

Institut for Informations- og Medievidenskab  
Aarhus Universitet

*final issue*

**p.o.v.**  
**A Danish Journal of Film Studies**

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The contents of this journal are indexed in the *MLA International Bibliography*, the *International Index of Film Periodicals* and *Dansk Artikelindeks*.

#### STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

*The principal purpose of p.o.v. is to provide a framework for collaborative publication for those of us who study and teach film at the Department of Information and Media Studies at Aarhus University. We will also invite contributions from colleagues in other departments and at other universities. Our emphasis is on collaborative projects, enabling us to combine our efforts, each bringing his or her own point of view to bear on a given film or genre or theoretical problem. Consequently, the reader will find in each issue a variety of approaches to the film or question at hand – approaches which complete rather than compete with one another.*

*March issues of p.o.v. are devoted to the short film. And as of December 2007, all issues of p.o.v. are anonymously peer-reviewed.*

*This is the final issue of p.o.v. for reasons explained on p. 5.*



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**Number 28, December 2009**

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## THIS IS THE FINAL ISSUE OF P.O.V.

Editing this journal biannually since its inception in March 1996 has been a source of great satisfaction to me and closing it now, nearly 14 years and 28 issues later, is not an easy step to take. But I have been asked by Intellect Books in the U.K. to design and edit a new journal on the short film, and this new challenge was simply too exciting an opportunity to miss.

The new journal will be called *Short Film Studies*, and the first issue should be in print approximately one year from now. It will devote serious but lively attention to the short film and also to exemplary commercials and public service ads. My hope is that many readers of *p.o.v.* will find in *Short Film Studies* essentially the same spirit as the March issues of *p.o.v.* and will look upon the new journal as the continuation of the old one. Meanwhile, all articles will remain accessible on the *p.o.v.* website.

There are many colleagues I wish to thank:

Annette Hoffbeck for printing *p.o.v.*

Jorge Leitao for designing and managing the web edition

Jakob Elias Nielsen for the new cover design, adopted in 2002.

Mette Hjort, Henrik Juel, Mark LeFanu, Bevin Yeatman, Gerry McCulloch, Johannes Riis and Frands Mortensen, for serving as referees since peer review began in 2007.

Steffen Brandorff, Chairman of the Department of Information and Media Studies, for taking over from the Aarhus University Research Foundation the funding of *p.o.v.* since 2007.

Stacey Cozart and Marilyn Raskin for proofreading.

And last but not least, Simon Andersen for updating the website and keeping it in good repair.

Finally I wish to thank those readers who have faithfully read and the many excellent articles that have appeared in this journal.

Richard Raskin, editor



## CANADIAN JOURNAL OF FILM STUDIES

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Scholarly articles in English and French on theory, history and criticism of film and television; book reviews; rare and archival research documents.

We are pleased to announce that the journal is now being edited by Catherine Russell and Charles Acland at Concordia University. Submissions are welcome at [cjfsedit@filmstudies.ca](mailto:cjfsedit@filmstudies.ca).

#### VOLUME 18 NO. 1 SPRING • PRINTEMPS 2009

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#### **Contemporary Japanese Cinema in Transition**

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Daisuke Miyao on the doppelgänger in  
Kitano Takeshi's *Takeshis'*

Aaron Gerow on Miike Takashi's stylistic rootlessness

William Gardner on anime's cyber sublime

Book Reviews by William C. Wees, Julianne Pidduck,  
Joan Nicks, Aaron Taylor, Murray Leeder

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## An interview with Nils Malmros

Jeppe Knudsen

Nils Malmros (born 1944) has won numerous prizes for his largely autobiographical feature films, portraying childhood and teenage dramas with unparalleled depth. Malmros taught himself filmmaking and is also educated as a surgeon.



### Filmography

1968 – En mærkelig kærlighed (A Strange Love)  
1973 – Lars Ole 5.C (Lars Ole Fifth Grade)  
1977 – Drengene (Boys)  
1981 – Kundskabens Træ (The Tree of Knowledge)  
1983 – Skønheden og udyret (The Beauty and the Beast)  
1989 – Århus by Night  
1992 – Kærlighedens smerte (The Pain of Love)  
1997 – Barbara  
2002 – At kende sandheden (Facing the Truth)  
2009 – Kærestesorger (Aching Hearts)

### Truffaut as an inspiration

*I've read that you made your own version of Truffaut's Jules et Jim [1962] and that Jules et Jim later inspired your own films. What was it in this film that inspired you so deeply?*

It was a very emotional film. It connected with my own insecurity about love. The expectation of everything that was about to happen combined with a sense of resignation – that was the dual emotion *Jules et Jim* left in me.

It was the film that started it all. It's the one I still refer to. Every time I make a film it's another attempt to make my own version of the film. This is also the case with latest film *Kærestesorger* [2008]. Although *Jules et Jim* is special in the sense that it's about two friends who – despite their rivalry in a love triangle – remain friends. That's not the case in *Kærestesorger*, in which the two main male characters are very much rivals. And it's the same in *Barbara* [1997].

*Truffaut was part of the nouvelle vague but he made the most conventional films compared to Godard and Orph  s. What is it in Truffaut's work that appeals to you so much?*

His first films were the most emotional ones and it's those I'm mostly affected by. They weren't as conventional as his later films like *Le dernier metro* [1980] or *La chambre verte* [1978]. The substance of these later films was very special. *La chambre verte* is about Truffaut's fascination with dead people. Not with death, but with the notion that life has ended.

*What is it in Truffaut's films that fascinates you?*

That he is so fiercely suggestive. You become chloroformed by the mood. It's something he does particularly on the soundtrack. *Jules et Jim* is very much carried by Georges Delerues' music. I'm also fascinated by the great feelings which his films ironically dissociate themselves from. He makes definite *verfremdungs*-effects but it just become more seductive in a strange way.

*What distinguishes Truffaut from Godard, Rohmer and the others?*

Godard is wildly experimental – especially in his first feature *A bout de souffle* [1960]. He experiments with the very form of the film; he cuts in the middle of a plot, he suddenly cuts music off, he turns toward the camera and he is full of *verfremdung*. Godard's films became obsolete long ago, while Truffaut's films are still moving.

*Are there elements in the nouvelle vague which have inspired you in your own films? And if so, which elements?*

It's primarily the auteur-theory – to write and direct my own films. Therefore there is a short distance from vision to completed film. A single film is not a film alone – it's a part of an oeuvre. I can't just make a mainstream blockbuster – it would disturb the oeuvre. Some perhaps think that *Barbara* ruins the oeuvre, but in the same way that *Jules et Jim* was my awakening to the film medium.

*Barbara* was the first real novel I read and it had largely the same influence on me. I've said that I would never do a screen version of a book, but if it had to happen then it had to be *Barbara*. That was the result of Truffaut's and the auteur-theory's influence on me.

*Does Truffaut, in your opinion, make use of good-guy and bad-guy characters?*

Now when I wonder if there are more films that I have to make and what it takes to make a film, I am shocked when I discover that a lot of films can't be made without a bad-guy. An example is *Mænd der hader kvinder* [2009]; if it weren't for the exceptionally brutal mass-murderer, there would be no film. And that is after all worrying. So I have to think to myself: what about my own films? In *Kundskabens Træ* [1981] the bad-guy is clearly Helge who orchestrates the persecution of Elin. The bad-guy reappears in *Kærestesorger* in the shape of Toke, and although he isn't malicious in the same way as Helge, they are nevertheless modeled on the same person. He is the bad-guy because he is the rival. And the rival is always the bad-guy.

*So to you it's a necessity to have a bad-guy in a film in order to achieve suspense or propulsion?*

Yes, in a way. In *At kende sandheden* [2002] there is a bad-guy in the form of an evil will – the press personified in the journalist. I have a bad-guy here, but the bad-guy isn't the precondition for telling the story of the dilemma involved in using the medical substance Thorotrast. The dilemma does not necessarily involve a bad-guy.

*How do you think Truffaut would relate to the good-guy and the bad-guy in his films?*

In *Jules et Jim* there is no bad-guy. The film is about the fact that their friendship survives the ménage-à-trois. In other Truffaut films, *Tirez sur le pianiste* [1960] for example, there are some gangsters but they're very sympathetic and funny. In his debut *Les quatre cents coups* [1959] there is a teacher who hits the children, but he's comical. I don't think that there are any real bad-guys in Truffaut's films.

## **The essence of good and evil**

*What is evil to you?*

Evil is first of all to be selfish. But evil is more than that. Evil is also the desire to hurt others. And we all have malice in us. We all have a little sadist in us – more or less repressed. The point in *Kundskabens Træ* is among other things that the pupils suddenly become aware of their own malice. They become aware that the way they're treating Elin is cruel.

*In film, and especially in American film, evil is something ultimate – the struggle between good and evil in Star Wars or the viciousness that makes Hannibal Lecter so scary.*

Yes, and a contemporary example would be *Changeling* [2008]. The precondition for that story is a man who enjoys killing children. America is such a vast country – so these people exist over there. But in Scandinavia, like in *Mænd der hader kvinder*, it's hard to accept the existence of a serial killer. I don't know of any Scandinavian serial killers.

*Your films are quite different from those which relate to good and evil in a categorical way.*

I don't know about that. *Kundskabens Træ* portrays categorical evil. It's categorical malice that is done to Elin.

*Okay. Your films are about everyday life. Could you say that they treat the malice of everyday life?*

Yes, you could say that.

*What is goodness to you?*

"Goodness is altruism," to quote my latest film. It's unselfish; doing something to please others and not just to please yourself through the pleasing of others. That's the hard thing to do, right? I do a lot of things to please others, but I can't help getting pleasure by doing it.

*In American films we often see a typical arch hero who is completely sympathetic and with whom we can identify. In your films there are no clear heroes because it's the people of everyday life that you portray. How do you relate to heroes in films, and do you get inspired to use some of these character traits in your own films?*

I would rather find the everyday hero. To overcome oneself is a far greater feat than to free the princess. It's these kinds of heroes I would like to find. Heroes within the horizon of everyday life. But I don't know if I have of these in my films. In the real story behind *Kundskabens Træ* I did some heroic deeds to help Elin, but they're not in the film. For example I always danced a duty dance with her.

*Which films depict goodness and evil in a realistic and credible way to you?*



It's not exactly an answer to your question, but the film *Closely Watched Trains / Ostre sledované vlaky* [1966] has a very fine moral. It's about a little wimp during the German occupation of Czechoslovakia. Thankfully someone takes care of him and he can become a man. And when he becomes a man he's ready to be a part of the resistance - so he blows up a railroad train. The moral is that you have to be something to yourself in order to be anything to others.

*Can you see any qualities in a stereotypical depiction of evil? Does it mean anything to us today?*

The exciting film is one where evil is being practiced not because people are evil but because of misunderstandings. That's the good film. *One Flew over the Cuckoo's Nest* for example where the head nurse is a true witch, but in her scheme of things she's doing the right thing. She believes that it's the correct the way to treat confused patients. And it's the same with religious moralism. Today's terrorists force their beliefs upon others - that is evil, but I don't think the Taleban look upon themselves as evil people. On the contrary - they see themselves as good people. You can easily find films where the bad-guys don't consider themselves as bad-guys. And it's exciting to look upon oneself and ask: "When do I do evil things in the belief that I am doing good?"

*What is the use of depicting goodness and evil to us as humans?*

We can use it to look upon ourselves. The moment we meet the evil of the big world in some way, we must react and respond. We must not allow anyone to terrorize us.

### **Good guy and bad guy in Malmros' films**

*What character traits does the good guy typically have in your films?*

The interesting thing about my films, and that may be what bothers some people about them, is that I actually don't portray any good characters. Instead I make fickle characters.

*The contrast between good guy and bad guy usually has the function of driving the action forward; the good guy fighting the bad guy; the innocent in contrast to the calculating cynic. Do you use any of these contrasts in order to drive the story forward in your films? How do you consider this contrasting relationship?*

I've thought about it and in relation to my own filmmaking I wonder what contemporary drama I would feel was relevant to depict. It's more as a phenomenon that I look around for the contrasts. I experience how lots and lots of stories couldn't exist if the postulate good guy versus bad guy wasn't made.

### **Love and evil**

*Jules et Jim is a menage à trois. It's about two friends and their love for the same girl. A ménage à trois appears in several of your own films, for example in your latest film Kærestesorger in the relationship between Jonas, Agnete and Toke.*

The difference between *Kærestesorger* and *Jules et Jim* is that in my film the two suitors are no longer friends after their fight for the girl.

*Why did you choose to build your story on such a drama?*

It's because I search my own life and memories for stories and use the ones I find as the fuel for my films. It's not that I wanted to find a ménage à trois, but one was there and I thought: "let me use it".

*Nearly all your films have love as their theme – in one way or another.*

Truffaut says: "If nine out of ten films are about love, it's one film short."

*In Kærestesorger Toke is depicted, if not as evil then highly disagreeable. How do you use his unpleasantness in the story?*

He is the rival. The scene where Toke sits with his sunglasses on would have been funny if he wasn't the rival. Then you might have thought: "Ha, he's teasing the French teacher." But as he is the rival the sunglasses become an expression of his arrogance. It's the jealousy that makes us see Toke through certain glasses.

### **Evil in the classroom**

*Evil can manifest itself as bullying. In Kunstskabens Træ you depict a school class in which bullying and victimization are part of everyday life. What are your thoughts about depicting the bullying and some of the pupils*

*as bad guys? Later in the film you actually sympathize with some of them. What's behind this choice?*

There is a bad main character who says TRL [translated from the Danish as Transportable Travel Hooker]. But there is also an evil class that suppresses its conscience and engages in malicious behavior. And of course there is a dynamic in the fact that it's the rejected small boys who start the bullying; Jørn apparently but also the other guys. And the girls are jealous of Elin. But there's also something about Elin – about her very being.

*You could say that the whole class is the bad guy in Kundskabens Træ?*

Yes. The tragedy is that when the class realizes its own malice and tries to save what can be saved, the tragedy becomes even more extreme.

*And Elin is in no way a good guy?*

No. She's just a victim. Elin took part in bullying Mona at the start of the film. So she's not at all a good guy.

*I presume that a class has always got some bullies. How did you depict those?*

The interesting about *Kundskabens Træ* is that it takes place in Århus Cathedral School – a very bourgeois environment. And it would be compromising if anyone was a bully in the traditional sense. It was more in a psychological sense that the children were bullies. No one hit or tripped anyone.

*What can say you about the good-bad dynamic that rules in a school class – is it always there?*

Yes. It's there until the pupils have eaten of the Tree of Knowledge. Until they have realized what evil is. Until they have recognized their own evil.

April, 2009

## An interview with David von Ancken

Martin Møller Aamand

David Von Ancken (b. 1964) has been directing film and television for twelve years. In 1997 his first short *Box Suite* won awards at three film festivals including the International Surrealist Film Festival. In 2000 he made *Bullet in the Brain* which was screened at twenty festivals and won best short film in five of them. Over the last seven years he has directed over twenty-five one-hour dramas for network and cable TV in the U.S. These shows include: *Oz*, *The Shield*, *Without a Trace*, *Cold Case*, *Californication*, *CSI:NY*, *Gossip Girl* and *Saving Grace* among others. In 2005-6 he wrote and directed a western called *Seraphim Falls* which starred Liam Neeson and Pierce Brosnan. He is currently developing two feature films and a television series.



### Filmography (as director)

*Box Suite*, 1997

*Bullet in the Brain*, 2001

*Seraphim Falls*, 2006

*The Equalizer*, 2009

plus numerous episodes of TV series listed above.

*Is the good guy/bad guy construct applicable to any of your storytelling?*

In *Seraphim Falls* (2006) there is, on the face of it, a good guy/bad guy relationship between Pierce Brosnan's and Liam Neeson's characters. And you think one guy is the bad guy to start with, because he's shooting another guy. He hits him and tries to kill him, and I think somewhere along the line it switches. There's a reversal that makes us start to feel that maybe the bad guy is not so bad. In that way that film has that current running through it.

*Do you think there's any necessary relationship between good guys and bad guys?*

I think really in any story, if you don't have a push and a pull, not even necessarily with a good guy-bad guy on its face, if you don't really have dramatic tension ... On some level, not one guy beating

another guy up, or trying to kill another guy. It's not that simple. But if there's a good guy/bad guy relationship in nearly anything – and it doesn't have to be of course just guys – you know, it's a psychological relationship, a one up/one down relationship. So the one up is the person whose will is being exerted over the one down. And in nearly any good dramatic situation, you will find that. You can call that good guy/bad guy, whatever.

*If you structure a story around a good guy/bad guy polarity, do you see any risks you need to be aware of? Are there any traps in doing that?*

I think if you do it too clearly sometimes. I think most big Hollywood movies and many genre movies, they have very, very clear definitions of that. So is there a risk? Yeah, the risk is subtlety, you lose it.

*So it becomes too clear?*

On some level. Some movies need it clearer, and some stories maybe are asking for a more subtle explanation of things.

*Do you think it would make any sense to distinguish between stories that have good guy/bad guy characters and those that don't?*

No. Simple answer.

*Why not?*

You know, because when you start to label things, you ruin the reason for exploring things, especially emotional beats. You start to label them upfront, rather than letting them come toward you. I find it just flattens out, it loses its reason for being interesting.

*What do you see as the best and worst ways to identify a given character as either the good guy or the bad guy?*

Best ways, hmm. Not through physical behaviour, but through sort of secondary intent, because you can very easily identify someone as good or bad if they're antagonistic or they're brutal or they're big, whatever. But it's always more interesting to get if you went to explore this middle label like that to see the underlying, ulterior motive of a character. So I guess I'm saying, I don't like to go in with labels upfront. If they come as a process, as a result of the exploration of a story, great. If they don't, that's okay too. You know, it's not something that you set up in front of a story. Like I said, in any good

dramatic arc, there's going to be this inherent relationship of a good guy and a bad guy.

*What do you see as the most interesting good guy and bad guy? Do you have any favourites in other films or your own films?*

I don't like to label them too much, because if you see it, you start to lose, you don't pay enough attention to other things that could be more interesting, more important. So if you start to see the good guy and the bad guy upfront as an audience, or even as a writer, I think you're being too obvious. You know, let it come as a result. Recognise that the relationship will be an antagonist and a protagonist of most stories. And it's not necessarily physical, it could be an emotional good guy/bad guy, or mental good guy/bad guy. But to come out with that too much upfront, I think is dangerous.

*If you see a good guy in a movie, what kind of qualities does that person have to have?*

If you're asking, what are the interesting parts of a character, to me it's always the unexpected. Where is your twist? Where is your reversal? Where's something that comes from your action unexpectedly? Because most of the time you go see a movie for some level of entertainment, so entertainment to me can incorporate learning, or it can incorporate very little learning sometimes. And both of those are valid. But if you don't have characters that have surprises, or at the very least quirks or interesting things that you don't see every day in your life, then you have something that's somewhat boring, and that's inexcusable. You know, that's just no reason to start shooting or force someone to watch some crap that you feel is important if it's not interesting in terms of the character having traits that are new, and from those traits you can say, "Well, I know this person better" or "I've seen that in myself" or something like that.

*Would you advise student filmmakers to go for a good guy/bad guy relationship in storytelling?*

No. I would advise you to find a story that means something to you on some simple level. Don't put the artificial constructs in front of your search for something to talk about. If you want to talk about *noir*, there'll be a very physical good guy/bad guy. If you want to talk about family relationships, there's always a one up/one down, in any family relationship. I'll leave it to you to figure it out, but someone very famous said, "All happy families are the same. All unhappy

families are different in their own way" – and that's a paraphrase. But it points you in the direction of something that's going to be interesting. If you paint a story on any level that's kind of normal, I guess you could just read the newspaper and be happy. It's got to be something that's interesting. So I would say, don't put any sort of construct in front of a search for a topic. Go do something that doesn't have anything to do with searching for a topic. Read a book, go to an art museum, talk with a friend, walk down the street. Don't look for it; it will find you. If it doesn't find you on some level, then you've got to do something else with your life.

