the duplicitous world of Russian monarchy; the idea of being obedient to her husband, the extraordinarily mad Grand Duke (and briefly Emperor) Peter (Sam Jaffe) is quickly revealed as equally wrongheaded; and, as the "scarlet" of the film's title suggests, "being kind to those in your service" will take on predominantly sexual signification.

Such discrepancies begin to suggest an irony present throughout the film. While the intertitle text underlines the grand, *fateful* actions of Catherine, the narrative world of the film is rather more concerned with the interpersonal treachery that seems more petty than "Historic". For example, one intertitle announces, "the historic banquet, which was the last to be shared by Peter and Catherine ..." In the corresponding scene, Archimandrite Simeon (Davison Clark) requests alms from each of the guests. While Peter and his paramour (Ruthelma Stevens) are offensive towards the priest, Catherine and her lover Orloff (Gavin Gordon), make very generous gifts. However, Catherine's haughty gesture gives less a sense of the "enlightened despot" that History tells us Catherine was to become, but someone more concerned with *making a show* of generosity. The artificiality of the gesture, and the performativity of all the diners, is heightened by their sitting in the extraordinary, grotesque Peter Ballbusch-designed furniture that populate the film. As George Wilson suggests, the characters in fact seem to have less emotional depth than the statues that entwine the dining chairs: "The statues appear in poses of religious ecstasy and world-weary despair. They assume

the postures of agony, shame and grief. And these are states of mind and soul that the human characters seem largely incapable of experiencing".[97]

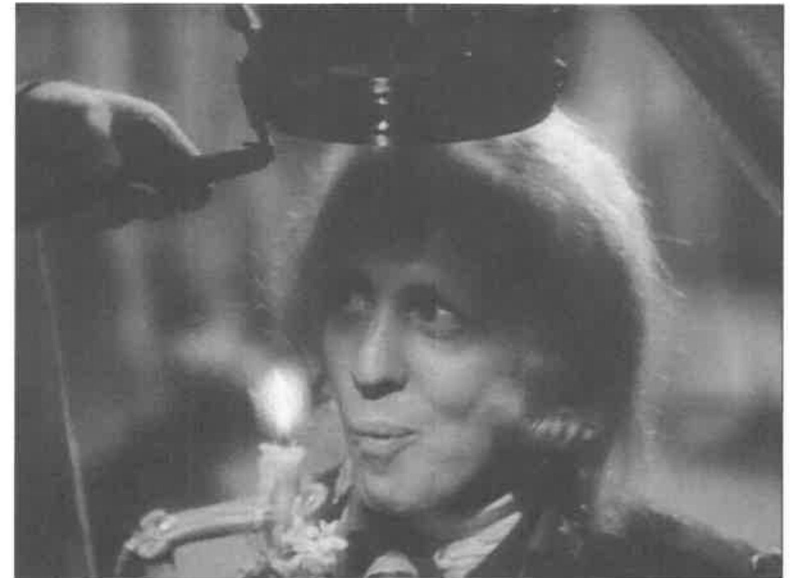
That the décor is imbued with more life than the characters parallels another way in which the film is an extreme version of the décorative approach to history. The characters do not display evidence of "Historical vision", and their gaze seems entirely restricted to the physical space that surrounds them. (It should be remembered that "the Historical gaze" is rarely literally "direct address"—e.g., the address of the camera/audience—but it does seem to look outside of the immediate world of the characters, into the future/the history to come). This is scarcely surprising given that, outside of the written text (the intertitles, and also the montage of repressive and violent "Proclamations" that accompany Peter's brief tenure as emperor), characters rarely seem concerned with events traditionally thought of as *historical*. Moreover, the décor itself is so crowded, so opaque it absorbs all views within and into itself.

The concerns of the characters are certainly ones of power, but this is generally of, at least on some level, a sexual nature. George M. Wilson's essay on the film takes issue with the brief use Laura Mulvey makes of von Sternberg[98] to illustrate aspects of scopophilia in Hollywood's regimes of "visual pleasure":

> [Mulvey] claims, "The powerful look of the male protagonist (characteristic of traditional narrative film) is broken in favor of the image in direct erotic rapport with the spectator". However, in *The Scarlet Empress*, the chief male protagonist, Count Alexy [John Lodge], is the bearer of the powerful, sexual gaze, although its intensity and narcissism are presented as absurd. (...) By the end of the film, whatever power his look may have had for [Catherine] is broken ... In fact, after her crucial transformation to sexual maturity, it is Catherine who comes to be the one who surveys the male world with her own appraising, dominating gaze.[99]

