Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary

Dir: Andre Heller and Othmar Schmiderer, Austria, 2003

A review by Jessica Lang, John Hopkins University, USA

Blind Spot: Hitler's Secretary, a documentary film directed by Andre Heller and Othmar Schmiderer, is the first published account of Traudl Humps Junge's memories as Hitler's secretary from 1942 until his suicide in 1945. The ninety minute film, which came out in 2002, was edited from more than ten hours of footage. The result is a disturbing compilation of memories and reflections on those memories that, while interesting enough, are presented in a way that is at best uneven. Part of this unevenness is a product of the film's distribution of time: while it begins with Junge's recalling how she interviewed for her secretarial position in order to quit another less enjoyable job, most of it is spent reflecting on Hitler as his regime and military conquests collapsed around him. But the film also is not balanced in terms of its reflectivity, abandoning halfway through some of its most interesting and most important narrative strategies.

In terms of its construction, the film involves Junge speaking directly to the camera. She speaks with little prompting (that the audience can hear, at least) and appears to have retained a footprint of war memories that has remained almost perfectly intact through the sixty years she has kept them largely to herself. Interrupted by sudden editing breaks, the viewer is rushed through the first two and a half years of Junge's employment in the first half of the film. The second half focuses in detail on the last weeks of Hitler's life.

Besides blank editorial pauses, the only other interruption to Junge's narrative is the occasional footage, spliced in, of her reaction as she watches herself talk to the camera. The first such interlude shows her reflecting aloud on her own presentation in a way that is thoughtful and purposeful. After making a minor correction, she essentially dismisses any significance her own narrative might bear, claiming that it is trivial and lacking in depth or meaning. At various points later in the film, the audience again sees Frau Junge watching herself on camera, but this time no editorializing comments are shared, and the purpose of these moments remains obscured. Junge's lips move as she watches herself, conveying the eerie idea that, far from spilling from her unexpurgated, her story is a long and well-memorized script.

The unevenness of the film is a product both of its production and of the period it dwells on. At its most interesting, *Blind Spot* is a commentary about a commentary: Junge narrates her story as a pre-World War II German and then reflects on it as a post-World War II German. Two perspectives emerge from her narrative in these moments, and are best seen when she puts herself in the position of her viewers hearing her story for the first time. Here she not only relates, with broad and fine strokes, what life was like working for der Fűhrer but also takes the time to critique her memories and their consequences. But this aspect of the film is, unfortunately, short-lived. As the film progresses, she enters into the details of her memories and stops stepping outside of the narrative, losing sight of her audience and even herself in a whirlwind of names and dates. While at the beginning of the film, Junge manages to both

relate her memories and reflect on them, by the end of the film, she launches into long descriptions of Hitler's final days—his despondency, his withdrawal and his suicide—with none of the self-awareness that marked the earlier part of her narrative. Furthermore, because Hitler's end turns out to be the primary focus of the film, her narrative falls short of what it promised to be at the start. Perhaps the directors chose to make Hitler's death the focus of *Blind Spot* in order to contribute to the debate concerning his suicide. Or perhaps they wished to highlight a voice of compassion at a time when Hitler was fast losing all he had fought for. Whatever the reason, their attempt to reveal Traudl Junge's wartime story comes across as only half-told.

Junge is, as she herself seems to recognize, a difficult subject. On the one hand, she has resisted sharing her war memories for more than half of her life, relegating them—and herself—to a marginal existence in a small flat in Munich since the end of the war. On the other hand, she has preserved them in her own mind in a way that monumentalizes them. She recalls names, dates, and fine details effortlessly. She talks seemingly non-stop, and is filmed taking only one break, a sip of water, at the end of almost ninety minutes of talking. The result is a narrator who is both unstoppable and yet somehow reluctant, sharing memories with us that she both dismisses as worthless and yet, as her energetic description suggests, significant. Junge's contradictory role as a subject is reflected in the film's title. *Blind Spot* is a reference to her own words, an explanation of how she was able to work for the man responsible for the greatest atrocities of the twentieth-century. She was located at the "center of information," in the eye of the storm, where life was normal, even mundane, and unavailable to the reality external to it.

As convinced as Junge is by her own claim of ignorance, her narrative raises questions for her audience that challenge her post-war memories of Hitler. She typed up much of his correspondence and numerous speeches. In "Blind Spot," Junge never addresses the content of these pieces. But they can hardly be ignored by those interested in the question that she herself poses: how much did she, as Hitler's colleague, know about his terrible goals? Furthermore, the one significant error that she makes in the film denies Hitler his place in history: in talking about the atrocities Hitler committed, she refers to the "thousands of people" he killed. This vast and disturbing understatement joins her other memories of Hitler which are what she deems them to be, fascinating and picayune at the same time. She talks about Hitler's digestive problems, his vegetarianism, his reluctance to touch people, avoiding even shaking their hands. He loved his dog, Blondie, who slept with him; he disliked cut flowers because they were dead; he never saw a badly bombed city, instead traveling throughout Germany in a train with the blinds drawn and touring only relatively intact parts of the city. Taken together, these aspects of Hitler paint a portrait of the man Junge knew during the war. What makes them even more disturbing than what they in fact are is that when she arrives at these descriptions in the film, she has long since abandoned her two-pronged approach to her narrative, one that asserts a historical balance to her memory. Instead her assertions here picture a man who not only once was likeable, but still is.