*Is there anything else you'd like to say about good guys and bad guys?*

I like to talk about westerns and good guys, like Butch Cassidy. These guys are bankrobbers, but they're still good guys. They kill people and kind of have their own rules of law that make sense to you and the audience. They're honest with each other. They've loved the same woman. They're decent people except for the fact that they put guns in people's faces and steal their money. The bad guy in that movie is never seen up-close. He's called The Forge, the man in the white hat, and he's chasing them down, but he never really gets so close to getting them, though in the end he does kill them. And he's the bad guy that wins. So that's a more subtle example of a good guy/bad guy, but it's definitely there, even though that movie is not a good guy/bad guy movie at all, it's a Buddy movie. But inside of it, there's a good guy/bad guy relationship. Because somewhere if you've got to have drama, you've got to have that rub, that friction. A lot of stories are written like explanations of characters, and many of those stories are not going to be something that you want to make a movie out of. You go to Halloween or Friday the 13th, well, they're very obvious bad guys – he's trying to chop your head off with an axe or put a spear through you and your girlfriend's chests when you're sleeping. That's a pretty obvious bad guy. But are the other people good guys? No, they're just trying to survive and that makes them good guys. That's in the opposite end of the spectrum compared to something like Butch Cassidy.

March 2009

## An interview with Philippe Lesage

Ina Fischlin

Philippe Lesage (b. 1973) is a Canadian filmmaker from Montreal who now lives in Copenhagen. A graduate of McGill University in literature and of the European Film College, he has directed two feature-length documentaries, one set in the fringes of Paris and the other one in the poor outskirts of Beijing. He is currently working on a third film, *Hotel-Dieu*, about the relationship between patients and doctors in the oldest hospital of Montreal, and is also preparing his first feature film. In 2008-2009, he returned to European Film College to teach documentary filmmaking.



### Filmography

2005: *Les cordes raides ont-elles au bout des coeurs pour se détendre?*

2006: *Can We Live Together?*

2009: *How Can You Tell If the Little Fish Are Happy?*

2009: *Hotel-Dieu* [in pre-production]

*How do you view the relation of the good guy / bad guy construct to our reality?*

That's the thing. In reality people are multidimensional, they're complex. We all have to fight and struggle within ourselves, with our good sides and bad sides. Taking it even further, "good" and "bad" are notions and talking about those sides is dependent on how we define them. This ends up in a question of values. What is good for one person can be bad for another and the other way around. As Spinoza, the philosopher, said "What is good for you is what is actually going in the direction of your own needs and desires. And what is bad is what is putting an obstacle in front of your desires and needs".

In terms of filmmaking there exists a huge stream in the cinema, mainly the American cinema at the beginning, but now everywhere, where the spectator is forced to act as a judge. A judge who has to separate the good guys from the bad guys. Normally it's even obvious who's "good" and who's "bad". For us as a spectator this is a limitation of what we could get out of the film. As humans we are unable to relate to these archetype characters because they come as a concept. In reality we are dealing with complexities and in that kind of cinema



there is no place for multidimensional characters. Sometimes they play with characters that have two faces. Such that there exists a struggle between a good and a bad side within a character. But often this is stereotyped as well. In reality the distinction between good and bad is not at all this clear. We all have different backgrounds and many layers of good sides and bad sides. Take monsters in the real world and dig beneath the surface. You can discover that they actually have reasons that explain their behavior. The French director Jean Renoir said: "What is terrible on earth is that everybody has their reasons". It's not as simple as we think it is. I'm not satisfied as a spectator, as a creative spectator when I'm in a position where I feel I have to be a judge. I cannot really relate anything from the reality to that fictional concept so therefore it narrows my personal experience with the film.

*Would you say that this discussed construct is more destructive for storytelling or can it help to construct the story?*

If you go to conventional storytelling there will always be the kind of films that use that construct. In most of these films you are being manipulated. Normally when you have to separate the good from the bad you are also being told when to feel sad, pain or fear by different means of manipulation, for example music. You are being taken by the hand. And I don't think it's going to disappear because this way of storytelling has been present for so long. Even though I believe that the new generation, who was brought up into this multimedia sphere, is less naive. My students for example are in that generation. We can't cheat them as much and tell them lies. I noticed that they realize it very quickly when it's too obvious and when the storytelling is falling into clichés.

Preferably I would like us to write stories in films that are – it's not about being complicated – but it's about having human beings that we can believe in. Because I believe that the difference between a good film and a bad film is as simple as whether it is believable or not. If you are following these archetype structures you have to add layers of dimensions in the characters and make them more human, in order to be more credible. Especially since we are less naive nowadays. You can notice some change in that direction in some American films. There have come up a lot of mainstream action films where you have characters that are maybe not that multidimensional, but at least they have these struggles inside of them between good and evil – that I mentioned earlier. You can see that in the new generation of Batman films for example. But still it's not sufficient enough for me to take them as real humans that I can relate to. It's too artificial when it's too

obvious. If you can relate to them you get a possibility to discover things about yourself and your own life.

And to come back to your original question, one way of using the good guy / bad guy idea in a constructive way would be to force the stereotype into two hundred percent. David Lynch does that for example. He uses these archetypes, but they're pushed into an extreme cliché. And the extreme cliché becomes interesting. The bad guys have this kind of irony and the story gets very close to satire. In a satire of course the author makes fun of the clichés by using them. So he's aware of using them and turns them into something else.

*I want to know a bit more about what you said concerning this new generation that is harder to fool and the change in mainstream action films. Do you think we will continue to move away from the clear distinction between good guy and bad guy?*

I hope so. I believe that we cannot not continue because of what I said earlier about how it's becoming a lot more difficult to cheat. I think it's the fact that the information is so widely spread. If something is false you can easily find a counterpoint to it somewhere, somebody or something is removing the mask from something else.

But yes, I hope that the new generation or we - I'm including myself in that generation - can get a bit more away from these old archetypes. And I think it's on a good way. I like this lack of naivety and I think it's a very healthy thing.

*You said earlier it's very common, especially in American films, to have this obvious good guy and bad guy. Why do you think this is done so often? What could the attraction be?*

I think for creating entertainment it's an efficient recipe. Because it requires less intellectual effort and no moral cost. Everything is given, you get no more than what you see, you don't have to ask yourself too many questions. You don't have to be confronted too much with aspects of reality that are annoying. And a lot of people are not interested in seeing and accepting reality as it is. So they don't want to go see a film after work that will tell them to see and accept reality as it is. As a form of entertainment consumption, primary entertainment, it's probably efficient, it always is. Maybe I hope that even in that kind of film the good guys and the bad guys will become more than that. If you are a lazy spectator and you don't want to get involved in a film, it's much easier when you only have to ask yourself what is going to happen and see films that are based on these false climaxes and guessing games. And you can play judge about "oh my god, he's so

evil" and "this person is so good" and "I hope that this good person will win over the evil person." So it plays with archetypes that you don't have to think too much about and it doesn't involve you.

*Would you say then that those films are made for the audience, rather than for the filmmaker to tell a story or convey a message?*

I don't think the filmmaker has bad intentions. But I think that he's excited that he's able to keep the viewers seated while they watch the film. He knows it's working and why should you change the recipe? Why make films where half audience wants to leave before the end because you're asking for too much personal involvement or you're showing them a reality that they don't want to see or even very few are able to see? If you start making films and you find yourself to be a good manipulator and have success, it's probably difficult to try to do something else. You know you're able to keep your spectators seated. I wish more of them would take the risk of breaking down that recipe. More directors like Gus Van Sant for instance who came up with *Gerry*, *Elephant*, *Last Days* and *Paranoid Part* after he did a sterile but successful film like *Good Will Hunting*.

*What if you have a story that doesn't use the concept we have been discussing? Where do you think the conflict is present in the story, if there is any conflict at all?*

There are many examples but take Bergman or John Cassavetes films. The conflict lies in the inner life of the characters. Their inner problems constitute the main material of the film. So there is not one conflict-thing, but it's a multiplication of conflicts. I like to talk about the inner tension of characters as the driving force within the story. Instead of having some external conflict that drives the characters. It gives much more accuracy and truthfulness to what they experience when the main conflict lies in their souls and in their inner personalities. That's when I can start to be personally involved with the film and become a creative viewer by starting to think about my own inner conflicts.

May 2009

## **Moral Twists of Perversion – Emotional Engagement and Morality in Relation to Pedro Almodovar's *Talk to Her* (2002)**

Birger Langkjær

Melodrama has often been considered a genre concerned with moral issues. The films of Pedro Almodovar are no exception. Some of his more intriguing films transcend common standards of morality but nevertheless become moral stories anyway. *Talk to Her* is both art cinema and melodrama. As with most of Almodovar's films, *Talk to Her* combines mainstream narration with excessive twists, especially in its orchestration of extreme dramatic characters. Thus, our emotional engagement and positive attitude towards central characters are established despite the fact that one of the characters acts in ways that cannot be defended by common moral standards.

To explain this, I will examine to what extent – and in which ways – questions of emotion and morality are interconnected. To what extent does the way we care for characters involve moral standards? The example I will use here is the character Benigno in *Talk to Her*, a less than bright rapist who nevertheless appears similar to many protagonists of melodrama, that is, as a virtuous character in distress who calls for both admiration and pity. Benigno is a character towards whom we can have no empathy in the sense of feeling *like* him, as his character is too strange for that. But the film provides us with plenty of opportunities to sympathise with him **DESPITE** his immoral acts. Even though we know that Benigno's acts are beyond what can be morally justified, the story nevertheless implies another viewpoint that in certain ways aligns us with Benigno.

What interests me here is exactly to what extent and in what sense questions of empathy and morality are related – if related at all. Is it possible not only to relate to but also to sympathise with or even to empathise or identify with someone who is doing not only wrong things but *seriously* bad things? Is it possible that we can forgive the fact that someone has raped another person? Is it even possible that we can somehow feel it was the right thing to do? In some sense this is what *Talk to Her* seems to imply.

### Identification and morality

In a well-known passage in *The Republic*, Plato warns the reader about the emotional impact of art. He claims that dramatic poetry “has a terrible power to corrupt even the best characters, with very few exceptions.”<sup>1</sup> The kinds of corruption Plato refers to are not only the emotional powers of dramatic poetry as such, but also the way it makes us experience those kinds of emotions that we would normally consider wrong:

[...] the poet gratifies and indulges the instinctive desires of a part of us, which we forcibly restrain in our private misfortunes.<sup>2</sup>

According to Plato, there is a conflict between what is considered to be morally right and the kind of emotions implied by the process of identifying with the misfortunes of the characters in the fiction. Apart from Plato’s specific ideas about right and wrong, rationality and emotion, and society and art, his focus is on how art and fiction may suspend our everyday moral standards. Stories may make us admire “a man we should ourselves be ashamed to resemble.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Plato: *The Republic* (Middlesex: Penguin Books, 1955; reprint 1983), 436.

<sup>2</sup> Plato: 436.

<sup>3</sup> Plato: 436.

Recently, cognitive theory has provided a more balanced view on the relation between cognition and emotion. In a sense, there is no cognition without emotion and vice versa.<sup>4</sup> But in the area of film studies, some cognitive film theories seem to imply a strong connection, not only between cognition and emotion, but also between emotion and morality. Thus, Noël Carroll defines suspense in the following manner:

Suspense is an emotion, one that in fictions generally involves an event where some outcome which we regard to be morally righteous is improbable.<sup>5</sup>

Carroll, however, does leave it unclear whether “morally righteous” is only an effect of how the narrative is structured or whether it also involves our everyday moral standards.

In an article on what he terms “perverse allegiances”, in reference to films like *A Clockwork Orange*, *Silence of the Lambs* and *Pulp Fiction*, Murray Smith discusses to what extent an audience can be said to identify emotionally with psychopaths, serial killers and gangsters. Identifying emotionally with a character is basically what he refers to by the concept of allegiance. He says:

Allegiance refers to the way in which, and the degree to which, a film elicits responses of sympathy and antipathy toward its characters, responses triggered – if not wholly determined – by the moral structure of the film.<sup>6</sup>

Thus, he establishes a strong and causal bond between morality and identification in which one determines the other. Even though he does not say that our emotions are triggered by morality *as such*, but by the moral *structure* of the film, he nevertheless later on characterises those

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<sup>4</sup> Ronald de Sousa: *The Rationality of Emotions* (Cambridge, Mass., 1987).

<sup>5</sup> Noël Carroll: *A Philosophy of Mass Art* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), 263.

<sup>6</sup> Murray Smith: “Gangsters, Cannibals, Aesthetes, or Apparently Perverse Allegiances”, *Passionate Views. Film, Cognition, and Emotion*, ed. Carl Plantinga and Greg M. Smith (London: The John Hopkins University Press, 1999), 220.

films as being “mildly subversive of moral norms,”<sup>7</sup> that is, norms and morality in general.

It should be obvious that films not only *can* but actually *do* shape our emotional responses by different narrative techniques. They can emphasise some good character traits while they suppress others, including less flattering qualities; they can withhold information that would be devastating to our sympathy, and they can make some characters less bad than others, that is, relatively good. But even though film structure can *modify* our moral evaluation of a character by underemphasising that which would trigger negative reactions and overemphasising that which would trigger positive reactions, it remains to be clarified whether emotional responses are wholly triggered by morality.

Smith argues that if we watch morally “perverse movies” and take pleasure in them, it can be for one of two reasons. Either we know it is an act of transgression towards moral norms and we enjoy this transgression in and of itself, thereby making ourselves culturally distinguished from those who can not do that, or we are – in a clinical sense – simply perverse.<sup>8</sup> But it seems to me that the kind of engagement offered by a film such as *Talk to Her* can neither be described in terms of second-order pleasure, nor as simple perversion. To argue for this, we need to take a closer look at *Talk to Her*.

### *Talk to Her*

*Talk to Her* has two male characters at its centre: the journalist and travelling author, Marco, and the nurse, Benigno. As the film opens, they are sitting next to each other watching a dance performance, but do not know each other. Later, Marco’s girlfriend, the bullfighter

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<sup>7</sup> Smith: 228.

<sup>8</sup> Smith: 219-23.

Lydia, is injured by a bull. In a state of coma, she is brought to a hospital where Benigno works as a nurse. His major job is to take care of Alicia, a dancer who, like Lydia, is in a coma after a car accident. Thus, the film establishes a parallel protagonist structure as the two men both devote themselves to nursing brain damaged and comatose women. The film is very much the story of their strange friendship and – with Marco as the mediator – the slow uncovering of Benigno's disturbing obsession with his patient, with whom he is actually in love. Whereas Lydia dies, it turns out that Alicia is pregnant and Benigno has raped her. In prison, Benigno is never told that she miraculously recovered after giving birth to a dead child and at some point he takes his own life. As Benigno explains in his suicide note, he wants to die in order to be with Alicia again.

Despite the disturbing uncovering of Benigno's twisted character, the film also provides him with credibility and trustworthiness in several ways. In one of the opening scenes, Alicia's father – who is a psychiatrist – asks Benigno about his sexual orientation. Benigno's answer is that he probably has a sexual preference for men. But in the very next scene, Benigno tells his colleague that he lied to the father because the lie was what the father wanted to know. Benigno's lying to someone front stage and acknowledging it to another backstage actually creates consistency in his character and builds up his credibility in relation to the film audience.<sup>9</sup> Benigno also tells Marco that Marco has to talk to Lydia the way he, Benigno, talks to Alicia. In the end, Lydia dies and Alicia not only survives but also recovers. The film asks us to accept the sincerity and meaningfulness of Benigno's dedication and, further, the narrative seems to suggest that Benigno was somehow right in his obsessive ideas.



The nature of Benigno's sexuality is discussed several times in the film. The psychiatrist – Alicia's father – asks him twice whether he is attracted to men or to women and several of his colleagues consider him gay. But Benigno seems to be closer to the truth himself: he is neither. He is a man without sexual orientation, without sexuality. In the beginning his love is purely romantic. But halfway through the film, as he is about to give Alicia an oil massage, he suddenly hesitates and says: "No. There is something wrong." Now he obviously feels strangely uneasy about the intimacy and Alicia's naked body, which previously in the film has been aestheticized and thereby de-sexualised. In confusion, he places himself in an armchair and begins to explain to Alicia – who is still in a coma at that point – that yesterday he saw a film that "made me a little uneasy." In a subjective flashback, in which we hear Benigno as narrating voice, we see him in front of the cinema with a poster for the film *The Shrinking Lover*. The film is an erotic melodrama in which a scientist named Alfredo becomes a victim of one of his own inventions: a mixture that makes him shrink. Alfredo's female co-worker, Amparo, is driven to tears by the sight of her diminished lover. Then Alfredo departs, planning to live with his mother, whom he has not seen for ten years. But Amparo finds her little Alfredo, and they stay together in a hotel. At the end of the movie, Alfredo crawls across Amparo's naked breasts and stomach, which appear oversized, like a bodily landscape, and jumps between her legs. Finally, he crawls into her vagina as Amparo opens her mouth and, blissfully, turns her head on the pillow. Benigno ends his recounting by saying: "And Alfredo stayed in her forever".

In and of itself, the dwarfed lover can be seen in parallel to how both Benigno and Marco admire the two women, both in states of

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<sup>9</sup> Erving Goffman has extensively described how people act differently in front- and backstage

coma and therefore unreachable. Further, this bizarre action is inter-cut with close-ups of Alicia's face as Benigno gives her a body massage. Thus, the eroticism of both the silent film and Benigno's massage are made clear to the film audience. But it is obvious that Benigno does not understand what is happening to himself. As it later becomes clear, the erotic film melodrama turns him from a passionate romanticist into a sexual being and, finally, a rapist.

In most films this would probably be the end of any sympathy towards such a character. But in *Talk to Her* it is different for several reasons. At one point, Benigno tells Marco that he is in love with Alicia and that he wants to marry her. These are obviously signs that Benigno is somehow mentally disturbed, but they also give his obsession with Alicia an air of sincerity. Second, Benigno's sexuality is a surprise to him and not something he recklessly pursues throughout the film. Thus, his act appears as non-intended or innocent. Third, his actions actually have some good outcome: the birth makes Alicia wake up from her coma and thus Benigno has created the miracle that medical science had refused, but Benigno himself has believed in. And, fourth, Benigno's suicide at the end of the film confirms his sincerity in a melodramatic way, as his commitment to love makes him choose death.

### **Emotions and morality**

Even though not all members of the audience will accept the film's premise, many will probably do so. One reason, I believe, is that morality and emotion are not necessarily *causally* connected. If someone kills another we will immediately feel sorrow for the person killed. We consider him to be a victim. But if the killer is a father and the person killed has previously killed his daughter, we might still

consider the killing a wrong thing, but we nevertheless understand why the father kills his daughter's murderer. We may even feel that we would do it ourselves if we were in that very situation.

My point is that we can indeed have a so-called perverse allegiance without being perverse. In the example about revenge, our morals may tell us that it is wrong and that we should not feel like that. But the feeling of revenge may simply be stronger than moral imperatives at that point and, furthermore, in this case emotions and morality are different in kind. The major component of this revenge-scenario has nothing to do with morality. It has more to do with interests, with bonds to other people and with our investment of emotions in different kinds of relations. When we see a character in a film, the film will most certainly make us understand how this person sees the world and what is at stake in it from his or her point of view. In everyday interactions we not only react to what other people do to us, but we also take other people's viewpoints in order to understand them so we are better at interacting properly with them. Seeing a film is very much about taking other people's viewpoint, although not in the sense that we have inner discussions with ourselves as we watch the movie. Rather, we pick up important information about character intentions, emotional states etc. And most films help us by emphasizing aspects of non-verbal communication, by musical underscoring, editing and the like. We watch films as we watch everyday interactions – but even more so because the film has ordered this information into a pattern that leads our emotional investment in certain directions at specific moments. Thus, emotions are not only a question of morality, but of psychology. And of course psychology can be *modified* by morality, but morality does not come first. Often morals do not trigger emotions, rather they bend them.