Indeed, Catherine's main rival for power, Peter, is clearly capable of neither "an Historical gaze" (dependent on foresight and intelligence well beyond him) nor even an imperious gaze upon other characters—see Figure 5.6 for Jaffe's idiot grin during the wedding ceremony, a moment that should begin to consolidate his power; note how it contrasts in the same scene to the still potent stare of Count Alexy (Figure 5.7). As Wilson writes, "Peter is a male, but one whose spying gaze is impotent".[100] As Wilson also suggests, by the end of the film, Catherine has defeated her crazed, impotent husband and seized the throne for herself, a shift in power expressed largely through Dietrich/Catherine's command of the look.

Taking place on the highest platform of the palace, the final moments of the film come closest to evoking the imperiousness or clairvoyance characteristic of the Historical gaze. Indeed, as Catherine looks around herself,



Figures 5.6–5.7 The Scarlet Empress (1934): Looks within the diegesis strongly convey potency and agency (or its lack).

there are images of bells tolling and ecstatic crowds are superimposed over her face, signifying the magnitude of this "Historical moment". However, I would contend that her look around herself is too frantic, not sufficiently fixed or measured. More importantly, her actions have given no sense of

her rising to "greatness" in any way other than as "a great sex object". (Contrast this to the British film, *The Rise of Catherine the Great* (1934), in which a totally desexualized Elisabeth Bergner incarnates the titular *Catherine the Great*, who, we are repeatedly told, will save Russia.)

The observable differences between this moment and films in which the gaze may be considered "historical" are subtle, but correspond with the particularity of von Sternberg's approach. The distinction illustrates one aspect of the important differences of von Sternberg's film to the conventional rhetoric of most historical films (another being the ironically incongruous intertitles). Furthermore, while one does not wish to overdetermine the links between "the Historical gaze" and spectacle, Catherine/Dietrich's slightly manic gaze does link to the *excessive rather than spectacular* aspects of von Sternberg's historical décor. In my opinion, von Sternberg's mise-en-scène is not sufficiently communicative, open or transparent to be considered spectacular; one of its main visual qualities is its crowdedness. Unlike DeMille, whose often rather camp décor comes closest to the sort of excess *The Scarlet Empress* embodies, von Sternberg's film is not so much presentational as obfuscatory, trapping characters within spaces in which they struggle to see clearly the already opaque motives of rivals, antagonists or lovers.

"Spectacular vistas" and "the décor of history" are not offered as catch-all terms, but rather provide useful heuristic categories through which to consider the uses made of spectacle by various French and American historical films of the 1930s. On the one hand, one may consider varieties of spectacle associated particularly with the historical epic (though this excludes much French cinema of the period), on the other, the visual pleasures of mise-en-scène (which are shared by both national cinemas, and are fitting with the characteristic "intimacy" of French 1930s cinema). The latter become spectacular with a certain heightening, when, in Rosen's words, it becomes "so playful, so performative as opposed to referential, that we call it spectacle".[101] Also, the spectacular effect of the décor and costuming may be inscribed by a certain relay of looks and a sense of wonderment created within the film world.

The next chapter examines some new questions, but also provides the conclusion to Part Two of this book. It may be observed that the preceding discussion of films cited numerous examples of historical mise-en-scène that seemed, at times, to critique its characters, and even the conventions of historical films themselves (for example, the grotesque, obfuscatory décor of *The Scarlet Empress*'s narrative world contrasts with the rhetoric of the intertitles; *La Kermesse héroïque* seems to satirize the spectacle of historical films). Therefore, the films examined in the context of "critical history" are not offered as entirely exceptional, but as particularly revealing case studies that explore the further possibilities of self-conscious, sophisticated historiography coexisting with clear, coherent, "classical" narrative.