Indeed, love for Hitler is a subject that comes up more than once in the film. First, Junge tries to explain and understand her attachment to Hitler, the existence of which she readily acknowledges, as a product of his fatherliness. Then she describes sorting through his many love letters sent to him by admirers. Lastly she tells her audience of the one time she saw Hitler kiss Eva Braun, after she declared she would stay with him to the end, a sentiment seconded by Junge and a few others who were present. The emotional content of these descriptions is produced not only by their subject, but by Junge herself. Like Braun and the

authors of the many love letters, Junge adored Hitler. In this film she tries to come clean, to accept responsibility for her "ignorance" and to explain it. *Blind Spot* begins with an earnest attempt to do just this. But by the middle of the film, with Junge silently watching and confirming her own performance, the emotion she best conveys isn't one of guilt or of her own historical value. While these feelings are present they remain subordinate to the feelings she holds for Hitler. Traudl Junge loved Hitler, enough to be blinded by it. The film attempts to shine a light on an important historical perspective and to ask—and more importantly answer—war-related questions that have been asked of Germans over and over again: How much did they know of Hitler's devastating plans? Is ignorance an acceptable answer to deferred responsibility?

In *Blind Spot* Junge may think she has an answer, however unsatisfying we may find it. And the producers set up the documentary to provide not only one answer, but an answer to this answer. Finally, though, the film never delivers on this, its promise.

Dawn of the Dead

Dir: Zack Snyder, USA, 2004

A review by Stephen Harper, University of Glasgow (Crichton Campus), UK

Fans of George Romero often bewail the absence of the cult director's fourth and final film in his celebrated 'Living Dead' series. Their frustration is understandable: as hopes for Romero's final instalment have withered over the years, the zombie movie itself has proved to be a genre that will not die. As if to add insult to the fans' injury, Universal have recently produced a remake of Romero's *Dawn of the Dead* (the 1979 sequel to 1968's *Night of the Living Dead*). It is impossible to assess Zack Snyder's film without reference to Romero's original; which is tough for Snyder, as the original *Dawn* is one of the most critically acclaimed of contemporary horror films.

Indeed, one might begin by asking why this film was made at all. The film's release coincides with a recrudescence of zombies in recent popular culture, as the entertainment industries capitalise on the money-spinning potential of the undead. The almost simultaneous appearance of *Resident Evil* (2002) and its forthcoming sequel *Apocalypse* (2004), *28 Days Later* (2002), the zombie spoof *Shaun of the Dead* (2004), and the myriad of video games such as *House of the Dead* seems to beg socio-cultural explanation. With their images of groups of running, panicking citizens, zombie films certainly encapsulate the apocalyptic anxiety of contemporary America in a more direct and horrifying way than other horror subgenres. In the stunning opening scenes of Snyder's film, for example, the zombie menace breaks out in a suburban housing development, scored to Johnny Cash's Revelation-based song 'The Man Comes Around'. The shocking incongruity of mundane domesticity and explosive terror recalls the terrorist attacks of September 11 itself, while the fear of the other and the sense of paranoia in the heartlands of America speak to the post-911 *zeitgeist*. Clearly, the social anxiety inherent in these depictions of zombie-related terror is in no way bad for business; the public concern with Last Times equals good times for the entertainment industries.

Snyder's *Dawn of the Dead* follows the fortunes of a nurse, Ana (art-house staple Sarah Polley), and a policeman, Kenneth (Ving Rhames, of *Pulp Fiction* and the *Mission Impossible* series). They soon encounter another policeman, André (Mekhi Phifer), his pregnant wife Luda (Inna Korobkina) and a white collar hero named Michael (Jake Weber). This band grows in number when the survivors decide to seek sanctuary in a shopping mall and meet some initially hostile security guards. Before long, more survivors enter the mall, making this film much busier than its precursor. The larger number of characters gives the film a sociable atmosphere absent from the original (in which the intense alienation of the four survivors was more palpable). The larger number also provides the opportunity for a number of gruesome despatchments, which hinder the development of narrative, character, and theme (at least, for those benighted horror fans who still demand such fripperies).