### **The film as a balancing act**

I am not trying to say that morality does not play a role at all. The rape of Alicia does make our sympathy for Benigno problematic. It happens exactly at the film's midpoint, which in terms of narrative structure is also a way to emphasise its importance. But we never see the rape. It is only represented by analogy and by its positive consequences as it makes Alicia wake up from her coma and slowly recover. It creates a paradox, as the film makes us feel sympathy as well as a lack of empathy towards Benigno. It is exactly this balancing that makes the film interesting. A platonic lover would not hold our attention during two hours of film, nor would a simple rapist. But the combination provides a twist.

Peter Brooks almost invented melodrama as a contemporary genre category, and he emphasised melodrama as a dramatic form that – in a post-sacred era – makes it possible to express moral conflicts.<sup>10</sup> Almodovar uses it for another purpose in most of his films and certainly in *Talk to Her!*: to transgress moral conflicts between good and bad characters by means of strong emotions such as sentimentalism and passion, which both have the power to reach for poetic justice at a level above good or bad. This looks like religion and smells like romanticism, but really tastes like a celebration of film art.

Plato was right that art may bring us to consider things differently from what our moral standards would dictate. On the other hand, one of his shortcomings was not to consider this to be an eye-opening potential for the audience that gathers to be entertained by art and popular fiction.

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<sup>10</sup> Peter Brooks: *The Melodramatic Imagination* (London: Yale University Press, 1976).

## Uncle Charlie, the smooth arch-villain

Jacques Lefebvre

On many occasions, Alfred Hitchcock stated that *Shadow of a Doubt* (1943) was his favorite film. It is a dark film, with nihilistic overtones, a departure from the comedy thrillers that made his success during his “British period”. It was Hitchcock’s first truly American film with an American cast in a typical American environment. He brought into this film what made the stuff of his inspiration, steeped as it was in the frustrations and anxieties of his Victorian upbringing. At the same time, without relinquishing his own culture, he absorbed the moral and cultural realities of mainstream America in the 1940s. The scenario, based on an idea by Gordon Mc Donnell, was written by Thornton Wilder, the acclaimed author of *Our Town*. Wilder’s contribution brought to the film a very special flavor which captured the essence of small town America.

The somber tale of the *Merry-Widow Murderer* takes place in the fairy-tale town of Santa Rosa, California. Hitchcock was fascinated by this discrepancy, which also fed his life-long interest in the theme of the double. For Hitchcock, appearances are deceitful and there is no such thing as innocence, evil is always on the prowl.

Yet, it is also an endearing film, with light-hearted family scenes that are reminiscent of the films directed by Frank Capra in the 1930s. The cast is an ideal one: Joseph Cotten plays the bad guy, Charles Oakley; Teresa Wright is his radiant “twin niece”; Patricia Collinge is the naïve and affectionate mother; the little sister, Ann (Ednae Mae Wonacott), coached by Patricia Hitchcock, is astounding and so are the

father (Henry Travers) and his neighbor (Hume Cronyn) as they discuss which method to use in order to kill each other. In many interviews Patricia Hitchcock O'Connell dwells upon the creative intensity which presided over the preparation and the actual shooting of the film. Strangely enough, the fact that the film was shot during World War II at a time which also coincided with Hitchcock's mother's death, is very often overlooked.

Charles Oakley, as portrayed by Joseph Cotten, is one of Hitchcock's most disturbing villains.<sup>1</sup> He is first shown in a grubby room in Philadelphia, lying supine, lost in thoughts and toying with his cigar. There is a stock of dollar bills on the bedside table and some other bills are strewn on the rug. A vampire-like figure, stretched on his bed, he seems to be indifferent to the world until his landlady informs him about the visit of two "friends." He suddenly comes to life and brushes past his two pursuers as if to taunt them. Such a shift in mood and attitude is typical of Charles Oakley. Later on, on arriving at Santa Rosa, a frail and sick figure, he will instantly become a sprightly and vibrant Uncle Charlie.<sup>2</sup> He is unpredictable and hence elusive. His evil nature lies in his smoothness. He is urbane, charming, "polished" but, beneath the smooth surface, there lurks a brutal and a cynical killer. The spectator is meant to be seduced by the charming villain so as to be shocked by his evil deeds and yet, by allowing this seduction to take place, the spectator is compelled to accept and recognize the evil that lies within any human being. Uncle Charlie is a seducer. His main "activity" implies seduction. His dress code is impeccable and he is never seen wearing anything drab. His elegance matches the evil in him. He is also a threatening shadow, framed in the entrance hall or an

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<sup>1</sup> He was modelled after Earle Leonard Nelson who was hanged in 1928 and was known as The Gorilla Killer or The Dark Strangler.

<sup>2</sup> In *M* by Fritz Lang, the murderer likes to be called « uncle » by his victims.

imposing figure on the landing. On various occasions, the camera focuses on his hands, the tools of his trade. A few gestures, the compulsive tightening of his fingers, the shredding of a newspaper, the clenching of a fist, all suggest an underlying fierceness. But those manicured hands are only seen "at work" in the climactic scene on the train, a gruesome and an almost obscene visual representation of his pathological urge to kill.<sup>3</sup> These hands are also a variation on the theme of the double, thematically and visually speaking.

To the world, Charles Oakley is a faceless figure and he must remain so. He dreads being photographed and the only picture one sees of him is the one taken for Christmas, just before his accident, a testimony to his long-lost innocence. Hitchcock constantly contrasts the villain's wish for physical transparency with his overwhelming presence on screen.

Uncle Charlie's presence is not only a corporeal one. What essentially characterizes his presence is his voice. First and foremost, it is a cinematic voice, the voice whose magic inflexions shaped such films as *Citizen Kane*, Orson Welles (1941) and even more so, *The Magnificent Ambersons*, Orson Welles (1942). In *Shadow of a Doubt*, Hitchcock uses Joseph Cotten's voice so as to convey the complexity of the villain's personality. Uncle Charlie is a talker, a charmer and a convincing one whether it be with his sister, Emma, or with Mrs. Potter, the flirtatious widow. He needs to have an audience, not only to seduce those who are listening to him, but also to be in command, to control the situation. His replacing Joe at the head of the dinner table is a clear statement. The status of his voice varies according to his mood shifts. One clear example is the speech he makes about middle-aged widows:

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<sup>3</sup> Hitchcock is obviously fascinated by the act of strangulation, a simple and a silent method favored by such villains as Bruno Anthony in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) and Bob Rusk in *Frenzy* (1972).

... the cities are full of women, middle-aged widows, husbands dead, husband who've spent their lives making fortunes, working and working. Then they die and leave their money to their wives. Their silly wives. And what do the wives do, these useless women? You see them in the hotels, the best hotels, every day by the thousands, drinking the money, eating the money, losing the money at bridge, playing all day and all night, smelling of money. Proud of their jewelry but of nothing else. Horrible faded, fat, greedy women.

The speech as such is a monologue, a theatrical revelation of the villain's evil nature. It ends with an arresting visual device. When his niece objects to his assessment by saying "They're alive! They're human beings!", Charles turns toward the camera in huge close-up and declares chillingly: "Are they?" It is one of the most memorable shots in the film and one of the most disturbing as young Charlie is the only one who really understands the meaning of her uncle's words.

The more attractive the villain is, the more disturbing the process of identification becomes. In *Shadow of a Doubt*, the process of identification is all the more complex as the villain is presented alongside with his own double, his niece Charlie, named after him. Young Charlie is first seen on the screen lying in the same supine position as her uncle. Vacantly lost in thoughts, she ponders over the emptiness of her life until she decides to send a telegram to the one and only person who can "shake up" the family, Uncle Charlie. By juxtaposing two similar scenes, the narrative establishes a visual parallel whose imprint will be ubiquitous. The two "Charlies" are indeed alike and share the same blood. The relationship is an incestuous one as the gift of the ring clearly exemplifies. It is an engagement ring and, at the same time, as it belongs to one of Uncle Charlie's victims, it testifies to his criminal activity. Uncle Charlie will attempt to kill young Charlie on three occasions, yet it is not her status as a victim that Hitchcock wishes to focus on. Young Charlie is the only one in the family who clearly recognizes Uncle Charlie's evil nature but she must keep her discovery



to herself in order to save her family and her mother in particular. She is therefore doomed to seek out the truth and conceal it from those she loves. By sharing the secret with the villain, she is contaminated by his evil nature. It is indeed most disturbing as the spectator is also forced to confront those dark forces and accept them as being part of human nature. Young Charlie eventually shares the secret with Jack Graham, the police detective she falls in love with, but the weight of her discovery and the loss it entails will not be eradicated.<sup>4</sup> As Jack Graham declares at the end of the film: "... the world needs a lot of watching."

The contamination of evil is obviously what *Shadow of a Doubt* is about. This accounts for the ambiguous status of the "Merry Widow" tune which occurs at regular intervals in the film. It is first seen and heard during the opening credits but it may not be attributed to any of the protagonists as they have not appeared on screen yet. This very first instance is meant to be memorized by the audience and will operate as a signal throughout the film. Not once does the image of the waltzing couples suggest what is going on in Uncle Charlie's head and yet the tune mysteriously "jumps from head to head", as young Charlie says later on in the film. It is a clear illustration of the contamination of evil but, at the same time, it confirms a telepathic relation between the two Charlies.

Shot in the midst of the Second World War, the film may also be read as a metaphor for the evil forces that were bringing chaos and spreading their despicable message to the world.

Uncle Charlie is eventually killed by his own niece, almost by accident, as he loses his balance and crushes into an oncoming train. She thus fulfills an earlier promise that she would kill him herself. The image of his death dissolves to the "Merry Widow" sequence for a

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<sup>4</sup> The ending of *Shadow of a Doubt* is not a classic Hollywood happy ending.

final occurrence. Uncle Charlie's evil deeds will never be revealed and the final words uttered by the priest during his funeral are an ironical counterpoint:

Santa Rosa has gained and lost a son. A son that she can be proud of. Brave, generous, kindly. (...) He came into our community and our lives were finer and richer for it. For you who loved him most, for you who knew him best. For you, his beloved family... Let this thought... in this sad hour of grief... that no true love ever dies... The beauty of their souls, the sweetness of their characters, live on with us forever.

## The Good, the Bad, and the Nasty

Marlene Petersen



The Western genre, and the Frontier Myth on which it is built, are of great significance for American identity. For decades, cowboys have served as American icons with their tough masculinity and keen sense of right and wrong in films such as Henry Ford's *Stagecoach* (1939), Fred Zinnemann's *High Noon* (1952), John Sturges' *Gunfight at the OK Corral* (1957), and more recently James Mangold's *3:10 to Yuma* (2007). The good-bad dichotomy is a well-known characteristic of the classical American Western and generally there seems to be a fairly fixed set of *good* features such as being on the right side of the law, sticking to social norms, showing confidence and strength, and being an honest, reticent, and modest cowboy; similarly a fairly fixed set of *bad* features generally includes being on the wrong side of the law, practicing villainy, being emotional and effeminate, and exuding weakness, deceit, and greed in relation to society.

Ang Lee's *Brokeback Mountain* (2005), which is adapted from Annie Proulx's short story published in 1997, contains some of the traits of the popular American Western as it plays on some of the traditional

elements which characterise the genre. The two main characters Jack Twist (Jake Gyllenhaal) and Ennis del Mar (Heath Ledger) both appear to be rough and masculine cowboys set against the scenery of the Wild West. However, it soon becomes clear that there is something lying beneath the surface of the two horse-riding, whisky-drinking, and cigarette-smoking 'good' cowboys.

The two nineteen-year old men meet each other in the summer of 1963 where they are going to work as sheep-herders in Brokeback Mountain, Wyoming. During the summer out in the wilderness, the two young men fall in love and let go of their limiting restraints. When the summer is over, the two men, convinced that neither of them is 'queer', split and return to their respective lives near Riverton and Texas and both marry and start a family. After four years however, they realise that they still love each other and they meet again. This will be the start of recurring 'fishing trips' to Brokeback Mountain until 1983 when Jack dies in a mysterious accident.

By displaying a love affair between two male cowboys, the film *Brokeback Mountain* presents an altered type of the cherished American icon. Before this film, no Western had dared to question the cowboy's sexuality this explicitly: that the true and admirable cowboy ready to cope with the harsh conditions and great challenges of the Wild West could be anything but heterosexual. In this light, it becomes clear that one more distinct opposition in the good-bad dichotomy can be added: it is *good* to be heterosexual whereas it is *bad* to be homosexual. That homosexuality is a *bad* thing to display in the Wild West can be seen on the inside of the film's own universe, but also on the outside of the film's setting as the film got a mixed response when it was released in December 2005.

### Society as an Evil Force

Being outside social norms has always been considered to be a character flaw in Westerns. When Ennis del Mar and Jack Twist give in to their sexual desires in *Brokeback Mountain*, they clearly deviate from the norms of society. That they are social outcasts is indicated in the film in a number of ways. For instance, their employer Aguirre grimly lets Jack know that 'you guys weren't getting paid to let the dogs guard the sheep while you stemmed the rose' when Jack, one year after his and Ennis' first meeting at Brokeback, returns to ask for a new round of shepherding. His comment clearly shows that society does not allow or tolerate same-sex love or passion between two men out in the wilderness.

While facing the challenges of rough, wild nature, finding your true identity clearly does not mean that you can carelessly redefine the traditional concept of 'brotherhood'. It is better to remain hard as a bone than to show any weaknesses, i.e. *bad* traits, out in the Wild West, because otherwise you will be doomed. And after their first meeting, Ennis and Jack are indeed doomed. Ennis, who has a lot in common with the classical, taciturn, lonely rider, is completely controlled by a traumatic childhood experience where a homosexual man from his district was exposed and violently castrated by his neighbours. It has made him concerned about homosexuality and it makes him paranoid:

You ever get the feelin', I don't know, when you're in town, and someone looks at you, suspicious...like he knows. And then you get out on the pavement, and everyone, lookin' at you, maybe they all know too?

Ennis has been thoroughly socialised by the norms of the homophobic society. Jack, who finds it harder to repress his sexuality than the pent-up Ennis, is symbolically sacrificed at the end of the film. When Jack's wife Lureen lets Ennis know that Jack has died in a mysterious

accident, Ennis imagines that he was brutally murdered by homophobes similar to the ones who had tortured the homosexual neighbour in Ennis' childhood. Society is thus filled with contempt for sexual outcasts. It is rigid and severe towards any changes. The fact that Annie Proulx herself has called *Brokeback Mountain* 'a story about destructive rural homophobia'<sup>11</sup> indicates that Ennis and Jack are not the real villains in this set. Proulx has additionally stated about her two male characters:

Both wanted to be cowboys, be part of the Great Western Myth, but it didn't work out that way; Ennis never got to be more than a rough-cut ranch hand and Jack Twist chose rodeo as an expression of cowboy. Neither of them was ever top hand, and they met herding sheep, animals most real cowpokes despise [...] they were not really cowboys (*ibid.*).

Ennis and Jack want to be traditional hard-as-a-bone cowboys and fit into the norms of society, but they cannot. As opposed to traditional cowboys, the two of them cannot suppress their inner feelings and they cannot live up to the required norms of individuality; they need each other too much. They want to do good, being on the right side of the common norms, but the conventional society forces the two of them to do bad by making them escape into the wilderness and fulfil their needs. So who is the true villain? The vital question is whether *good* can actually exist in an environment that does not accept differences in others. Ennis and Jack are basically both decent people, who try to stick to the common patterns of society by marrying two beautiful wives, having children, and earning their living as respectable people, but they are trapped in a dilemma created by society itself and thus forced to do bad, i.e. commit adultery, lie, and hurt those around them.

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<sup>11</sup> Annie Proulx, Larry McMurtry, and Diana Ossana: *Brokeback Mountain. Story to Screenplay*,

## An Attack on the Traditional Western

*Brokeback Mountain* forced its audience to reconsider their conceptions of the American Frontier Myth featuring the Wild West and tough masculine, i.e. heterosexual, cowboys as it had been established in traditional Western films such as *Stagecoach* (1939), *Star in the Dust* (1956), *The Man Who Shot Liberty Valence* (1962), and *The Outlaw Josey Wales* (1976) starring the great American cowboy icons John Wayne and Clint Eastwood. Featuring two gay cowboys seemed to be a direct attack on the beloved traditional Western genre and its significance for the American identity. The visual image of two men, and especially masculine cowboys, having sex seemed to be too bitter a pill to swallow for certain segments of the American population. Thus, the real-life cowboy Jim-Bob Zimmerschied, living in rural Wyoming, strongly opposed the film by asserting that 'They've gone and killed John Wayne with this movie' and 'There ain't no queer in cowboy.'<sup>12</sup> A lot of his fellow ranchers and cowboys clearly seemed to agree. The film was also met with condemnation from representatives of the religious Right who claimed that the film eroded the genuine moral code of traditional Westerns which for their part did not display any ambiguous attitude toward the concept of manhood and sexuality as such. David Kupelian, *World Net Daily* editor, for one attacked the film for damaging American identity since according to him, homosexuality is an unnatural, sinful, and destructive lifestyle. He expressed this in his controversial article "'Brokeback Mountain': Rape of the Marlboro Man" (2005).<sup>13</sup>

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Harper Perennial, London, 2006, 130.

<sup>12</sup> Philip Sherwell: 'John Wayne made real movies. There ain't no queer in cowboy', in *Telegraph*, 1/1 2006, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/northamerica/usa/1506756/John-Wayne-made-real-movies.-There-aint-no-queer-in-cowboy.html>

<sup>13</sup> David Kupelian: "'Brokeback Mountain': Rape of the Marlboro Man", in *WorldNetDaily*, 27/12 2005, [http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE\\_ID=48076](http://www.wnd.com/news/article.asp?ARTICLE_ID=48076)

Therefore, it was not only on the screen that Ennis and Jack's behaviour was met with contempt. Annie Proulx doubted that her story would ever make it to the screen as "it was too sexually explicit for presumed mainstream tastes, the general topic of homophobia was a hot potato unless gingerly skirted."<sup>14</sup> When the story did make it to the screen, viewers were forced to reconsider their rather hidebound understanding of the true cowboy. It clearly seemed to be about time to loosen up on the traditional good-bad dichotomy. Even though the critics labelled *Brokeback Mountain* as a 'gay-cowboy' story, it is not *just* a story about homosexuality but also about love, identity, and current, burning issues, 'hot potatoes' in American society.

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<sup>14</sup> Op. cit., 133.



## Nice Bad Guy or Bad Nice Guy? – *Medium Cool*, by Haskell Wexler (1969)

Sébastien Doubinsky

A TV film crew approaches a burning crashed car on a Chicago freeway. The cameraman films the wreck and the injured body of a female passenger while the soundman records her whimpers. The two men then hurry back to their TV. “We should call an ambulance” says the cameraman to his friend.

The opening scene of Haskell Wexler’s *Medium Cool* leaves no ambiguity for the seer: the film is going to deal with ethics and violence. A “typical” film of the parallel circuit of the late sixties, it pinpoints, along with such classics as *Easy Rider*, *Soldier Blue* or *One flew over a cuckoo’s nest*, the growing *malaise* of American society and mythology.

John Cassellis, played by Robert Forster, a TV cameraman who loves his job, is the central and pivotal character of the film. We follow him in his daily life in Chicago, right before and during the famous 1968 Democratic Convention, which ended up in violent riots provoked, it seems, by the police. The film is very close to Godard’s *cinéma-vérité*, with a mix of documentary footage mixed with the fictional storyline.

The plot can be easily summarized in a few lines: Cassellis is a TV cameraman working for a local television channel focused on sensational news. He has a loose affair with a nurse, Ruth (Marianna Hill) and has no problem doing his job, until two events crack his professional surface.

First, he films a black cab driver who has found 10 000 dollars in an unmarked envelope on the backseat of his cab. He has contacted

the police, but got hassled instead of thanked. Sensing there is more to it than a local story, Cassellis wants to do a follow up, but is turned down by his boss and is fired under a false pretence.