NOTES

1. Greg Dening, "'Captain Bligh' as Mythic Cliché: The Films", in *Screening the Past: Film and the Representation of History*, ed. Tony Barta (Westport: Praeger, 1998).
2. George F. Custen's *Bio/pics: How Hollywood Constructed Public History* (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1992).
3. Vivian Sobchack, "'Surge and Splendor': A Phenomenology of the Hollywood Historical Epic", in *Film Genre Reader II*, ed. Barry Keith Grant (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1995).
4. Philip Rosen, *Change Mummified: Cinema, Historicity, Theory* (London: University of Minnesota Press, 2001).
5. Rosen does discuss *Le Retour de Martin Guerre* (1982), but not least in his use of the term "classical", it appears that Hollywood is his primary concern (ibid., esp. 147–166).
6. Dening, "'Captain Bligh' as Mythic Cliché", 23–24.
7. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 294.
8. Dening, "'Captain Bligh' as Mythic Cliché", 32. MGM's promotion of *Mutiny on the Bounty* is by no means exceptional. Warner Bros., a studio renowned for its research department, promoted the similarly fictionalized *The Charge of the Light Brigade* through materials designed for use in the classroom (Rosen, *Change Mummified,* 158).
9. Dening, "'Captain Bligh' as Mythic Cliché", 31.
10. Ibid., 34.
11. Custen, *Bio/pics*, 129.
12. Rosen, *Change Mummified,* 149.
13. Dening, "'Captain Bligh' as Mythic Cliché", 29.
14. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 287.
15. Ibid., 288.
16. Custen, *Bio/pics*, 128.
17. Ibid., 35–38.
18. Rosen, *Change Mummified,* 155–161.
19. Custen, *Bio/pics*, 39.
20. Tino Balio, *Grand Design: Hollywood as a Modern Business Enterprise, 1929–1939* (London: University of California Press, 1995), 93.
21. Custen, *Bio/pics*, 38.
22. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 299.
23. Rosen, *Change Mummified,* 147–199.
24. Ibid., 147.
25. Roland Barthes, *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968/1989).
26. George MacDonald Fraser, *The Hollywood History of the World* (London: Penguin, 1988), 23.
27. Rosen, *Change Mummified,* 184–199.
28. Ibid., 188.
29. Ibid., 188–194.
30. Martin Rubin, *Showstoppers: Busby Berkeley and the Tradition of Spectacle* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1993), 41–42.

31. Rosen, *Change Mummified*, 193.
32. Ibid., 192, 195.
33. Dudley Andrew, *Mists of Regret: Culture and Sensibility in Classic French Film* (Chichester: Princeton University Press, 1995), 182–184.
34. Tom Gunning, "The Cinema of Attractions: Early Film, its Spectator and the Avant-Garde", in *Early Cinema: Space, Frame, Narrative*, ed. Thomas Elsaesser (London: BFI, 1990), 61.
35. I take this "hypocrisy" to be characteristic of so much cinema which counterposes "gratuitous" spectacles with moral messages.
36. Steve Neale, "*Triumph of the Will*: Notes on Documentary and Spectacle", *Screen* 20:1 (spring 1979): 85.
37. "DeMillesque" spectacle has a particular affinity with "the cinema of attractions". The scene in the amphitheater, and indeed the Tarsus sequence, where the hysterically presentational and symmetrical display of Cleopatra's entourage is contrasted with the sudden veiling of the bed on which she and Anthony recline, seems to announce "Now you see it, now you don't". Tom Gunning uses this term to structure his most recent discussion of the temporality of the cinema of attractions ("'Now You See It, Now You Don't': The Temporality of the Cinema of Attractions", in *The Silent Cinema Reader*, ed. Lee Grieveson and Peter Kramer (London: Routledge, 2004), 45–46).
38. This is examined by Jean-Pierre Jeancolas (*15 ans d'années trente: Le Cinéma des Français, 1929–1944* (Paris: Éditions Stock, 1983), 70–71), Colin Crisp (*The Classic French Cinema, 1930–1960* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1993)) and Pierre Billard (*L'Âge classique du cinéma français: Du cinéma parlant à la Nouvelle Vague* (Paris: Flammarion, 1995)).
39. Colin Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema, 1929–1939* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 289.
40. Lucie Derain, "Production française 1937 égale production de qualité", *La Cinématographie française*, 1,000 (31 December 1937): 219; my translation.
41. The image is part of a gatefold advertisement for the Danielle Darrieux vehicle *Katia* (1938). This film is unavailable but apparently contains historical figures like Tsar Alexander II and his wife the Tsarina. To continue the overwhelming presence of material on historical films, the pages following the Derain article contain an advertisement for L'Herbier's "Raspoutin" (Rasputin), which would be renamed *La Tragédie imperiale*.
42. Anon: [Review of *Entente cordiale*] in *Figaro*, 03/05/39, BIFI press clippings.
43. Numbers 998 (17 December 1937), 1,000 (31 December 1937) and 1,003 (21 January 1938) (see fig. 3.134 of the cover of no. 998).
44. Pierre Guibbert, Marcel Oms and Michel Cadé, *CinémAction: L'histoire de France au cinema* (Condé-sur-Noiseau, 1993), 74.
45. According to the publicity, filming was due to begin in June 1939 (in *La Cinématographie française* no. 1065 (31 March 1939): 105–111). Of course the war would get in the way of this project, which Gance still talked of making until well into his eighties—Norman King, *Abel Gance: A Politics of Spectacle* (London: BFI, 1984), 125.
46. King, *Abel Gance*, 169.
47. *Cinématographie française* 1058 (10 February 1939): 35.
48. *Cinématographie française* 1065 (31 March 1939): 105–111 and *Cinématographie française* 1062 (10 March 1939): 33–36.

49. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 281.
50. J.E. Smyth, "*Cimarron*: The New Western History in 1931", *Film and History*, 33:1 (2003): 10.
51. Peter Stanfield, *Hollywood, Westerns and the 1930s: The Lost Trail* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2001), 40.
52. The highly conservative Motion Pictures Producers and Distributors Association would be responsible for the enforcement of the Production Code.
53. Quoted in Stanfield, *Hollywood, Westerns and the 1930s*, 42.
54. Marc Ferro, *Cinema and History*, trans. Naomi Greene (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1988), 73.
55. Information from "Making of *The Big Trail*" on *The Big Trail* DVD, 20th Century Fox, US, 2003, ASIN: B00008WQ4E.
56. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 295.
57. For a comparison of the 35 and 70mm versions of the film, see William Paul, "Screening Space: Architecture, Technology, and the Motion Picture Screen", *Michigan Quarterly Review*, 35:1 (winter 1996): 143–173. Recent DVD and Blu ray releases of the film provide both versions.
58. In Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 298.
59. See Allen Barra, "The Incredible Shrinking Epic", *American Film* 14:5 (March 1989), 40–45, for a discussion of the anti-epic. It is precisely the presence of films like *Cimarron* within classical cinema that supports J.E. Smyth's critique of the prevailing notion that critical film historiography only became possible in the post-classical environment.
60. Sobchack, "Surge and Splendor", 294.
61. Tom Brown, "Spectacle/Gender/History: The Case of *Gone with the Wind*", *Screen* 49:2 (summer 2008): 157–178.
62. Tom Brown, "Spectacle and Value", in *Valuing Films: Shifting Perceptions of Worth*, ed. Laura Hubner (Houndmills, Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), 49–67.
63. Brown, "Spectacle/Gender/History", 172.
64. My thanks to Frances Bonner for the term "spectacle of the frou".
65. "Décor of history" and the "décorative" are also meant to encompass costume. However, for the sake of manageability and focus, I have chosen to privilege décor.
66. Crisp, *Genre, Myth, and Convention in the French Cinema*, 322–323.
67. Guibbert, Oms and Cadé, *CinémAction*, 74; my translation.
68. Serge Yared, "Sacha Guitry and Modernity: New Ventures in Sound Cinema", unpublished MA dissertation, University of Warwick, 2005.
69. Guibbert, Oms, and Cadé, *CinémAction*, 75; my translation.
70. Rosenstone, "The Historical Film", 62.
71. 16mm print owned by the University of Warwick, Film & Television Department.
72. Susan White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls: Magisterial Vision and the Figure of Woman* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 110.
73. Though Litvak is generally considered (if at all) simply as a workmanlike director capable of adapting to a range of genres, and indeed national cinemas (like many more famous émigrés, this Russian-born director started at UFA, moved to France before working in Hollywood), his best film, *Coeur de Lilas* is said to have prefigured poetic realism (see Ginette Vincendeau, *Encyclopaedia of European Cinema* (London: BFI, 1995), 264). See also Dudley Andrew and Steven Ungar, *Popular Front Paris and the Poetics of Culture* (Cambridge,

Massachusetts: The Belknap Press, 2005), 136–138, for a short discussion of *Mayerling* as illustrating 1936 France's "popular culture of narcissism".