Second, he meets Eileen (Verna Bloom), the mother of a street urchin named Harold (Harold Blankenship) who has tried to steal one of his hubcaps. A relationship begins between the two, the sweet and innocent God-fearing Eileen growing on him.

During the eve of the Democratic Convention, Harold disappears. After a fruitless night of searching, Ruth decides to try and find John at the Convention, as she knows he will be filming it. She becomes a witness of the riots, while John films from inside the amphitheater. They finally meet among the chaos, but on the drive home to Ruth's, a tire explodes and they die in the ensuing crash. The last scene shows a car driven by some hicks slowing down so that the son can take a picture of the burning car, before the camera zooms out to reveal Haskell Wexler himself filming the scene.

With the character of the cameraman John Cassellis, the notion of good guy/bad guy becomes suddenly an issue reaching beyond fiction, infiltrating multiple paradigms linked with what had become the post-JFK reality of America. News voyeurism, race issues, feminism, violence – all the 1968 problematics are presented in *Medium Cool*. But the central character is so complex that the film escapes manicheism and pushes the usual acceptation of a good (or bad) character.

During almost the first half of the film, John Cassellis could be labelled as the typical “bad guy” in cinematographic fiction – cynical, distantiated, (voluntarily) de-humanized by his job, which he loves and seems ready to sacrifice everything for. We see him filming the National Guard doing anti-demonstration manoeuvres, as well as

young Democrats getting ready for the convention – without any show of partisanship either way – Cassellis’s neutrality in this case being suspicious in times of great political turmoil. What’s more, after having filmed the car accident at the beginning of the movie, he meets his girlfriend, Ruth, at the hospital where she works and they decide to go to a Roller Derby competition, where they cheer players beating up each other, like at a Roman circus game. Violence seems at the core of John’s character – he breathes it, he films it, he likes it. In a cocktail discussion where reporters are present and where ethics are discussed – more precisely, how much does the reporters’ presence trigger violence and where should their moral commitment begin or end – John doesn’t say a word, but passes on cocktails to the participants. Later on, watching a memorial report on Martin Luther King, who has been shot in April, he blankly states: “Jesus, I love to film.”

John Cassellis is therefore an extension of his lens, just as his partner, sound-engineer Gus (Peter Bonerz), says he’s an “extension of his recording-machine”. The medias are here to relate objective facts and have no time, nor needs for human feelings. What paradoxically makes Cassellis a hateable character is precisely this neutrality, at a time where direct confrontation and political stance seem so important – blacks vs. whites, pacifists vs. the Vietnam war, women’s rights movement surging, etc. John’s attitude can be definitely assimilated to the big media corporations who use the term “neutrality” as a mask to influence and exploit the public for their own ends.

This aspect of the problematic is reinforced by Wexler’s technique of blending real documentary footage with actors, on location. This is extremely efficient, because it places the spectator at an “impossible” angle, which is to see how reality is “filmed” within a work of “fiction”. The moral problem that John Cassellis represents is

therefore not a conceptualization of good and evil, but the incarnation of the moral debate itself. His self-distantiation from a moral judgement on the events he is filming lands the spectator on a larger esthetical/ethical intellectual battlefield. Is John's "badness" inherent to his job (or social determination), or is it inherent to his personality (i.e. to his attraction to violence, – we even learn later in the film that he has been an amateur boxing champion)? As we are tempted to say "a little of both", we realize that the good guy/bad guy problematic has risen to another level – judgement becomes arduous.

All the more when John, learning that the footage he has filmed during previous demonstrations has been screened by the police and the FBI, becomes truly enraged. He feels betrayed and says he now understands why protesters attack TV film crews ("Because they know!" he yells at the female colleague who has broken the news to him). To complicate things even further, his desire to follow up on the Black cab driver harassed by the police suddenly turns him into a justice-seeking reporter, not a mere onlooker anymore. The fact that he is fired because of that only adds to his new nature.

John Cassellis should therefore, with our pre-set moral standards, suddenly appear to us like a saint, a predecessor of Woodward and Bernstein – but Haskell Wexler very cleverly avoids that easy Hollywoodian "redemption". Cassellis doesn't change character after these incidents – on the contrary, he remains the same. His humanity is shown with his (strange) love story with the God-fearing West-Virginian Ruth and his relationship to her son, but he still longs to film and is more than glad to accept the job of filming the Democratic Convention.

What John Cassellis is, in fact, is the moral ambiguity of journalism itself, or rather he asks himself the questions any *real*

journalist should ask himself. His presence at the Democratic Convention, first, then in the midst of the riots places him on both sides of the same event – his personal life being somewhere at the very center of his professional life. The title of the movie itself becomes thus significant, inverting Marshall McLuhan's term on television, which he called "a cool medium". "Medium cool" becomes an ironic statement, to say the least.

Wexler's character is therefore quite an unusual character, more related to the two hippies of *Easy Rider* than to *Dirty Harry* in terms of ambiguity – although Cassellis's conservative look is closer to *Dirty Harry*'s – , a bad guy that doesn't really turn good because he wasn't that bad at the start and doesn't even become that good in the end – and yet, the morals at stake (Civil Rights, Vietnam War, Democracy, etc) seem to imply a clear moral standpoint. Cassellis is, in a way, a good guy who doesn't believe in "good-guyness" because the society in which he lives in has blurred the notions. Ironically (or poetically), just as the only "good" people the *Easy Rider* characters encounter are a family of Deep-South farmers, the West-Virginian Ruth incarnates the possibility of simple love. But, just as in *Easy Rider* (once again), death lurks on the American roads and hicks have no respect for love, nor a different notion of freedom.

The tragic ending, however, does not solve our problem, as once again Haskell Wexler rejects the sanctification of his hero. John and Ruth die in a car accident, which is just that, an accident. There is no violence involved other than that of an exploding tire – no shots fired, no conspiracy, no human action. It is fate, just stupid fate. John Cassellis is thereby denied the final status of "Bad guy turned Saint" and remains locked forever in his ambiguity. When Haskell Wexler appears in the final sequence and turns his camera lens towards the

audience, while the protester's chant "The whole world is watching you! The whole world is watching you!" in the background, the ambivalence is complete, letting the spectator be the only judge of himself, like Jean-Baptiste Clamence's interlocutor in Camus's *The Fall*.

*Medium Cool*, 1969

Director: Haskell Wexler

Running time: 110 minutes

Cast of characters:

John Cassellis: Robert Forster

Eileen: Verna Bloom

Harold: Harold Blankenship

Gus: Peter Bonerz

Ruth: Marianna Hill

## Good Guy / Bad Guy

Sune Liltorp

*NB. Though it is not the politically correct way to write I have decided to refer to the good and the bad guy by the male pronoun, even though there are a lot of good and bad 'guys' who are female. Writing he/she all the time takes up too much space and the article would have to be called "Good person / bad person" which in actuality is what it really is about. My apologies to the fairer gender, hope you can overlook this slight.*

### Making character interesting

Subtext and contradiction are two of the most important traits to make characters interesting. Subtext is used to reveal contradiction and contradiction is used to make your characters multifaceted and give them dimension. Giving your main characters contradictions makes them much more believable and easier to connect with, since we, the audience, can recognize contradictions from our everyday lives.

A character without contradictions is boring, non-human and almost impossible to put in dilemma, which are the situations where we learn about the true nature of the character; through their choices under pressure. If we have no doubt about what a character is going to do, because he always does right or wrong, the story becomes a dull sequence of uninspiring choices with no true dilemma and no audience involvement and empathy.

*TRUE CHARACTER can only be expressed through choice in dilemma. How the person chooses to act under pressure is who he is – the greater the pressure, the truer and deeper the choice to character. – Robert McKee, Story.*

In story we need to sympathize and often empathize with the actions of the Good Guy, whereas for the Bad Guy we only need a moment of empathy. The good guy and the bad guy come in many shapes and forms. But from the audiences point of view the good guy is the person we hope will succeed and fear will fail. The opposite is true for

the bad guy, though sometimes if it is a poorly constructed good guy the audience will start rooting for the more interesting bad guy. If done cleverly this can be used as a storytelling tool, as with all writing this should be done intentionally serving the true story you want to tell, and not just as a way of manipulating your audience. There is nothing more annoying than a person who has nothing to tell and only reverts to gimmicks to move their story forward.

### **Types of Good Guy / Bad Guy character:**

- The Good Good Guy.
- The Bad Bad Guy.
- The Bad Good Guy.
- The Good Bad Guy.

The Good Good Guy still needs a flaw (too trusting, too confident etc.) to make him interesting, whereas the Bad Bad Guy needs a scene where it is explained why he has become bad. A truly Bad Bad Guy is not believable and impossible to connect with. That is unless your whole story world is twisted and strange in itself; Like Dennis Hopper's truly Bad Bad Guy in David Lynch's *Blue Velvet*.

The Bad Good Guy is the quintessential antihero where the flaw in the character is so big that it has become an integral part of his demeanor (drunkenness, hate, despair etc.), but through his actions he still shows us his good side (sense of justice, helping the weak). Like Bogart in *Casablanca*. The Bad Good guy is often much more interesting since the contradiction is much bigger. This is the type of character good actors want to play because the dimensionality is a much bigger challenge and it makes for Oscar nominations.

The Good Bad Guy is also interesting though not nearly as common as the Bad Good guy. This is the type of character who wants to



do well but does it in a bad way. Here we have some of the true tragic characters like *Oedipus Rex* or Michael Douglas in *Falling Down*. Again this character is more interesting because of the contradiction behind their dilemma. Wanting is not achieving and saying is not doing.

### Two sides of the same coin

Some years back actor Gary Oldman was asked how it felt always playing the bad guy. To which he answered with incredulity: 'Bad guy? I have never played a bad guy in my life!' The reasoning behind his answer is simple; everyone acts true and 'good' according to their own point of view. No one believes what they do is evil or bad, it is simply done because that is the way it has to be according to their wants and needs. As an actor Gary Oldman understands that in order to play a bad character convincingly you need to see the world as he does.

*The Good Guys and the Bad Guys* is a western from 1969 starring Robert Mitchum and George Kennedy. The story is about a good guy Marshall, who just before getting retired finds out that his bad guy train robber nemesis is in the area. Despite being retired he seeks out his nemesis who is sort of retired as well. Finding common ground they become partners and together prevent the train robbery and save the city. The point of the story is that there is no real difference between the good and the bad guy, they are basically the same. Doing what they need to survive according to their own point of view.

As a screenwriter you have to understand this. **There are no bad characters in a screenplay**, making the whole good guy / bad guy dilemma completely academic. Every character will do the right thing according to their specific point of view. Bad characters need as much love and affection as good characters, if not more. Bad screenplays will

have flat and boring bad guys with no real understanding of what terrible past has incapacitated them so.

If you look at child psychology, children aged 4 to 6 want to play the bad guy as much as the good guy. This also comes out as bad behavior, pulling wings off a butterfly or throwing stones after cats. Parents and society will soon put an end to this behavior, but as a screenwriter you need to become that child and embrace your characters with open arms. Of course you need to understand that your audience will have the point of view of your parents and see the world in good or bad. Being that clever screenwriting child you understand your parents, knows how to cheat them and sometimes you even ignore their rather limited view of the world.

### **Who hurts the most**

Storytelling is about characters and the clash of their unique point of view. It is even possible for the same character to be the good guy and provide his own opposition, the bad guy, within himself. When the good guy / bad guy dilemma is within the character himself it is often much stronger and more engaging: Gollum in *Lord of the rings* and Sam Neill's character in *Ivanhoe* (1982). When the conflict is inner and you are your own worst enemy, the battle will rage within and your audience (a western world audience) will recognize their own inner dilemmas living in a world of too many choices. Inner conflict is always much stronger than outer conflict since it happens within the character himself and there is no one else to blame.

A bad guy, unless he is a psychopath (which means it really isn't his fault), is in constant inner conflict making him a potentially much more interesting character than the good guy. Who should really have our empathy the guy doing good deeds or the bad guy who has to live with his? Bad guys have the ability to make us feel much sorrier for

them, because to do the acts they do they must truly suffer inside. Look at Shakespeare's *Macbeth* who kills everyone close to him, all the while suffering from an extreme guilty conscience. The contradiction where he continually kills his friends and family, while suffering the hurt every time he does it make for a very exciting character.

The intrigue and fascination of the bad guy with true inner conflict makes us see the world as it truly is. Instead of judging we try understanding why people do as they do, seeing what is behind the curtain. A storyteller's most important tool is telling the truth, and the truth is that the world is not black and white but different shades of gray. And a dark shade of gray is much more interesting than a lighter because it is much closer to where it really hurts. *Beware of the dark side*, No not really, as a writer you need to go there and once you've been there you will never come back.

This is why even in screenwriting, *Nice guys finish last!*

There will always be a need for the good guy in storytelling; he is who we want to be and therefore the often used main character in most films. But personally I want to see more films with a bad guy main character, because in a world of talent shows and reality shows we already get a lot of want, and what we really need is to follow characters that are actually closer to ourselves and that make us feel lucky about being alive, instead of constantly striving to reach the stars.

## The Good, the Bad, and Halloween: A Sociocultural Analysis of John Carpenter's *Slasher*

Jody Pennington

### Introduction

In this paper, I examine the representation of the ultimate bad guy, the homicidal Michael Myers (Will Sandin, age 6; Tony Moran and Nick Castle, age 21), in John Carpenter's slasher *Halloween* (1978).<sup>1</sup> More specifically, I provide a sociocultural analysis of the role of first person point of view and the narrative's motivation for Michael's murderous behavior.<sup>2</sup> Finally, I discuss the role of ignorance on the part of the "good guys" in the narration's distribution of knowledge. *Halloween's* good guys include Michael's clinical psychiatrist, Dr. Sam Loomis (Donald Pleasence), and the main character, a teen-aged babysitter named Laurie (Jamie Lee Curtis) along with her best friends Annie (Nancy Loomis) and Lynda (P. J. Soles).

A sociocultural analysis examines the relationship between the diegetic world of the film and the social and cultural world being represented. A sociocultural analysis draws on history, sociology, psychology, and other social sciences but does not presume film characters behave strictly the same as human beings in everyday life.

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<sup>1</sup> Two actors played Michael at 21. Castle, credited as "The Shape," played Michael when masked, and Moran credited as Michael age 23, played Michael near the end of the film, when Laurie rips the mask off as he chokes her. Michael manages to put the mask on again before Dr. Loomis shoots him.

<sup>2</sup> Critics often interpret the slasher as representing social anxiety in the United States over changes in sexual behavior brought on by a sexual revolution. The association is not hard to make given the way in which the sexuality of Michael's victims is framed. John Carpenter told at least one interviewer, though, that he disagreed with the critics who saw Laurie's sexual purity as the virtue that saved her (Todd McCarthy, "Trick or Treat," *Film Comment* 16, no. 1 (1980).).

Working with a neoformalist model of film narrative, this approach recognizes film characters have narrative motivations. At the same time, drawing on the disciplines noted above, it seeks to understand the social and cultural models of behavior that characters emulate.

### **The bad guy and point of view**

John Carpenter's low-budget success *Halloween* (1978) begins on Halloween night in the small Illinois town Haddonfield in 1963. From a mobile first-person point of view shot created by cinematographer Dean Cundey's moving Panaglide camera, the petting escapades of Judith Myers (Sandy Johnson) and her boyfriend (David Kyle) are seen by lurking eyes peering through a window. After an upstairs bedroom window goes dark, the unknown voyeur moves into the house, a hand seen reaching out and taking a large knife from a kitchen drawer. Pausing as the boyfriend leaves, the voyeur continues upstairs, putting on a Halloween mask, and entering Judith's room. She is seen topless in her underwear brushing her hair, the shot matted to indicate the mask, a perspective enhanced by the sound of breathing, an audio motif that recurs throughout the film. With a pan, the camera shifts the voyeur's gaze to the tell-tale signs of rumpled sheets on Judith's bed then back to Judith. She exclaims, "Michael," her voice providing an additional clue that she knows the voyeur: she does not sound frightened, only annoyed at an invasion of her privacy and minor offense to her modesty before he begins stabbing her with the knife.

We soon learn the voyeur-turned-slasher is Judith's six-year old brother, Michael, who had remained unseen during the opening mobile point of view shot. Revealing Michael's identity would have shattered the suspense since the perspective would no longer have

seemed intrusive or dangerous. He could have been simply returning home from trick or treating, which his clown's costume implies.

The opening sequence, which ends with a crane shot lifting away from Michael as his parents discover him in the front yard, establishes a pattern in the film. When Michael stalks, there will either be more-or-less subjective point of view shots either from his perspective or from a series of deep focus shots that foreground Michael, in either the left or right corner of the frame, with Laurie or another potential victim positioned in the background, blithely unaware of being pursued.

### **Psychopathology and evil**

From a neoformalist perspective, a narrative provides clues about a character's behavior. Within the diegetic world, these clues range from ascriptions offered by other characters to inner monologue audible on the soundtrack and connotative image composition that uses depth of field and positioning, lighting, or symbolism to imply a character's cognitive or emotional processes. *Halloween's* initial explanation for Michael's badness is mental illness, which enables *Halloween* to exploit a not uncommon belief that the mentally ill are dangerous.<sup>3</sup> The field of psychiatry would diagnose Michael's behavior as the result of psychopathology. The narrative cues this inference by Michael's being institutionalized in Smith's Grove Sanitarium for fifteen years, during which he does not speak, until he escapes the night before Halloween in 1978. It is reinforced by having the good guy, Dr. Loomis, who tries to stop Michael and who is the only character who understands what

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<sup>3</sup> Jo C. Phelan and Bruce G. Link, "Fear of People with Mental Illnesses: The Role of Personal and Impersonal Contact and Exposure to Threat or Harm," *Journal of Health and Social Behavior* 45, no. 1 (2004).

Michael is likely to do upon returning to his home town, be a psychiatrist.

The opening scene combines different factors to imply young Michael's psychopathology: he stabs Judith, he spies on her, he dons the mask prior to stabbing Judith, he watches his hand thrust the knife, and he stares blankly when his father removes his mask. While the stabbing is necessary to establish the child's violent psychopathology, it is not sufficient. Taken as a whole, these cues provide good reason to believe that what is being represented is the "early onset of extremely aggressive behaviour that is not tempered by any sense of guilt or empathy with the victim," a hallmark of psychopathology.<sup>4</sup> Michael's disregard for his sister's obvious distress marks his behavior as psychopathic as well.

Typical of a low-budget film, though, the precise nature of Michael's mental illness is not a major narrative concern. Rather than offer a developed psychiatric explanation of Michael's mental illness or his behavior, the narrative suggests it is inexplicable. The narrative offers no clues as to the etiology of Michael's mental illness or of his sudden urge to kill his sister. Indeed, it goes even further, though, and suggests that psychopathology, although present, is insufficient to explain Michael's rampage. An alternative, offered by Michael's psychiatrist, is that Michael is not just bad; he is evil.

When Michael escapes from the sanitarium before Dr. Loomis's eyes, the frustrated doctor exclaims, "The evil is gone from here!" Much of Dr. Loomis's expository dialogue fills in Michael's backstory between the two fateful Halloweens. The doctor's inferences and his attitude (a mixture of fear, anger, and disgust) indicate he has

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<sup>4</sup> RJR Blair, "A Cognitive Developmental Approach to Morality: Investigating the Psychopath," *Cognition* 57, no. 1 (1995). 2.

abandoned any pretense to genetic, cognitive, or neurological explanations for his patient's actions. While in the Myers house, Sheriff Bracket (Charles Cyphers) remarks that the jumpy Loomis is "just plain scared," to which the doctor readily admits. He tells the sheriff why by recounting his experiences as Michael's doctor:

I met him fifteen years ago. I was told there was nothing left, no reason, no conscience, no understanding, in even the most rudimentary sense, of life or death, of good or evil, right or wrong. I met this six-year-old child with this blank, pale, emotionless face and the blackest eyes, the devil's eyes. I spent eight years trying to reach him and then another seven trying to keep him locked up because I realized that what was living behind that boy's eyes was purely and simply evil.

The momentousness of what Loomis is saying is underscored on the soundtrack by Carpenter's haunting musical theme. A few moments later the men go upstairs and discover a dead dog (off screen) that appears to have been partially eaten. Dr. Loomis assures Bracket, whose daughter Annie will become one of Michael's victims, that this was the macabre work of his patient, who he insists "isn't a man."

### **The ignorance of the good guys**

A staple of the slasher concerns the capacity of other characters to be aware of and recognize the inhuman evilness of the bad guy. Typically, though, neither awareness nor recognition is readily forthcoming. The narration of *Halloween* keeps the good guys, with the exception of Dr. Loomis, ignorant of Michael's existence and, thereby, the threat he poses. For his part, Dr. Loomis remains ignorant of where Michael is. Both forms of ignorance are staples of the genre.

Sometimes the bad guy is recognizably bad, while other times, the bad guy, being a psychopath, is able to hide behind a "mask of sanity," as in *I Know What You Did Last Summer* (1997, Jim Gillespie) or *Wolf Creek* (2004, Greg McLean). In *Halloween*, Michael does not hide



behind a mask of sanity but rather a white mask, an inverted and spray-painted William Shatner Captain Kirk mask, that evokes his first murder and makes him look deathly pale and menacing. John Carpenter told an interviewer that the idea of a mask resonated both with the film's title and with his memories of reading Cleckley's classic account of psychopaths, *The Mask of Sanity* ().<sup>5</sup> In *Halloween*, the characters who sight the masked bad guy are simply not sure about what they are seeing (and it being Halloween do not become too alarmed). Laurie is unsure whether she has actually seen anyone at all while the eight-year old boy she baby sits, Tommy Doyle (Brian Andrews), simply believes he has seen a creature of mythical proportions, the "boogey man" older kids at school taunted him with earlier.



Now she sees him...



Now she doesn't: Fear and ignorance are interwoven in the narrative of John Carpenter's *Halloween* (1978).

Usually in the slasher, ignorance of lurking danger diminishes a character's chances for survival. The lack of awareness about one's surroundings is frequently worsened by the characters' being often blinded to danger by sexual desire. The first of the good guys to be killed is Annie, who Michael had watched undress to wash her clothes. Moments later, Michael strangles her from the back seat of her mother's car as she is leaving to get her boyfriend. Shortly thereafter, beer-drinking Lynda and her boyfriend Bob (John Michael Graham),

<sup>5</sup> Quoted in Adam Rockoff, *Going to Pieces: The Rise and Fall of the Slasher Film, 1978-1986* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland & Co., 2002). 54.

arrive at the Wallace's, go inside, and, finding Annie and the girl she is babysitting, Lindsey (Kyle Richards), gone, and assume no one is there. They start kissing on the living room couch rather than investigate. The camera tracks back to reveal Michael's shoulder and arm: the house is not empty after all. The over-the-shoulder shot, used conventionally in shot/reverse shots to shift perspectives during dialogues, reinforces the notion of Michael's perspective while foregrounding the other characters' lack of awareness of his presence. Oblivious to Michael, they go upstairs and make love. The soundtrack music becomes discordant as Michael's shadow appears on the wall as he again watches.

Afterwards, Bob, still ignorant of Michael's presence, stands in the dark kitchen, calling out for Annie and her boyfriend when the backdoor creaks open. In slashers, characters enter dark houses or rooms at night but rarely bother to turn on the lights (Linda and Bob turn on two lamps). While the genre's use of this convention implies to viewers that the characters are in a menacing environment, it also indicates the lack of threats or danger the characters' associate with their homes and neighborhoods. Thus, characters' ignorance is in part motivated by their living in an environment in which they normally would not worry about psychopaths.

Michael then appears in the door to the Wallace's bedroom covered in a white sheet and wearing Bob's glasses. When the "ghost" remains mute uncomfortably long, Lynda calls Laurie on the telephone. Laurie answers just as Michael begins strangling Lynda with the cord. The murder scene blends the sexuality of the young woman's exposed breasts with the violent act of murder. The scene also cross-cuts between Michael and his victim and Laurie, who thinks it is

Annie, playing a prank. Once again, a character's ignorance impedes knowledge of danger.

Laurie's ignorance is demolished when she discovers her friends' corpses. She escapes Michael and seeks sanctuary in the Doyles' house together with Tommy and Lindsey. She staves off Michael's attacks, stabbing him with a knitting needle. She appears to have triumphed, but her ignorance of his (apparent) invincibility leads her to leave the knife near Michael, prolonging her agony. She hides, the only means available to the victim to reverse the genre's knowledge differential about a character's location. Discovered, Laurie jabs Michael with a coat hanger, causing him to drop his knife. She stabs Michael with the knife, discarding it near him. He attacks her again, but Dr. Loomis arrives just in time and shoots him. Michael falls from the second story but vanishes, and the film ends with a montage of the spaces Michael haunted.

This analysis of *Halloween* indicates how a sociocultural perspective on the representation of bad guys and good guys unites both filmic and sociocultural aspects of representation, providing an alternative to psychodynamic interpretations of film narrative, as suggested by Stephen Prince.<sup>6</sup> Working with an analysis inspired by neoformalist work, a sociocultural approach presumes that film characters behave as they do primarily for *filmic* reasons governed by the narrative and style of the film. Characters are shaped by aesthetic concerns and through aesthetic means. A theory of narrative based on cognitive psychology—as suggested by David Bordwell in *Making Meaning*—posits that inferences that members of an audience make about character behavior are shaped not only by the expectations associated

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<sup>6</sup> Stephen Prince, "Dread, Taboo, and *the Thing*: Toward a Social Theory of the Horror Film," in *The Horror Film*, ed. Stephen Prince (New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2004).

with the film's genre but also by schemata that audience members have about how human beings might behave in various contexts.<sup>7</sup>

It is unnecessary to posit the existence of a "collective nightmare," as Robin Wood has done,<sup>8</sup> to explain the knowledge of threats that members of a slasher film's audience share. Instead, the perception of a "bad guy" such as Michael as being evil can be explicated in terms of socially and culturally shared conceptions of psychopathology and murder that allow audience members to recognize their representation in *Halloween* as manifestations of evil. Instead of speculations about repressed desires and fears, this analysis suggests how an examination of sociocultural conceptions of mental illness (both onscreen and off) might inform the attitudes of filmmakers and audience members. As discussed above, *Halloween* employs filmic elements such as mise-en-scène, editing, cinematography, and sound as well as narration and the conventions of the slasher genre to cue the viewer to recognize the threat posed by the bad guy even as the good guys remain ignorant of that threat. The vicarious fears engendered by the threat of violence or the acts of violence felt by some audience members, a quality of the genre delineated by Carol J. Clover,<sup>9</sup> do not entail that the represented threat be experienced as a "collective nightmare" in any Freudian sense. A better understanding of the recognizable evil in *Halloween* bridges an investigation of bad behavior in a given society and culture with an analysis of the filmic elements that represent evil in Carpenter's low-budget classic.

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<sup>7</sup> (David Bordwell, *Making Meaning: Inference and Rhetoric in the Interpretation of Cinema*, Harvard Film Studies (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1991).

<sup>8</sup> Robin Wood, "Return of the Repressed," *Film Comment* 14, no. 4 (1978). 26.

<sup>9</sup> Clover has examined this and other aspects of the slasher genre succinctly in Carol J. Clover, "Her Body, Himself: Gender in the Slasher Film," *Representations*, no. 20 (1987). and extensively in Carol J. Clover, *Men, Women, and Chain Saws: Gender in the Modern Horror Film* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1992).

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## *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*

Adapting embodied gender from novel to movie  
in Stieg Larsson's crime fiction

Karen Klitgaard Povlsen & Anne Marit Waade



*The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* (in Swedish: *Män som hatar kvinnor*), 2009, produced by Yellow Bird and directed by Niels Arden Oplev. Michael Nyqvist and Noomi Norén play the main characters.  
<http://www.stieglarsson.com/the-movies>

The film adaptation of Stieg Larsson's popular crime novel *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* introduces Mikael Blomkvist, the male protagonist, in one of the opening scenes standing on the front steps of a court building, surrounded by journalists and microphones and being interviewed by a female journalist who asks him what it's like to be a loser. Blomkvist looks pale and rather introverted, and although he is standing several steps above the crowd of journalists he appears small and defenceless. In the scene that follows we see him at a Christmas celebration with the editorial board of the journal *Millennium*, where he is an editor and journalist. A beautiful woman tries to persuade him to fight back even though he has lost the trial – but he announces his decision to resign from his job, saying that he was naïve to have believed in a story that proved to be false. Several scenes later he leaves the celebration and retreats to the home of his sister and her

family, where we find him clad in an apron baking cookies in the kitchen. At this point the phone rings and he is persuaded to accept a case. Thus the male protagonist enters the plot in a traditional female role: defeated, victimized and finally wearing an apron in a kitchen.

By contrast the female protagonist, Lisbeth Salander, enters the film taking photos of Mikael Blomkvist as he leaves the editorial office. Observing him from her hiding place, she is dressed in black leather with heavy eye make-up, with black lipstick and pierced nose and lips. In the first sequence we see her in fragments and in profile, concentrated on her camera and later on the computer, where she hacks her way into Mikael Blomkvist's files. To make a long story short: He is shown as a pale, soft, feminine figure; she is shown as an androgynous heavy punker, in control and as aggressive as a hardboiled masculine character.

In this article we wish to focus on the gendered bodies of the two main characters, their physical appearance and their bodies as physical artefacts in *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo*<sup>1</sup>. While the plot line is much the same in the novel and the film, the characters differ. Whereas the gender of the characters in the novel is ambiguous, the film shows us simply gendered characters, albeit in reverse. The male character is soft and passive, while the female protagonist is hard and has a body inscribed with demonic symbols. Our main argument is that the adaptation from novel to film involves an alteration of the gender representations in the two main characters, and that this alteration corresponds to the genre-specific and media-specific conditions associated respectively with the genre thriller versus crime fiction and with the format of the film versus that of the novel. In examining these differences in relation to *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo*, we draw on

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<sup>1</sup> The original Swedish title was *Män der hatar kvinnor* (Men who hate women).

the fact that gender is a central issue in Nordic crime fiction as best-seller and cultural commodity.

### **Stieg Larsson as feminist author?**

Stieg Larsson's *Millennium Trilogy* has become an international best-seller, and this year (2009) film versions of the first two parts of the trilogy have been released both for cinema and on DVD, receiving a rapturous reception from both audience and critics. In Denmark only the latest *Harry Potter* movie achieved the same numbers of viewers during its first week in the cinema. Lisbeth Salander, the central female figure in *Millennium Trilogy*, is a special character, a type rarely encountered in previous crime fiction series. The fact that Nordic crime fiction has become an international brand and a media commodity with a growing numbers of markets and audiences is certainly a key factor in the series' popularity, but Lisbeth Salander, the fascinating young hacker at the heart of the series, is undoubtedly one of the main reasons why it has proved so popular and captivating. Despite the reversal of traditional gender roles, with the male protagonist in the passive role and the female in the active, the film reflects both the growing number of female action heroes in movies and action series in general (Schubart 2007), and the way in which recent Nordic crime fiction has focussed on gender and gender relations in contemporary society (Nestingen 2008).

Crime fiction has traditionally been seen as a male dominated genre (Agger 2009) but since the 1990s we have witnessed a boom in crime fiction created by women and with female protagonists. American authors such as Sarah Paretsky and Marcia Muller were already publishing feminist crime novels in the 1970s and the 1980s, but since 1990 Scandinavian and especially Swedish writers have achieved great

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popularity in Europe (Klitgaard Povlsen 1995). Liza Marklund, Åsa Larsson and Helene Tursten are the bestselling authors of novels that have often been adapted for film and television. They can be said to have created feminist fiction by presenting female protagonists that are competent, strong and clever and who act effectively in a society often dominated by men. But male authors such as Henning Mankell have also contributed to this new type of fiction by writing about soft, melancholic male police officers engaged in crimes that involve strong female offenders who react with vigilante violence to male rape, murder and so on in their pasts (Klitgaard Povlsen 2006). In a debate in Sweden and Denmark in 2007 that looked at male and female crime writers and directors, Stieg Larsson was presented as a feminist author who wrote better than his female counterparts (Hjarvard 2007). It is in this context that we see the adaptation from novel to film and the tie-in effect between print and film/television (Feather and Woodbridge 2007: 218, Geraghty 2009: 91) that often creates a bestseller in both media formats. Both in print and on screen, Nordic and especially Swedish crime fiction has often focussed on equal opportunities, offering a critique of traditional gender roles and presenting ambiguous strong female characters and soft male characters.



Stieg Larsson's Millennium Trilogy includes *The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo* (2005), *The Girl Who Played With Fire* (2006) and *The Girl Who Kicked the Hornets' Nest* (2007).

<http://www.stieglarsson.com>

Ambiguous characters and relationships are one of the key features of Nordic crime fiction (Agger 2009). This ambiguity can be seen, for example, in the way that characters struggle to combine the roles of responsible parent and professional policeman, caring partner and efficient investigator, or even try simultaneously to stay on the right side and the wrong side of the law, as in the case of Henning Mankell's police detective Kurt Wallander. This ambiguity can also be seen in the way that specific places and communities are presented both as familiar, picturesque locations that evoke nostalgia and as scary crime scenes (Waade 2007). *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* presents all these kinds of ambiguity, and, not least, an ambiguity with regard to gender, in which the characters reflect different aspects of masculinity and femininity.

### **Mikael and Lisbeth in relation to Astrid Lindgren's work**

The protagonists of the Millennium Trilogy, Mikael Blomkvist and Lisbeth Salander, refer back to characters already familiar to us from Astrid Lindgren's books for children. In the novel these references are both explicit and implicit. As in the film, we first meet our protagonist Mikael Blomkvist "as a loser" (2005:13). He has lost his case in court and is confronted with journalists who approach him as "Kalle Blomkvist" – the protagonist from Astrid Lindgren's debut trilogy (1946-1953) on the "Master detective" Kalle Blomkvist (in English known as Bill Bergson), a schoolboy from a small town in Sweden. In the Swedish film of the trilogy made in the 1990s Kalle has round cheeks and wears big glasses, and looks very like the author Stieg Larsson himself. Mikael Blomkvist is thus a detective, but not a hard-boiled one; he is slightly effeminate and has a soft body, but he is also a real man: a womanizer who sleeps with many women, who put up with him because of his intellect (ibid.: 15).



Stieg Larsson<sup>2</sup> and the character Kalle Blomkvist in the filmed version of Astrid Lindgren's books.<sup>3</sup>

Unlike Mikael Blomkvist, the female protagonist Lisbeth Salander is not initially presented from the inside but rather through the eyes of her boss Dragan Armanskij: He sees her as an extremely clever security detective, who is “pale and anorexic with very short hair and pierced nose and eyebrows. She had a two-centimetre tattoo on her neck and ... a tattooed dragon on her shoulder blade. Her natural hair colour was red, but she had dyed it ivory black” (p. 38). In short, Salander is seen as clever and hardboiled, and on page 53 of the Danish edition she is referred to for the first time as a kind of Pippi Longstocking, Astrid Lindgren's most famous character. Like Pippi, Lisbeth is an unorthodox individualist, living on her own and taking the law into her own hands, and like Pippi she ends up with a lot of money. While Kalle and Pippi are examples of the girl-boy and the boy-girl that we often see in 20<sup>th</sup> century children's literature, Stieg Larsson's novel transfers these utopian figures to a grown-up universe. By contrast, the film re-traditionalizes gender roles and especially sexual relationships. In the novel Lisbeth Salander has sexual relationships with women until she meets Mikael Blomkvist, as he has sexual relations to several women. In their relationship, the two

<sup>2</sup> (<http://www.stieglarsson.com/>)

<sup>3</sup> ([http://cdon.se/film/kalle\\_blomkvist%3a\\_mästerdetektiven\\_lever\\_färdigt-529000](http://cdon.se/film/kalle_blomkvist%3a_m%C3%A4sterdetektiven_lever_f%C3%A4rdigt-529000))

protagonists in the novel both adapt somewhat to prevailing gender roles, and both are less involved with other women.

### **The film: from reversed gender stereotypes to a true love story**

Mikael's soft and somewhat effeminate body and the passive role he plays in the first part of the film contrast with Lisbeth's black clothes and make-up, her muscular, masculine and demonized body and her masterful gaze represent reverse gender stereotypes. The adaption from novel to film has included an emphasis on the reversed gender stereotypes. Film as a medium involves explicit visual images, which means that the actor and actress's physical appearance, as well as the way they behave and perform, play a part in the way that body and gender are represented.

In the adaptation from novel to film, the producers have made certain dramaturgical choices that emphasise these gender stereotypes. In the love-making scene, for example, it is Lisbeth who plays the typically masculine part; it is she who takes the initiative by entering his room at night, and she who takes the active and dominant position, sitting astride him while they make love showing her naked, well-muscled and hard body. Mikael assumes a passive role, allowing him to be controlled and seduced as he lies flat on the bed. When they are finished, Lisbeth leaves the room and wants to go to her own bed to sleep. Mikael is left in his bed and asks gently: are you leaving? She looks at him and leaves. In this scene she is presented as a masculine lover who takes control and initiative and whose physical and sexual needs take precedence over feelings and emotional relations. Later, in the investigation of the murdered women, it is also Lisbeth who figures things out, takes initiatives and makes plans and decisions, while Mikael can hardly drive the car they are renting and is frightened and unsure of what to do. Lisbeth is the technician and computer

expert, and it is she who installs surveillance in the cottage where they are living: a decisive move in enabling her to solve the crime and ultimately save Mikael's life. And it is (of course) Lisbeth who succeeds in discovering and punishing the serial killer Martin Vanger. Lisbeth is the real hero of the story.

At the same time, however, another story is taking place, and another form of gender representation and gender relationship is emerging. This other story concerns the love relationship between Lisbeth and Mikael. In this story Lisbeth is in the process of becoming a woman and Mikael a man. Again, it is Lisbeth who first takes the active role in restoring Mikael as a lover and an attractive man. It is also she who makes it possible for him to take revenge on the true villain of the story, the financier Wennerström. She is the anonymous giver in the story. It is thanks to her investigation and actions that Mikael in the end achieves redress for his loss in court at the beginning of the film. Another interesting dramaturgical choice with regard to the main characters in the film concerns the way in which their various other sexual relationships and affairs are eliminated. Thus Mikael's long-term relationship with his married female boss and his love affairs while he is working for the Vanger concern evaporate, as does Lisbeth's lesbian relationship and friendship with another girl. In the film, these relationships are barely even suggested. This is also why the love relationship between the two protagonists and their growing feelings for one another stand out so clearly and unambiguously in the film as a traditional love story that presents typical gender relations. While Lisbeth is reinstating Mikael as a lover and a winner, Mikael is reinstating Lisbeth as a sensitive feminine woman. Thus as the film progresses Lisbeth gradually becomes more soft and careful; her black makeup, black lipstick and tough armour slowly disappear,

her beautiful body and profile are revealed and her feelings and charm emerge. Mikael, as a person, makes it possible for her to open up and develop as a person too, and she is shown as a much more soft and feminine character at the end of the film than she was at the beginning.



Mikael reinstates Lisbeth as a sensitive feminine woman in the course of the story.

<http://www.stieglarsson.com/the-movies>

She falls in love with him without really having the capacity and courage to acknowledge this and, for example, tell her mother about her feelings for Mikael. In the scene with her mother, however, another feminine characteristic emerges; Lisbeth becomes a daughter, showing concern for and feeling sorry for her mother. In the course of the story she develops from being a wounded, bitter and lonely child to becoming a mature, empathetic and forgiving woman. Because of Mikael's calm and emotionally open attitude towards her and Lisbeth's growing feelings for him, Lisbeth is transformed from a tough, black, distanced, heavily made-up person who smokes continuously into a naked, vulnerable, fragile person and an attractive woman with no makeup. It is Lisbeth's development as a person and the developing love story between Mikael and Lisbeth that are emphasised in the movie.