74. White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 110.
75. This term comes from Jon Beasley-Murray's discussion of the "Peronist Cinematic Imaginary" in *Posthegemony: Political Theory and Latin America*, 243–244. See also Susan White's discussion of the scene at the ball in which the Archduke and his wife "turned *the spectacle* of victimization to their own advantage" [emphasis added] (White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 124).
76. Susan White suggests that the editing and the mise-en-scène of the second half of the film were particularly compromised (White, *The Cinema of Max Ophuls*, 333n1), and the last 15 minutes do feel especially rushed and incongruous with much of what precedes. Despite this, the film did enjoy some success in the United States (ibid.), a market which the tacked-on propaganda of the final montage was clearly designed to address.
77. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, 177–178; see also Tim Bergfelder, Sue Harris, and Sarah Street, *Film Architecture and the Transnational Imagination: Set Design in 1930s European Cinema* (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2007).
78. Philip Kemp, sleeve notes to *La Kermesse héroïque* DVD, BFI Video Publishing, UK, 2004, ASIN: B0002B96JI.
79. Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, 179.
80. Ibid.
81. Ibid., 180.
82. Ibid., 180.
83. Quoted in Andrew, *Mists of Regret*, 180.
84. Andrew tells us Lubitsch sent his set designer to France to learn lightness from Meerson, a metaphoric but also a literal lightness—it was literal in Meerson's use of illuminating gas to give a veiled look to his sets (ibid., 188).
85. Ibid., 184.
86. François Vinneuil, Review of *Entente cordiale* (1937), in *Je Suis Partout*, 5/05/39 (BIFI press clippings).
87. François de la Bretèque, "Robin des Bois, ou comment une geste s'installe dans l'enfance", *Les Cahiers de la cinématheque. Revue d'histoire du cinéma*, 42/43 (été 1985): 72.
88. In fact many of the early Technicolor films were, not necessarily medieval in setting, but were often of "period" stories. For example, *The Black Pirate* (1926) was one of the earliest major two-strip Technicolor films, and the Thackeray adaptation *Becky Sharp* (1935), the first three-strip Technicolor feature (see Pam Cook and Mieke Bernink, eds., *The Cinema Book: 2nd Edition* (London: BFI Publishing, 1999), 49–51). Clearly the historical film or costume drama was well suited to the ostentatious visual qualities of Technicolor. Of course the other genre most famously allied to Technicolor is the musical.
89. Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment*, 242.
90. Ibid.
91. Neale, "*Triumph of the Will*", 85.
92. "Welcome to Sherwood: The Story of *The Adventures of Robin Hood*" on *The Adventures of Robin Hood* DVD, Warner Home Video, 2004, ASIN: B0000BK6OR.
93. Roddick, *A New Deal in Entertainment*, 244.

94. Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (London: Secker & Warburg, 1965), 265. Of course Marlene Dietrich, and her relationship with the director, also looms large in criticism on the film.
95. Despite Tom Gunning's suggestion that von Sternberg may "offer a challenge to the classical paradigm equal to Mizoguchi, whom [David Bordwell, Janet Staiger, and Kristin Thompson, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960*. London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1985] discuss in some detail" (Tom Gunning, Review of *CHC*, *Wide Angle*, 7:2/3 [double issue] (1985): 77), there is not the scope here to discuss the broader significance of the director in relationship to "classical Hollywood cinema". As we only consider classicism through the specific modes of the musical and the historical, one may limit oneself to the observations made by George Wilson about von Sternberg's "calculated playfulness concerning familiar standards of temporal and causal exposition" (Narrative and visual pleasures in *The Scarlet Empress*", in John Gibbs and Douglas Pye, eds., *Style and Meaning: Studies in the Detailed Analysis of Film* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), 56). Furthermore, Wilson's general discussion of the opacity of Dietrich's Catherine and the lack of clear individual psychology in all the characters suggests why von Sternberg is marginal to Bordwell's writing about "norms"—there are few references to the director in *Narration in the Fiction Film* (1985), the various editions of *Film Art: An Introduction* (with Thompson, 1979 onwards) and *The Classical Hollywood Cinema* (Bordwell et al., 1985). More generally, the "extreme stylization" of *The Scarlet Empress*, and the use of extremely crude models and painted backdrops force one to question the reality of what is seen in a very "un-classical" way (see Carole Zucker, *The Idea of the Image: Josef von Sternberg's Dietrich Films* (London: Associated University Presses, 1988), 70–71).
96. Rosenstone, "The Historical FilmHisH", 62.
97. Wilson, "Narrative and visual pleasures", 62.
98. Laura Mulvey, "Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema", in *The Sexual Subject: A Screen Reader in Sexuality*, ed., John Caughie and Annette Kuhn (London: Routledge, 1992), 29–30.
99. Wilson, "Narrative and visual pleasures", 63.
100. Ibid., 64.
101. Rosen , *Change Mummified*, 193.