### **Media formats and genre perspectives**

Why this difference between the novel and the film? There are several possible answers to that question, relating for example to crucial

artistic choices made in the process of adaptation. We will suggest some more general answers relating respectively to genre and media formats. Gunhild Agger (2009) argues that crime fiction as a bestseller genre in print usually combines well with the film genres of melodrama and thriller, and *The Girl With the Dragon Tattoo* provides a good example of this. Whereas the film lays the emphasis on the love story as a melodramatic element, the thriller element of the story is more evident in the novel. At the same time, the film version also opens up an element of action crime. As a genre, action crime is an audiovisual story format in which suspense and thrills are created through the deft use of camera, editing and music. The combination of melodramatic love story and action crime thriller is often highly successful in presenting crime fiction on screen.

In the adaptation from novel to film, certain obvious media-specific conditions come into play, e.g. the duration of the plotted story (Stam 2005). In a novel, the author has many hours at his disposal, and in Stieg Larsson's case over six hundred pages and hundreds of reading hours are used to tell the story. This amount of time makes it possible to give an expanded and complex characterisation of the protagonists, and the reader has even more time to get into their minds, their relationships, their experiences and actions, in so far as the reading time is usually longer than the duration of the plot (some crime fiction enthusiasts of course read the whole novel at one go). By contrast, the film director has only about 120 minutes to tell the same story, s/he has to make cuts and priorities so that the story fits into the film format. The dramaturgy and the presentations of the characters have to be effective and simple so the plot and conflict emerge clearly especially in films directed at a global mass audience the contrasts are often exaggerated and traditionalised (Leitch 2008: 68). Nevertheless,

many audiences already know the novel and may glimpse it behind the film (Geraghty 2007: 195). To secure international distribution and popularity and maximize ticket sales the combination of crime and love story is particularly favourable, as we know from several other crime series and action movies. Following recent adaptation theory we find this interesting but we do not see it as a proof of quality. It does however tell us something of how a global bestseller-film can tell a story that for most viewers is already known in another printed version (Hutcheon 2006) that becomes part of the film experience.

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## The Case of Monsieur Hulot

Jakob Isak Nielsen

One does not write an article for a distinguished journal such as *p.o.v.* merely based on expectations about what other contributors might write. Nevertheless, considering the potential of the 'good guy/bad guy' topic of this current issue I could not help but consider what characters might lend themselves to an article on this topic.

First of all, we seem naturally drawn to flamboyant bad guys: Daniel Plainview (Daniel Day Lewis) of *There Will Be Blood* (2008), Hannibal Lector (Anthony Hopkins) of *Silence of the Lambs* (1991), Frank Booth (Dennis Hopper) of *Blue Velvet* (1986) not to mention all of Batman's adversaries. Second, film history is packed with memorable 'bad guys' who, it seems, are not all bad and memorable 'good guys' who are not all good. Ethan Edwards (John Wayne) would be a classic example of the latter and many of the above mentioned bad guys certainly have a number of redeeming or appealing features.

But what about characters who are fundamentally 'good'? We might think of role models, super heroes, saviors or more mundane characters who simply do nothing but good deeds. We might lend allegorical, symbolic or ideological functions to these characters, yet they may also appear one-dimensional or even trivial and boring as has sometimes mistakenly been said about Tim Burton's Batman.

In the following I want to discuss a character who seems fundamentally 'good': Monsieur Hulot (Jacques Tati) as he appears in *Play Time* (1967). Analytically, the 'good guy'-aspects of Hulot are a little more complicated to come to grips with because in this particular example the character Monsieur Hulot is of course played by the

director of *Play Time*: Jacques Tati.<sup>1</sup> This fact comes to bear on the way in which Hulot can be engaged with as a good guy. The twist here is not played out at a characterological level where Hulot comes across as a good guy but ultimately has a hidden 'darker side'. Instead I will argue that 'what is good about Hulot' should be studied from the perspective of a type of viewer engagement that is multi-layered – where qualities of Hulot become enmeshed with questions of narrative point of view and directorial vision.

### Engaging with Hulot

Hulot is an odd figure of engagement. Somewhat like an uncle, as suggested by the title of Jacques Tati's earlier Hulot-film *Mon oncle* (1958), he is at once familiar and a mysterious stranger. The physical characteristics of Hulot make him instantly recognizable – even in silhouette: pipe, soft hat, beige cottoncoat, umbrella across his arm, trousers that are too short, striped stockings, and the bird-like gait (fig. 1). While Hulot's physical characteristics are strikingly recognizable we *know* very little about him. Where does he come from? What does he want?



Fig. 1. The trailer to *Les vacances de Monsieur Hulot* (1953) exploits the recognizability of a silhouetted Hulot.

In the classical cinema our engagement with characters is usually bound up with goal oriented action. The good guy of classical cinema

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<sup>1</sup> Hulot (Jacques Tati) has also appeared in films not directed by Tati himself. Nicolas Ribowski directed *Cours du soir* (1967) where Hulot teaches an acting class. Hulot has also been played by

wants something and we generally want him to succeed. The questions – often burning questions – which we pose in connection with goal-oriented action, is significant to our involvement in narrative per se. This is completely different in the case of Hulot – in general and in particular with the Hulot that we meet in *Play Time*. The goal that drives forward the events in *Play Time* is Hulot wanting to meet a Monsieur Giffard. However, we never come to understand why Hulot wants to meet Giffard and in many ways this modest premise is nothing but a setup for the various detours that in effect *become* the film.

Essentially, Hulot is a mime – his character being defined by appearance, gesture and movement. Not only is he a mime but also his mimic performance in *Play Time* communicates a rather narrow range of psychological states. He generally acts attentive, surprised or befuddled. Often, Hulot comes across as a *type* more than a fully fleshed character with psychological depth. Particularly in *Play Time* we are rarely allowed to access the thoughts or emotions of Hulot. This is as much a question of style as of narrative design: He is rarely given audible dialogue and he is rarely presented in close shots. It would be false to claim that Hulot is a 'faceless' character but certainly his facial physiognomy is not as dominant a feature of his persona as it is with regards to other comedians such as Louis de Funès or – to mention a more contemporary example – Jim Carrey.

Mime itself involves a distortion of everyday behavior. Similarly, the Hulot neighborhood that we get to see in *Mon oncle* is also a caricature of old idyllic Paris as is the so-called 'Tativille' in *Play Time* of modern urbanity. These settings do not represent physical places but – like Hulot – a philosophy of life.

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another actor, namely Jacques Cottin in Francois Truffaut's *Domicile conjugal* (1970).

## Sympathetic gestures

Given these reservations, why is Hulot a memorable 'good guy'? For one, Hulot is a likeable character in *Play Time*. There is not one malicious action, he is helpful when two ladies need assistance with a lamp, he does not remonstrate when unfairly abused by a manager at the exhibit ("Slam Your Doors in Golden Silence"), he purchases a charming present for Barbara (Barbara Dennek) and so forth. However, the reason that Hulot is a 'good guy' has more to do with the way in which Tati the director orchestrates the Hulot persona and assigns meaningful qualities to him.

The first remarkable thing about Tati's orchestration of the Hulot personae is the initial presentation of Hulot in the film. Other director-comedians such as Chaplin and Buster Keaton clearly present their persona as the main protagonists of the films in which they appear. However, Tati does something quite astounding in *Play Time*. He shows us a number of false Hulots before we get to see the correct one (fig. 2-5). Of course, the instant recognizability of costume, gesture and movement can be easily and powerfully invoked – particularly when characters are far away from the camera.



Fig. 2. The first 'false' Hulot appears approximately four minutes into the film.



Fig. 3. The second 'false' Hulot appears approximately seven minutes into the film.



Fig. 4. The third 'false' Hulot (Smith) appears approximately nine minutes into the film.



Fig. 5. The real Hulot appears approximately eleven minutes into the film where he greets Smith who gets on the bus he has just exited.

The fact that we get to see a whole number of 'false' Hulots has a number of implications for our way of engaging with the character. This understated character introduction is in itself sympathetic on the part of Tati the director but more importantly, Tati ingeniously utilizes the popularity of his well-known persona in the service of a greater cause. Given the popularity of Hulot the false Hulots are an amusing gimmick but they also significantly reveal to the observant viewer a remarkably bold audiovisual agenda. A number of researchers (e.g. Noël Burch in a footnote in *A Theory of Film Practice*, and Kristin Thompson in "*Play Time: Comedy on the Edge of Perception*.") have commented on Tati's use of multiplane and multiaction staging within a single shot where Tati often places a range of potential points of interest within a single frame. What has been less commented on is *why* Tati does so. In one sense, Tati remains within the world of the film: he launches a whole number of parameters that are creatively presented or transformed in the course of the film: for instance glass is one of the parameters most often invoked: a towering glass facade appears early in the film against the backdrop of a blue and cloudy sky (fig. 6), glass reflects tourist attractions (fig. 7), reflections in glass cause confusion (fig. 8), real and apparent window exhibits (fig. 9-10), glass aquarium, spectacles ("viewty glasses") (fig. 11-12), glass transfigured into ice cubes (fig. 13), glass as nothing/nothing as glass (fig. 14-15) et cetera.





Fig. 6. One of the first shots of the film is of an enormous glass house.



Fig. 7. Barbara (Barbara Dennik) sees the reflection of the Eiffel Tower.



Fig. 8. Hulot mistakenly believes that his contact walks around across from him.

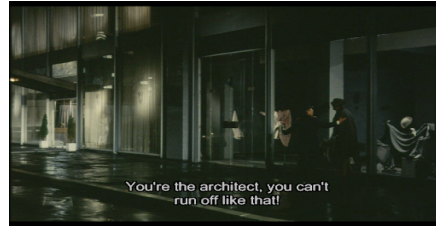


Fig. 9. A real window exhibit.



Fig. 10. A living room that looks like a window exhibit.



Fig. 11. The sales woman introduced "Viewty glasses."



Fig. 12. The sales clerk walks around with his own set of "viewty glasses."



Fig. 13. Glass transfigured as ice cubes.



Fig. 14. Glass as 'nothing'. Igniting a cigarette through a glass window is not easy.



Fig. 15. 'Nothing' as glass. Hulot breaks the glass door at the restaurant but his friend keeps on 'opening the door' as new guests arrive.

Throughout the film, some of these uses of glass are invoked again. For instance, we first see a young woman advertising "viewty glasses" (fig. 11) and later we see the angry boss from the "Slam Your Doors in Golden Silence"-exhibit walking around with a pair of broken glasses (Hulot's handshake) which look very much like "viewty glasses" (fig. 12). There are a number of auditive and visual parameters:

- transfiguration – nuns who appear to have seagulls on their heads, a man who comes to appear like a buck (fig. 16), a waiter who comes to look like a penguin, street lamps who appear to water the flower hats of the American tourists, a broom comes to look like the front of a car and so forth.
- paths of movement - along straight lines, down long corridors, in circles, up and down (fig. 19).
- a particular color of red keeps popping up.
- cardboard figures in the background of shots/characters momentarily taking a stand *as if* they were cardboard figures and so forth.

The false Hulots is merely one strategy of many, albeit an important one. Once established these parameters can – potentially - all be brought into play within a single shot (fig. 18).



Fig. 16. The buck.



Fig. 17. A broom comes to look like the front of a car.



Fig. 18. This shot combines at least three parameters. In trying to contact what turns out to be a false Hulot, the office clerk walks straight into a glass door. Cardboard men can be found different places in the frame. The man to the right just outside the building poses for several seconds – as if he were a cardboard figure – but then suddenly walks away.



Fig. 19. In the beginning of the film characters and objects (e.g. cars) appear to be entrapped by objects and architecture – forced to move in awkward straight lines as when Hulot walks through a labyrinth of parked cars to get to the building where Giffard works. At the end of the film movement is more free and playful.

## Work Time Play Time

The good guy characteristics of Hulot come into play because of the overall parametric development within the film and the role that Hulot comes to play in this regard. There is an overall development in the film where we first witness work time then play time – then ultimately work time transformed into play time. At the end of the film the roundabout has become a carrousel, as has the car hoist at the automechanic. In most cases it is Hulot who brings about the significant change: he breaks the glass door at the restaurant whereafter *everyone* seems to enter this previously upper class venue. It is of course also Hulot who in attempting to grab hold of an orange comes to tear down some wooden panels in the restaurant practically deconstructing the architecture – re-functionalizing the wooden shelves so that they instead come to function as a garden gate (fig. 20-21). Symbolically, the rich American tourist declares Hulot the new architect – which in a way, he becomes because Hulot's way of interacting with other people and with physical objects permeates the latter half of the film.





Fig. 20. Hulot deconstructs the architecture.



Fig. 21. The roundabout is transformed into a carousel.

In one sense it is 'merely' a game of form, but in *Play Time* this staging strategy also has ideological implications as in the case of the broken glass door that erodes the rigid separation of social classes, races and nationalities (perhaps as in the world of vaudeville early in Tati's career). Hulot is not necessarily Tati's alter ego but an *agent* in the service of Tati's audiovisual – and ideological – agenda. Consequently, the positive 'good guy' values that we attribute to Hulot belong as much to Tati the director. Furthermore, that audiovisual agenda of *Play Time* reaches out into the real world. When we orient ourselves in the real world, for instance in traffic, our cognitive capabilities filter out a great deal of information not deemed relevant in the light of this particular goal – for instance when we ride our car or bike to work it is not necessary for us to take in the number on the license plate of the coming car. However, the camera does not have these cognitive filters and – depending on lighting conditions - takes in whatever is within the optic pyramid of the camera. As André Bazin reminded us (p. 13), the movie camera does not have those cognitive filters and can therefore enable us to more fully re-experience phenomenal reality. In refusing to forcefully direct the attention of the viewer the compositional (and auditive) design of *Play Time* is as close to a realization of Bazin's "democracy of vision" as popular cinema is likely to get.

However, *Play Time* not only challenges our ways of seeing and listening to film.

*Play Time* is a truly bold experimental film because it invites us to walk away from cinema with a – literally – new perspective on phenomenal reality. It is as if – by means of cinema and the aid of Monsieur Hulot – Tati believes we can come to see the world differently. *Play Time* not merely advertises a more democratically organized frame where the attention of the viewers is – for once - not forced from one bit of information to the next. The audiovisual agenda of *Play Time* also encourages *curiosity*, *patience* and a *playful* way of talking in the world through our senses.

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## From Leslie Howard to Raoul Wallenberg: the transmission and adaptation of a heroic model

Richard Raskin

### Introduction

While it is widely known that seeing Leslie Howard's film *Pimpernel Smith* in 1942 may have played a role in inspiring and shaping Raoul Wallenberg's rescue mission in Budapest two years later, the connection between the two events has never been discussed at any length, and even the most comprehensive study of *Pimpernel Smith* to date simply mentions Wallenberg in passing,<sup>1</sup> just as accounts of Wallenberg's activities in Budapest do not go beyond a brief reference to *Pimpernel Smith* if the film is mentioned at all.

The purpose of the present article is to look more closely at the model found in Leslie Howard's film and the ways it was adapted by Raoul Wallenberg to the situation in Budapest in 1944.

But first, a brief discussion of *The Scarlet Pimpernel* will provide some useful back-story.

Baroness Emmuska Orczy, Hungarian born but residing in England, wrote *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, both as a play performed in London's West End in 1903 and as a novel published in 1905.

The action, set in 1792, concerns a band of daring Englishmen who make forays into France during the Reign of Terror, "snatching away lawful victims destined for Madame la Guillotine."<sup>2</sup> These Englishmen

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<sup>1</sup> Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards' excellent book, *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (London: I. B. Tauris, 1994), p. 63; orig. pub. 1986. The 30-page chapter in this book is indispensable reading for anyone wishing to study *Pimpernel Smith* in its original context.

<sup>2</sup> Baroness Orczy, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (New York: Lancer, 1968), p. 11.

seemed to be under the leadership of a man whose pluck and audacity were almost fabulous. Strange stories were afloat of how he and those aristos whom he rescued became suddenly invisible as they reached the barricades and escaped out of the gates by sheer supernatural agency (p. 12).

The leader of this band is Sir Percy Blakeney, a baronet who pretends to be a mindless and effeminate fool, affecting a “perpetual inane laugh,” in order to prevent anyone from suspecting that he is the legendary rescuer of French aristocrats. Even Lady Blakeney, his French-born wife, is deceived by his foppish pose and has no idea as to the identity of the Scarlet Pimpernel, so named because he sends those he will rescue as well as their persecutors a slip of paper “signed with a device drawn in red – a little star-shaped flower, which we in England call the Scarlet Pimpernel” (p. 12). Acting on behalf of the *Comité de salut public*, Citoyen Chauvelin is the Scarlet Pimpernel’s arch enemy. Chauvelin blackmails Lady Blakeney into helping him to lay a trap for the mysterious rescuer, by threatening to have her brother Armand arrested. Ultimately of course, Lady Blakeney discovers her husband’s secret identity, bitterly regrets having unwittingly laid a trap for him, Sir Percy cunningly outwits Chauvelin once again and along with his now adoring wife, makes a getaway from revolutionary France and a safe return to England.



Leslie Howard and Merle Oberon  
as Sir Percy and Lady Blakeney.

In 1934, *The Scarlet Pimpernel* was filmed with Leslie Howard as Sir Percy Blakeney, cast in that role by producer Alexander Korda only after protests erupted over his original and somewhat incomprehensible choice of Charles Laughton for the lead.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Baroness Oczy, *Links in the Chain of Life* (London: Hutchinson, 1947), p. 165.

However Baroness Orczy did not consider Leslie Howard ideal for the part because “he was short and could not look strong enough to dominate certain situations, nor could he tower over Chauvelin, played, as it happened, by a very tall man [Raymond Massey]” (p. 166). And although she disapproved of the film’s ending, she stated that all things considered: “I think I may safely say that my pleasure in the presentation of my romance on the cinema outweighed any disappointment I may have felt” (*ibid.*).

The film, directed by Harold Young, picked up no awards of distinction, but did win high praise from contemporary critics.<sup>4</sup>

### *Pimpernel Smith*

In January 1938, on a skiing holiday in Kitzbühl, Leslie Howard met a painter named Alfons Walde who told him “disquieting stories of friends liquidated by the Nazis.” In the wake of this meeting, imagining an escape story for this painter “was to become the germ of the idea for the film *Pimpernel Smith*.”<sup>5</sup> In late 1940, after the Battle of Britain and during the Blitz, that individual escape story seemed too limited a framework for the film Leslie Howard wanted to make as part of his contribution to the war effort,<sup>6</sup> and while trying to flesh out this story with the help of a friend, the Scottish novelist Archibald MacDonell, the two men came up with the idea of an archeology

<sup>4</sup> See for example the reviews that appeared in *Variety* on January 1, 1934 and *The New York Times* on February 8, 1935 at the following links, respectively:

<<http://www.variety.com/review/VE1117794669.html?categoryid=31&cs=1>>

<[http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?\\_r=1&res=9500E2DD113FE53ABC4053DFB466838E629EDE&partner=Rotten%20Tomatoes](http://movies.nytimes.com/movie/review?_r=1&res=9500E2DD113FE53ABC4053DFB466838E629EDE&partner=Rotten%20Tomatoes)>

<sup>5</sup> Ronald Howard, *In Search of My Father* (London: William Kimber, 1981), pp. 63-64. See also Leslie Ruth Howard’s *A Quite Remarkable Father* (London: Longmans, 1959), pp. 228-229 and 249.

<sup>6</sup> Other contributions he would make include a role in Michael Powell’s 49<sup>th</sup> *Parallel* (1941); writing and acting in the 15 min. propaganda film, *The Four Corners* (1941); producing, directing and starring in *The First of the Few* (1942), released as *Spitfire* in the U.S.; a voice-over (uncredited) in Noel Coward’s *In Which We Serve* (1942); 27 broadcasts to the U.S., in the BBC’s *Britain Speaks* series, beginning in July 1940; and speaking tours in Spain and Portugal on behalf of the British Council.

professor who would lead rescue operations in Nazi Germany, and it was MacDonell who suggested: "Why not a modern Pimpernel?" Not keen on the idea of exploiting the Pimpernel name in this new film, Leslie Howard replied, "Well – not exactly. Let's just call him Smith."<sup>7</sup> And according to his son, he "never cared much for the finally selected title *Pimpernel Smith*, finding it catchpenny and trivial" (*ibid.*). Yet as the following synopsis will show, the storyline of the film – which Leslie Howard produced, directed and starred in, and which was released in the U.K. in July 1941 – is in many ways a transposition of the *Scarlet Pimpernel* story from one "reign of terror" to another, even with regard to such details as a distinctive calling card, the blackmailing of the woman who is in love with the hero, and her unwitting though ultimately inconsequential betrayal of him.

### Synopsis

In the Spring of 1939, a mysterious rescuer, referred to in the press as the Shadow, manages to save a number of scientists and artists from the clutches of the Nazis, getting them safely out of Germany. His calling card, given to prisoners he is about to liberate, is a note with the words "The mind of man is bounded only by the universe." The arch villain of the film, General von Graum (played by Francis L. Sullivan and clearly modeled on the equally corpulent Hermann Goering) is obsessed with capturing the mysterious Shadow, and is also preoccupied with debunking the idea that humor is a secret weapon of the British. In the summer of 1939, the bespectacled and absent-minded Professor Horatio Smith (Leslie Howard) conducts archeological excavations in Germany. The six Cambridge students he has brought along on the dig are unaware that he is in fact the Shadow. He slips away from time to time on his secret rescue operations, in one striking scene disguised as a scarecrow. Smith's students eventually discover that the Shadow is none other than their "prof," and from then on, assist him in his secret operations.

Meanwhile, Ludmilla Koslowski, daughter of a Polish newspaper editor, has been blackmailed into working for von Graum who is holding her father prisoner. Her assignment: to help capture the Shadow, whom von Graum knows will be attending a specific banquet at the British Embassy in Berlin. At this banquet, von Graum and Smith meet for the first time and Smith replies with wit and persistence to the general's absurd claims, e.g. that Shakespeare was a German. It is also here that Ludmilla first sees Smith and immediately suspects that he is the Shadow, informing von Graum of her guess, which is dismissed by the general as ridiculous. She visits Smith's room that night, asking him to rescue her father, but

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<sup>7</sup> Ronald Howard, *op. cit.*, pp. 77-78.



he denies being the Shadow. The next day, having verified that she is in fact Sidimir Koslowski's daughter, Smith agrees to help free her father, whom he tells her is being held at the concentration camp in Grossberg. When Ludmilla tells von Graum that she was mistaken about Smith's being the Shadow, she inadvertently reveals that he must in fact be the mysterious rescuer, since she now knows where her father is being held.

Von Graum expects a rescue attempt, but not on the day it is deftly carried out by Smith, in the guise of a revolting Nazi propagandist calling himself Voden-schatz, who intimidates and rudely bosses people around at the Ministry of Propaganda. Through this elaborate bluff, Smith manages to free Koslowski as well as several other prisoners at Grossberg. Von Graum is unable to confirm that Smith and Vodenschatz are one and lets Smith and Ludmilla go, though under surveillance. Smith promises Ludmilla that he will not leave Germany without her. He then arranges for her father and the other prisoners he has freed to escape from Germany to France by train. When the Nazis interrogate Ludmilla, claiming that Smith has left Germany for good and that her father has been recaptured, she admits that Smith is the rescuer. Smith now returns for her, she is distraught but forgiven for having revealed his identity, and the two of them set out on their own getaway by train. At the border station, von Graum's men arrest Smith, and Ludmilla is sent back on the train to France. It is now that Smith is led into a waiting room at the station where von Graum takes charge of his prize prisoner.

What follows is a memorable monologue in which Smith replies to the general's claim that Germany will soon rule the world:



"You will never rule the world because you are doomed. All of you who have demoralized and corrupted a nation are doomed. Tonight you will take the first step along a dark road from which there is no turning back. You will have to go on and on, from one madness to another. Leaving behind you a wilderness of misery and hatred. And still you will have to go on because you will find no horizon and see no dawn 'til at last you are lost and destroyed. You are doomed, Captain of Murderers. And one day, sooner or later, you will remember my words."

The general then has Smith placed at the flimsy wooden gate marking the frontier, where he can be "shot while trying to escape." But once again, Smith slips through the general's fingers, disappearing behind the barrier when the general turns away for a moment. Von Graum fires his pistol in the direction of the puff of smoke Smith has left behind from his cigarette, and when von Graum shouts "Come back," Smith – no longer visible and safely on the other side of the wooden gate – calmly replies: "Don't worry, I'll be back. We'll all be back."

### The Vodenschatz episode

In the opening sequence of *Pimpernel Smith*, a scientist named Dr. Beckendorf is safely smuggled out of Germany by the mysterious Shadow, but exactly how that feat is accomplished is left entirely to the viewer's imagination. The same is true of Karl Plancke's escape at the Swiss frontier, and also of the pianist Karl Meyer's rescue following the remarkable scarecrow scene. In all these cases, not a clue is given as to how the Shadow operates.

However, in the Vodenschatz episode we are clearly shown and in rich detail at least some of the ways in which Professor Smith gets the better of the Nazis.

In order to carry out a plan he has devised for liberating Sidimir Koslowski and several other prisoners being held at the Grossberg camp, Smith needs six official permits for visiting the camp and a high ranking officer to accompany him when he enters Grossberg in the guise of Herr Vodenschatz, along with his six students posing as American journalists. He will have to get the permits and the officer he needs at the Ministry of Propaganda, and his visit there is prepared by one of the his students who taps into the ministry's private telephone line and says:

Propaganda Ministry? Gestapo Headquarters speaking.  
Department X2. About those six American journalists. We are  
permitting their visit to Grossberg... The journalists who  
wish to accompany Herr Vodenschatz... Your representative  
of the Bund... What do you mean you don't know? Then find  
out! (*Hangs up the phone.*)

Professor Smith, unrecognizable thanks to a fake mustache and wads of cotton stuffed in his cheeks, and wearing a bowler hat and matching suit, then strides busily into the Ministry, puffing on a cigar.



At several points, when he needs to cross a threshold of some kind within the Ministry, he brushes off the guard who tries to question or stop him:

SMITH (*walking briskly past the entrance guard*): Heil Hitler.

GUARD: Who do you wish to see?

SMITH (*without stopping*): I've seen.

Or again at an inner gate, he turns the situation around, putting the guard on the defensive and defining his role as someone who is there to assist him:

SMITH: Heil Hitler.

GUARD: No visitors, except by appointment.

SMITH (*curtly*): How long have you been here? You don't know me? Ever heard of the American Department?

GUARD: Ah, yes sir. I thought...

SMITH (*interrupting him*): Don't apologize. See if you can find my umbrella. I left it behind the other day. Vodenschatz is the name.

After more encounters of this nature, but in which he begins pressing for the permits he needs, Smith finally barges into the office of Steinhof, the department head, along with a subordinate named Graubitz. As this somewhat longer quote will illustrate, Smith captures and holds the initiative at every turn, confusing, and bullying his adversary, and meeting any hesitation to comply with his demands by threatening to complain to a feared superior, in this case Josef Goebbels:

SMITH: Now look here Steinhof, where are the permits for the six American journalists.

STEINHOF: Permits?

SMITH: Yeah, don't you say Heil Hitler any more?

STEINHOF (*rising from his chair*): Heil Hitler.

SMITH: Heil Hitler.

STEINHOF: I don't think I know you.

SMITH: Then what do you know? Have you ever heard of America?

STEINHOF: Yes.

SMITH: Good. Then where are the permits?

STEINHOF: But I... I...

SMITH: Now listen. I'm Vodenschatz. The man who got the Nazi Party those nice headlines in America where they don't like you. I'm the man

who put the Nazi American Bund on the map. And you never even heard of me. Let this be a lesson to you, Gentlemen.

STEINHOF: But ah...

SMITH: No, no, no, no. Let me speak. I've come all the way from New York to correct your blunders with the American correspondents. I've spent two whole weeks with them, trying to nurse them into a better humor. This afternoon I was taking them to the Grossberg camp so they could cable the United States and tell them not to believe those stories they hear about the German concentration camps. And you've got to spoil everything. I ask for permits and you haven't got any permits.

STEINHOF (to Graubitz): No one told me anything about this.

GRAUBITZ: The Gestapo did telephone.

STEINHOF: Oh.

SMITH: So now you're deliberately obstructing the Gestapo.

GRAUBITZ: That would be the last thing I'd do. Perhaps if you'd come back tomorrow...

SMITH (to Graubitz): Tomorrow? Do you want me to keep the representatives of six of the biggest newspapers in America waiting outside this building until tomorrow? Unless I get those permits in two minutes, you'll be responsible.

GRAUBITZ: I'll be responsible?

SMITH: Right! I know what I'll do! (*Pointing to the phone.*) Get me Dr. Goebbels.

STEINHOF: No, no, Herr Vodenschit.. uh, Vodenschatz. I.. I..I'll find the permits.

SMITH: Find them, find them.

GRAUBITZ (to Steinhof): There are some here, Sir.

SMITH: That's better. Now you can fill them out as we go.

STEINHOF: As we go?

SMITH: Certainly. Didn't I say you are coming with us.

STEINHOF: No, no. I have...

SMITH: Oh, this is too much. Please. Get me Dr. Goebbels (*picking up the phone*).

STEINHOF (*rising from his seat*): No, no. I can finish the work at home.

SMITH: Ya, that's right. And we've been waiting long enough. Come along. Come along.

*Smith leads Graubitz and Steinhof from the inner office.*

SMITH: You know, the trouble with you propaganda boys... You've got so used to telling lies... you don't recognize the truth when you hear it.

STEINHOF: Orders are orders.

SMITH (*to someone walking in the other direction*): Heil Hitler.... You know, Graubitz, you're a smart boy.

GRAUBITZ: Thank you, Sir.

SMITH: Yes, you can do something for me. Ring up the Grossberg camp and tell them we're on the way. Have them prepare everything in the usual Ministry of Propaganda style. And remember: America is a soft-hearted democracy. Get me?

GRAUBITZ: Leave it to me, Herr Vodenschatz.

GUARD (*seen earlier in the scene and now holding out two umbrellas*): Your umbrella, Sir.

SMITH: Oh, umbrella. (*Taking one*). Thank you.

*Smith leading Steinhof toward the exit, stops for a moment pointing at a guard's boots with his umbrella.*

SMITH (to guard): Dirty boots.

*Exit.*

Shortly after arriving at Grossberg with Steinhof and with his six students posing as journalists, Smith has Steinhof knocked out, and his uniform donned by Koslowski while the other prisoners to be freed put on the clothing of the "journalists," who later pretend to have been beaten unconscious. Smith makes an easy getaway in two cars with the prisoners he has rescued, remarking as he removes the fake mustache: "Well, goodbye Vodenschatz. You were the quintessence of all the objectionable men I ever met but you served a noble purpose."

### ***Raoul Wallenberg***



Raoul Wallenberg in 1944

In 1942, Raoul Wallenberg, son of a wealthy family of Swedish bankers and industrialists, and who had been educated as an architect, was working as a junior partner in an import-export firm based in Stockholm. During his business trips throughout Europe, including Germany and Nazi-occupied countries, Wallenberg had seen with his own eyes how Jews were being murdered and he became increasingly frustrated over not being able to do anything about the unbearable scenes he was witnessing. One of his friends stated: "he seemed a little depressed at that time. I had the feeling he wanted to do something more worthwhile with his life."<sup>8</sup> It was at this time that seeing *Pimpernel Smith* apparently gave a new direction to Wallenberg's plans for the future, as John Bierman reported in these terms:

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<sup>8</sup> John Bierman, *Righteous Gentile – The Story of Raoul Wallenberg, Missing Hero of the Holocaust* (Harmondsmith: Penguin, 1981), p. 27.

In the grim winter of 1942 Raoul Wallenberg spent an evening in the company of his half-sister at a private film show put on by the British embassy in Stockholm. The attraction was *Pimpernel Smith*, an updated version of Baroness Orczy's classic novel *The Scarlet Pimpernel*. In it the British star Leslie Howard played an apparently effete and absent-minded university professor who nevertheless outwits the Nazis and rescues dozens of prospective victims from their clutches.

Wallenberg identified strongly with Howard's quiet, pipe-smoking Professor Smith, whom he physically resembled. "On the way home he told me that was just the kind of thing he would like to do," Nina Lagergren recalls. By an astonishing twist of fate, Wallenberg was to get his chance (*ibid.*, p. 29).

Two years later, having been accepted by representatives of President Roosevelt's War Refugee Board to carry out a rescue mission in Budapest where he would serve officially as First Secretary of the Swedish legation, Wallenberg carried out in reality the kinds of daring exploits his role-model had performed in *Pimpernel Smith*.

On July 9, 1944, the day of his arrival in Budapest, Wallenberg asked Per Anger, Second Secretary at the Swedish legation, what documents he had issued to the Jews. Anger showed him the array of materials that had been used until then, with varying degrees of success:

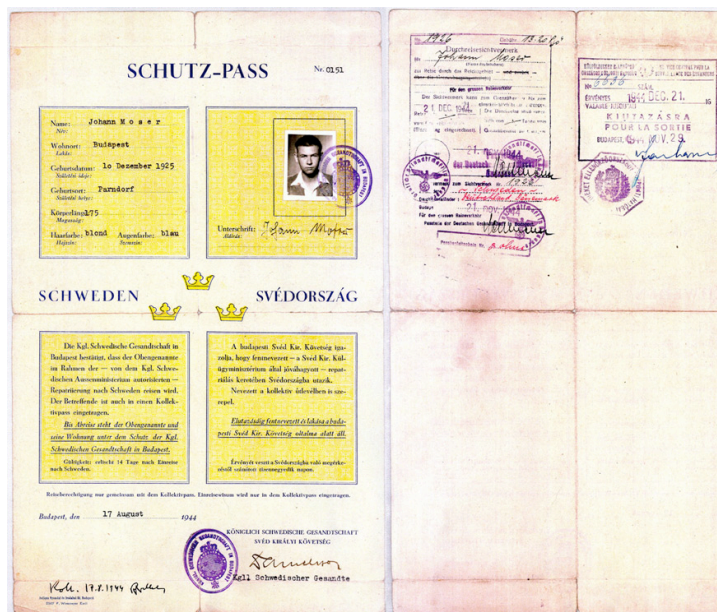
I showed him the provisional passports, the visa certificates and the Red Cross protection letters. Wallenberg looked at the documents and said, after a pause: "I think I've got an idea for a new and maybe more effective document."

In this way, the idea of the so-called protective passports was born at our first meeting. These were the identification papers in blue and yellow with the three crowns emblem on them that would come to be the saving of tens of thousands of Jews.<sup>9</sup>

These homemade but visually striking "passports" with their official emblems, seals and signatures, stated that "the bearer awaited emigration to Sweden and, until his departure, enjoyed the protection of that government."<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>9</sup> Per Anger, *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest. Memories of the War Years in Hungary* (New York: Holocaust Library, 1981), p. 50. Translated from the Swedish by David Mel Paul and Margarita Paul.



The protective passport ("Schutz-pas") designed by Raoul Wallenberg. Originally authorized by the Hungarian Foreign Ministry to issue 1500 of these passports, Wallenberg was able to raise that limit to 4500 and then went on to issue "more than three times that number, bribing and blackmailing Hungarian officials to turn a blind eye" (Bierman, p. 52).

The protective passports were just one of many plans Wallenberg put into practice as part of his rescue mission, which included the creation of "safe houses;" the hiring of hundreds of Jews as embassy staff; providing food, medicine and clothing, even during death marches to the Austrian border; and threatening to have the supreme commander of German forces in Hungary, General Gerhard Schmidhuber hanged when the advancing Red Army arrived in Budapest, unless he prevented the slaughter that had been planned by the Arrow Cross (Hungarian Nazis) of the approximately 70,000 Jews then clinging to life in the ghetto.

Returning now to the protective passports, we can consider one of the most dramatic ways in which they were used: namely as a pretext for extracting Jews from freight cars bound for Auschwitz. While written accounts could be cited to illustrate these remarkable events, the account that does the greatest justice to them is an unforgettable scene in the award-winning Swedish film, *Good Evening, Mr. Wallenberg*, written and directed by Kjell Grede and released in 1990.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur D. Morse, *While 6 Million Died. A Chronicle of American Apathy* (New York: Ace Publishing, 1968), p. 293.



As the scene opens, a truck is seen driving alongside railroad tracks on which a single freight car is being pushed toward a station by a locomotive. Seated in the cab of the truck are Wallenberg (Stellan Skarsgård) and his driver, Szamosi (Károli Eperjes). All dialogue in the scene is in German, provided here in English translation based mainly on the film's subtitles. Stills are reproduced with the kind permission of Kjell Grede and Sandrew Metronome.



SZAMOSI: Everyone in the Spanish Embassy has gone home. I'm the only one left. But I'm not even employed there. We have embassy stamps, flags, and official cars at our disposal. So the Spanish Embassy... is me.

WALLENBERG (*smiling*): Not bad for a Jew with false papers.

SZAMOSI: Lies and deception lead to success. With real papers, you die. (*He looks over at the Arrow Cross guards holding on to ladders at the back of the freight car.*) Here they are supposed to be transferred. If they leave with the next train they'll never come back. (*As the train comes to a halt, Szamosi parks the truck in a position perpendicular to the tracks.*) How many have Swedish passports?

WALLENBERG: Five.

SZAMOSI: Five. Out of fifty-two.

WALLENBERG (*putting on white gloves*): We have to do it in less than two minutes. Otherwise it's no use.

SZAMOSI: Put on the fur cap. Without it you're lost.

*Wallenberg fits a fur cap onto his head. They both look through the rear window of the cab, as Arrow Cross guards pull open the sliding doors of the freight car.*



SZAMOSI: Now?

WALLENBERG: Now!

*Szamosi backs the truck, so that the loading platform is flush against the opening of the freight car, then hurries out of the cab and climbs up onto the platform. Wallenberg, who*

has also descended from the cab, hands him a paper. Arrow Cross soldiers approach, led by a sergeant.



WALLENBERG (in a loud angry voice, addressing the sergeant): This is a very serious mistake for a minor official.

Meanwhile Szamosi is now inside the freight car, coaching the men who all have yellow stars sewn onto their coats.

WALLENBERG (begins calling out names on a list): Schönberger.

In the freight car, Szamosi instructs a man to say "Ja, Ja" and pushes him out toward the platform. The sergeant puts his hand on Wallenberg's arm

WALLENBERG (to the sergeant): Be quiet. (Then resuming the roll-call.) Weiss.

SZAMOSI (off-screen): Ja!

Wallenberg circles around, waving the sergeant over and beckoning him with his gloved hand, so that the sergeant, in following Wallenberg's instructions and changing his position, now has his back to the truck.

WALLENBERG (in a reproachful, lecturing tone): Herr Sergeant. A labor battalion that is supposed to carry out repairs at the Swedish and Spanish Embassies. Repairs that cannot be delayed. (Waving a handful of protective passports.) They have Swedish passports. Understood? (The sergeant, who can't get a word in edgewise, looks exasperated. Wallenberg resumes the roll-call.) Fischer!





SZAMOSI: Ja! (He grabs a man, has him raise his hand, and pushes him out toward the platform.)

WALLENBERG (now yelling at the sergeant): The repairs can't be delayed. Do you understand what that means? Herr Sergeant! (Resuming roll-call.) Fingelmann!

SZAMOSI: Ullman? (He looks around.) Ja, Ullmann.

WALLENBERG (handing his pack of protective passports to the sergeant): Here, check for yourself. (He turns toward the rest of the squad, then back to the sergeant.) I want the names of all of your men. (The sergeant is now facing the truck once again and looking at the protective passports. Wallenberg walks over to him, snatching the papers from his hand.) What is it with you? Answer me! Don't you speak German? (He gets the sergeant to look away from the truck.)

SERGEANT: There should be... should be a...

WALLENBERG (off-screen): Are we supposed to do the repairs ourselves?

Szamosi hurries into the drivers seat in the cab of the truck.

WALLENBERG (keeping an eye on the truck, which the sergeant cannot see): How do you imagine that? You're going to pay for your lies.

The sergeant begins to reply but has trouble formulating a single word in German, then turns to see the truck pull away, with all 52 Jews on the loading platform.



WALLENBERG (off-camera, and still haranguing the sergeant): That was a very unusual transfer. Very unusual and you're gonna pay for it. (Now Wallenberg sees his embassy car pull up, with a small Swedish flag mounted on the fender.) You're totally unreliable. You don't say a single true word. (Getting into the car.) One asks oneself if you know what honesty means. (As the car pulls away, Wallenberg removes his fur cap. Now viewed from inside the car, Wallenberg, looking weary, quietly addresses the unseen driver while removing his gloves.) You were late. 30 seconds.





In this scene, a kind of composite based on a variety of accounts in the literature describing Wallenberg's activities in Budapest,<sup>11</sup> it isn't difficult to see how Wallenberg might have taken what he needed from Leslie Howard's Professor Smith and adapted it to the present circumstances – above all, the use of bullying and insults, of a constant stream of threats and blame, keeping the adversary on the defensive at every turn and never letting him capture the initiative, the verbal and gestural flourish, the hammering away with an elaborate pretext, the perfect or near perfect timing of efforts coordinated with confederates, etc. There are also of course important differences, since here for example no disguise was needed, there was no secret identity to hide. But the spirit and manner of the two performances unmistakably share the same essential qualities.

### **Leslie Howard's death**

Leslie Howard didn't live to learn about the rescue operations in Budapest that *Pimpernel Smith* may have helped to inspire. The *Ibis*, the civilian aircraft in which he was returning to England from a speaking tour in Spain and Portugal on June 1, 1943, was shot down by eight Luftwaffe fighter planes. There is no consensus in the literature on this subject as to why the routine BOAC flight was intercepted on that occasion, and three main explanations have been proposed.

One is that German spies mistook another passenger, Alfred Chenhalls – Leslie Howard's cigar-smoking, heavy-set, balding accountant – for the British Prime Minister. Churchill himself believed this to be case, and when describing his return to England from Gibraltar at about the same time, he wrote:

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<sup>11</sup> Sources undoubtedly included Per Anger's *With Raoul Wallenberg in Budapest* (op. cit.). Kjell Grede had seen *Pimpernel Smith* ten or twenty years before writing *Good Evening, Herr Wallenberg*, but now – approximately twenty years after he wrote the script – he has no memory of the Vodenschatz episode. (Email written by Kjell Grede to this author on 24 August 2009.)

Eden and I flew home together by Gibraltar. As my presence in North Africa had been fully reported, the Germans were exceptionally vigilant, and this led to a tragedy which much distressed me. The regular commercial aircraft was about to start from the Lisbon airfield when a thickset man smoking a cigar walked up and was thought to be a passenger on it. The German agents therefore signaled that I was on board. Although these passenger planes had plied unmolested for many months between Portugal and England, a German war plane was instantly ordered out, and the defenceless aircraft was ruthlessly shot down. Thirteen passengers perished, and among them the well-known British actor Leslie Howard, whose grace and gifts are still preserved for us by the records of the many delightful films in which he took part. The brutality of the Germans was only matched by the stupidity of their agents. It is difficult to understand how anyone could imagine that with all the resources of Great Britain at my disposal I should have booked a passage in an unarmed and unescorted plane from Lisbon and flown home in broad daylight. We of course made wide loop out by night from Gibraltar into the ocean, and arrived home without incident. It was a painful shock to me to learn what had happened to others in the inscrutable workings of Fate.<sup>12</sup>

Another explanation is that the Luftwaffe pilots were unaware that the plane they shot down was a civilian aircraft. This at least was claimed by one of the pilots who had taken part in the operation – Oberleutnant Herbert Hintze – who stated that it was only after they had opened fire that the air crews discovered that the enemy aircraft they had attacked was a civilian plane.<sup>13</sup>

And a third explanation is that the Nazis had specifically targeted the flight because they knew that Leslie Howard was on board. Though Ronald Howard believed the mystery of the attack would never be solved, he also suggested that the presence of his father on the plane, as well as that of T. M. Shervington (Chief of Shell Oil), “may well have been the main motive, the basis for the [Luftwaffe’s] search and final interception of *Ibis*” (*op. cit.*, p. 230). Ronald Howard

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<sup>12</sup> Winston S. Churchill, *The Second World War. Volume Four: The Hinge of Fate* (London: The Reprint Society, 1953), pp. 666-667. Ian Colvin also believed this to be the reason for the attack on the BOAC flight, as he argued in his book *Flight 777* (London: Evans Brothers, 1957).

<sup>13</sup> Chris Goss, *Bloody Biscay. The story of the Luftwaffe’s only long range maritime fighter unit, V Gruppe/Kampfgeschwader 40, and its adversaries 1942-1944* (Manchester: Crécy, 2001; orig. pub. 1997), p. 54.

further evoked another argument in possible support of this explanation, namely:

Goebbels' hatred of [Leslie Howard] for making fools of the Germans in *Pimpernel Smith* and for his truculent, anti-*Herrenvolk* broadcasts. He was, after all, Goebbels' principal propaganda opponent in Britain. And to this the insidious Goebbels would not be slow in adding the racial element, perhaps the lynchpin of his hatred. [...] Though Leslie's point of view was scarcely predominantly Jewish he was tainted, in Goebbels' eyes, by the fact that he had a Hungarian-Jewish father (pp. 231-232).

Furthermore, in discussing reactions to his father's death, including those published in Germany, Ronald Howard wrote:

News of the death of Leslie Howard was given special prominence in Goebbels' newspaper *Der Angriff*. It was celebrated almost like a victory. Under banner headlines, larger than those accorded 'the strategic withdrawal' of Hitler's armies in Russia, the front page bore the words: 'Pimpernel Howard has made his last trip!' (p. 225).<sup>14</sup>

In this context as well as in the relationship between *Pimpernel Smith* and Raoul Wallenberg, the boundaries between life and art, reality and fiction, are not nearly as clear-cut as they are generally thought to be.

Finally, Raoul Wallenberg also met a tragic fate soon after fulfilling his mission in Hungary, and the mystery as to why he was arrested by the Russians in January 1945 and the fate he met while in their custody, now appears to be as insoluble as the mystery surrounding the Germans' attack on the *Ibis*. These tragic endings for two lives, focusing each in its own way on the outwitting of Nazi executioners, constitute yet another parallel between Leslie Howard and Raoul Wallenberg.

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<sup>14</sup> Unfortunately, Ronald Howard cites no date for this article, which would presumably have appeared during the first week of June 1943. However, it did not in fact appear on the front page of any issue of *Der Angriff* in the period 1-12 June 1943 (as confirmed by the Berliner Stadtbibliothek in an email to this author on 31 August 2009). Nor did it appear on the front page of *Der Stürmer* or *Völkischer Beobachter* in the relevant period. I am grateful to two former students, Sven Pohl and Mareike Düssel, for helping with this piece of detective work. Numerous references to the headline, attributing the article to *Der Angriff*, must all stem from Ronald Howard's bibliographically inaccurate discussion of it in his book.

## Epilogue

After completing the above discussion, I was able to contact Nina Lagergren, who graciously responded to a number of questions and helped to clarify an important issue. As the reader will recall, it was to his sister, Nina Lagergren, that Raoul Wallenberg said “that was just the kind of thing he would like to do,” after seeing *Pimpernel Smith* at the British Embassy in Stockholm in 1942.

In a telephone conversation on September 22nd, 2009, Nina Lagergren said that to her knowledge, Raoul Wallenberg did not think at all in terms of carrying out rescue operations in Budapest until the Spring of 1944, when he was chosen to organize a rescue mission for Hungarian Jews by Iver Olsen, who had been sent by Roosevelt to Stockholm as an official representative of the War Refugee Board. According to Nina Lagergren, it was therefore not the case that seeing *Pimpernel Smith* gave Wallenberg the idea in 1942 of taking on the Pimpernel role in Budapest in 1944. Nor did he subsequently mention *Pimpernel Smith* to his sister. So much for what now appears to be too simplistic a view of the effect of the film on Wallenberg when he first saw it.

However, if the film was not the catalyst that first set Wallenberg’s plans in motion, it can still have defined the dramaturgy that would ultimately be in play. On the basis of Wallenberg’s statement to his sister in 1942 and the striking similarities pointed out above between Leslie Howard’s performance, particularly in the Voden-schatz episode, and Wallenberg’s *modus operandi* in Budapest, there is every reason to believe that once committed to his mission at the Swedish legation in Hungary, Wallenberg found in *Pimpernel Smith* a role-model he could adapt to the situation at hand when facing down

Nazi and Arrow Cross guards and snatching prisoners from their grasp.

It is in this respect that the remarkable rescue of countless lives in Budapest involved at least in part the transmission of a heroic model from Leslie Howard to Raoul Wallenberg.

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**  
***PIMPERNEL SMITH***

Director and producer	Leslie Howard
Screenplay and scenario	Anatole de Grunwald
Story	A. G. Macdonald, Wolfgang Wilhelm
Novel <i>The Scarlet Pimpernel</i>	Baroness Emmuska Orczy
Scenario	Roland Pertwee
Co-writer (uncredited)	Ian Dalrymple
Cinematographer	Mutz Greenbaum
Editor	Douglas Myers
Professor Horatio Smith	Leslie Howard
General von Graum	Francis L. Sullivan
Ludmilla Koslowski	Mary Morris
David Maxwell	Hugh McDermott
Shoot at Denham Studios	January-April 1941
Release date U.K.	26 July 1941
Release date U.S. (New York)	12 February 1942

**PRINCIPAL CREDITS**  
***GOOD EVENING MR. WALLENBERG***  
***GOD AFTON HERR WALLENBERG – EN PASSIONSHISTORIA FRÅN VERKLIGHETEN***

Director and writer	Kjell Grede
Producer	Katinka Faragó
Executive producer	Klas Olofsson
Cinematographer	Esa Vuorinen
Editor	Darek Hodor
Raoul Wallenberg	Stellan Skarsgård
Marja	Katharina Thalbach
Szamosi	Károly Esperjes
The Rabbi	Erland Josephson
Release date Sweden	5 October 1990
Release date U.S. (New York)	23 April 1993

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## A note on a source of the *Marseillaise* scene in *Casablanca*

Jonathan Chubb

NB. On October 21, 2009, I received an email from Dr. Jonathan Chubb which sheds new light on the origins of the *Marseillaise* scene in *Casablanca*. Since this issue was in final proofread at the time, I thought it best simply to publish the email. The articles to which Jonathan Chubb presumably refers are: "Bogart's nod in the *Marseillaise* scene: A physical gesture in *Casablanca*." *p.o.v.* no. 14 (December 2002), pp. 136-142; and "Two *Marseillaise* scenes: from *Casablanca* to *West Beirut*." *Canadian Journal of Film Studies*, Vol. 16, No. 2 (Fall 2007), pp. 112-118. The passage cited from Dostoevsky's *The Possessed* (1872), can be accessed at [http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/8devl10h.htm#1\\_3\\_3](http://www.gutenberg.org/dirs/etext05/8devl10h.htm#1_3_3). Some of the French in the quote is incorrect.

Richard Raskin, editor.

Dear Dr Raskin,

Forgive the intrusion, I am contacting you (from Scotland) to query you about the famous "Marseillaise" scene from *Casablanca*, as you have written academic articles on this.

I have been struck how there is no published source that the derivation of this scene is unquestionably a scene from Part Two, Chapter 5 of "The Devils", by Dostoevsky. The novel is also known as "The Possessed" or "The Demons" depending upon translation. I include the Constance Garnett translation (Russian-English) below my signature. Another translation (not the one available online) changes the 4th last sentence to "But already it was forced to sing in time with Mein Lieber Augustin". There are additional peripheral sentences which may also be relevant.

I would like to stimulate some discussion about this- just for the sake of interest. After all, it is one of the most dramatic scenes of one of the most iconic movies of any age.....

Sincerely,  
Jonathan Chubb  
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***The Possessed* by Fyodor Dostoevsky**

Translated from the Russian by Constance Garnett, first published 1914. London: Heinemann, 1914; pp. 291-292 (1965 reprint).

It began with the menacing strains of the "Marseillaise ":

*"Qu'un sang impur abreuve nos sillons."*

There is heard the pompous challenge, the intoxication of future victories. But suddenly mingling with the masterly variations on the national hymn, somewhere from some corner quite close, on one side come the vulgar strains of "Mein lieber Augustin." The "Marseillaise" goes on unconscious of them. The "Marseillaise" is at the climax of its intoxication with its own grandeur; but Augustin gains strength; Augustin grows more and more insolent, and suddenly the melody of Augustin begins to blend with the melody of the "Marseillaise." The latter begins, as it were, to get angry; becoming aware of Augustin at last she tries to fling him off, to brush him aside like a tiresome insignificant fly. But "Mein lieber Augustin" holds his ground firmly, he is cheerful and self-confident, he is gleeful and impudent, and the "Marseillaise" seems suddenly to become terribly" stupid. She can no longer conceal her anger and mortification; it is a wail of indignation, tears, and curses, with hands outstretched to Providence.

*"Pas un police de noire, terrain; pas une de nos forteresses."*

But she is forced to sing in time with "Mein lieber Augustin." Her melody passes in a sort of foolish way into Augustin; she yields and dies away. And only by snatches there is heard again:

*"Qu'un sang impur ..."*

But at once it passes very offensively into the vulgar waltz. [...]



## Contributors

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Born 1974, Yorkshire, England. Ph.D., Lecturer and Research Fellow at the College of Life Sciences, University of Dundee, Scotland. Research uses new image capture techniques to record small biological events. Recent published work: *Gene Activation at the Edge of the Nucleus*, 2009, *Embo Journal* 28:2145. *Transcriptional Pulsing of a Developmental Gene*, 2006, *Current Biology* 16:1018.

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Born 1963, Paris. Ph.D., visiting lecturer. Teaches language and literature in the French section of the Dep't of Language, Literature and Culture, Aarhus University. Published novels: *Star*, 2008; *Les Fantômes du soir*, 2008; *Le Livre muet*, 2006; *La Comédie urbaine*, 2004; *Les Frères de la côte*, 2003; *Les Ombres de la croix*, 2002; *Mira Ceti*, 2001; *Fragments d'une Révolution*, 1998; *La Naissance de la Télévision selon le Bouddha*, 1995; *Les Vies Parallèles de Nicolai Bakhmalov*, 1993.

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Born 1985 in Zürich, Switzerland. 2009 graduate from the European Film College foundation course. Currently taking the last exams for the Bachelor of Science degree in Computer Science at ETH Zurich and starting up a stop-motion animation production company in Denmark.

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Born 1986. B.A. in History, Aalborg University. Has studied Film and Television and is currently studying Journalism. Both at University of Aarhus. From 2008 Chief Editor of the student magazine *Delfinen*.

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Born 1965. Ph.D., associate prof., Dep't of Media, Cognition and Communication, University of Copenhagen. Teaches film and media studies. Editor-in-chief of *MedieKultur – journal of media and communication research*. He has written two books on film sound and film music (*Filmlyd & filmmusik*, 1997, and *Den lyttende tilskuer*, 2000) and numerous articles in journals (e.g. *Convergence*, *MedieKultur*, *Norsk medietidsskrift*, *Montage a/v*, *Film International*, *Excavatio*) and anthologies (e.g. *Made in America*, *Visual Authorship*). He is currently part of the research project “Audiovisual culture and the good sound” (2009-12) financed by the Danish Research Council and is working on a book on Danish cinema.

### Sune Liltorp

Born 1974. Headmaster and founder of Potemkin Film College – an Aarhus based film school. Founder of Plotpoint Film Production, a Danish based production company specializing in shorts, TV-shows, commercials and post-production. Has been working with film and television since the beginning of the 1990's. Robert McKee educated and a freelance editor for Denmark's Radio television. Guest lecturer in screenwriting and film manipulation.

### Jacques Lefebvre

Born 1947, Reims, France. Professeur agrégé de l'université. Taught English, American Literature and Current Affairs at the Lycée Masséna in Nice. Also taught *The Western* at the University of Nice. Now retired, works as a consultant and as a lecturer at the Cinémathèque de Nice. His articles have appeared in such journals as *Positif*, *Cynos*, *CinémAction* and *CinéNice*. [www.lefebvre-linetzky.com](http://www.lefebvre-linetzky.com)

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**Jody Pennington**

Born 1959, Georgia, USA. PhD. Assoc. Prof. in Media and Culture Studies at the Dep't of English, Aarhus University. Has published articles and presented papers on various aspects of American film and popular music, as well as U.S. constitutional law. Author of *The History of Sex in American Film* (2007).

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Born 1952. MA, PhD., Assoc. Prof. at the Dep't of Information and Media Studies, Aarhus University. Has published several books on gender, media and popular fictions, travel literature and the 18<sup>th</sup> century, has lately edited *Northbound* (2008). Has published several articles on crime fiction in print and in film and television <[www.krimiforsk.aau.dk](http://www.krimiforsk.aau.dk)>.

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### Henrik Juel

Born 1951. Mag. art and cand. mag in Philosophy and Nordic Philology, Ph.D. in Communication Studies. Associate Professor at the Department of Communication, Business and Information Technologies (CBIT), Roskilde University, where he teaches video production and film theory, aesthetics, communication theory and rhetoric. Research in film phenomenology, rhetoric and didactics. Long standing interest in the aesthetics of nature and creative and philosophical video production. More information and articles in English can be accessed at: <http://akira.ruc.dk/~hjuel/>

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## Previous issues of p.o.v.

1: March 1996	Three short films: <i>Cat's Cradle, La Vis, Avondale Dogs</i>
2: Dec 1996	Functions of the film title; set-up and pay-off; how films end
3: March 1997	Three short films: <i>Eating Out, The Beach, The Price Is Right</i>
4: Dec 1997	Filmic space, camera movement and metaphor in film
5: March 1998	Three short films: <i>Wind, Immediate Departure, The Bloody Olive</i>
6: Dec 1998	The art of film editing; Alan Alda on storytelling in film
7: March 1999	Three short films: <i>Come, Possum, Goodbye Mom</i>
8: Dec 1999	Wim Wenders's <i>Wings of Desire</i>
9: March 2000	Two short films: <i>The Sheep Thief, New York Encounter</i>
10: Dec 2000	Aspects of <i>Dogma 95</i>
11: March 2001	Three short films: <i>Las Nueve Vidas, Peep Show, Kleingeld</i>
12: Dec 2001	Comparisons of American and European cinema
13: March 2002	Short fiction and documentary films
14: Dec 2002	<i>Casablanca</i>
15: March 2003	Four short films: <i>With Raised Hands, Derailment, Funeral at Parc de France, Remembrance</i>
16: Dec 2003	Film and politics
17: March 2004	Four short films: <i>Bamboleho, Save the Children, Promise Land, The Chinese Wall</i>
18: Dec 2004	Storytelling
19: March 2005	Four short films: <i>Heritage, Cock Fight, Draft, Natan</i>
20: Dec 2005	Film and terrorism
21: March 2006	Three short films: <i>Bawke, Staircase, [A]torsion</i>
22: Dec 2006	Documentary film
23: March 2007	Danish TV Commercials and Advertising Films
24: Dec 2007	The Western
25: March 2008	Three short films: <i>Kitchen Sink, T-Shirt and The Tube with a Hat</i>
26: Dec 2008	Humor in film and TV
27: March 2009	Two short films: <i>Bullet in the Brain and Alumbramiento/Lightborne</i>