Indeed, a fatalistic atmosphere pervades this film. In Romero's film, two survivors escape from the mall in a chopper (this was a significant change to the original screenplay and novelisation of *Dawn of the Dead*, in which all the characters are killed). In doing so, they represent the potential of the more progressive and sensitive human beings to move 'beyond apocalypse' (Wood 1986: 121). The escape in Snyder's version, on the other hand, is short-lived, as the survivors meet a horde of zombies on the island to which they finally escape. This 'twist' - shown in short snippets over the closing credits - gives the film a very dark tone. This movie is more brutal and pessimistic than Romero's, substituting gory nihilism for character-driven *ideologiekritik*.

One of the interesting aspects of Romero's film was that in some scenes the zombies – pathetically defenceless against a gung-ho mob of survivors - elicited the audience's sympathies. The zombies (who possessed a degree of originality or even, in some cases, of personality) seemed to have something to teach the human beings. Moreover, the human beings in Romero's series were always potentially more dangerous than the zombies. There is no such sense in this film; here the undead are simply an othered and undifferentiated mob. Romero's zombies shuffled ominously, as if inviting the audience to ponder their socio-political significance; Snyder prefers more threatening, fast-moving zombies, reminiscent of the afflicted human beings in *28 Days Later* (2002). If we accept Robin Wood's notion of the inverse relationship between the otherness of monsters and the progressiveness of the films in which they appear, then this movie is less radical than Romero's.

Nonetheless, while most reviewers have stated that Snyder steers clear of the 'moralising' and satirical aspects of Romero's original, there is some overt social commentary in the film. The appearance of the American flag at the beginning and end of the film speaks sombrely to the post-9/11 audience, rather as the stars and stripes in the graveyard at the start of Romero's *Night of the Living Dead* (1968) slyly suggested the deadliness of American foreign policy in Vietnam. Likewise, the early aerial shots of Ana's surburban neighbourhood, mockingly scored to Stereophonics' 'Have a Nice Day' constitute a Romero-esque swipe at the sterility of American bourgeois culture. Here the cinematic style, as well as the narrative content, recall Romero's original, in which aerial shots created the sense of distance required by satire.

The gender politics of this film, on the other hand, give rather more cause for concern. In Romero's film the heroine Fran (Gaylen Ross) is pregnant and yet never reduced to a maternal body. She constantly struggles to be recognised as an autonomous agent, while the men - in her absence - discuss whether she should have an abortion. Fran becomes a multi-faceted heroine who is both an active agent and yet who is also able – because of her position of inferiority in relation to the men in the film - to identify with, and show sympathy for, the hapless zombies (see Harper 2003). In this film, the pregnant Luda is reduced to her function as the carrier of a zombie baby, leaving the hardbody action to Ana. This bifurcation of female roles in the remake dilutes the strong feminist import of the original film. It also reflects the remake's more general tendency to present characters in relation to a relatively restricted narrative function rather than to a symbolic or thematic significance. As a result, the characters are underdeveloped and the audience cannot care very deeply about any of them.

Fans of Romero's zombie series will enjoy the film's several visual jokes. There are several allusions to Romero's *oeuvre*, the most obvious of which is a clothing store named 'Gaylen Ross', the name of the actress who played Fran, the original film's heroine. Nevertheless, this remake is less progressive, critical, and feminist than its predecessor. But as the cultural

appetite for zombies increases, it may be that the funding for Romero's final zombie film is closer at hand than ever before.

References

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Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind

Dir: Michel Gondry, USA, 2004

A review by Kevin Hunt, University of Nottingham, UK

All together now: 'the star of the film is the script'. Which is, of course, true. It's witty, clever, neatly observed, and full of those surreal moments that cinema, and occasionally television (I'm thinking *The Singing Detective* (1986) here), can do so well. That's not to say that everything Charlie Kaufman touches turns to gold, *Human Nature* (2001) felt like an early script resurrected merely to supply demand, but *Eternal Sunshine* is right on the money – probably even more so than the critically acclaimed *Adaptation* (2002). Why? Partly because its less self-referential than the orchid movie, but also because *Eternal Sunshine* brings together the oddball content of *Being John Malkovich* (1999) with a more immediately accessible, maybe even plausible, reality.

Put another way, *Eternal Sunshine* sets up a coherent means through which to explore the inside of a mind, in this case the mind of a lonely thirty-something cartoonist called Joel Barish (Jim Carrey), rather than taking route one and climbing directly into John *Malkovich*'s head through a portal. Although I am perhaps leaning towards the vanilla in my desire for a plausible (or should that be modernist?) diagesis, *Eternal Sunshine* is much easier to admire than *Being John Malkovich* precisely because its conceptual qualities are tied more subtly to the structure of the story.

To surmise: Joel's ex-girlfriend, Clementine Krucynski (Kate Winslet), who has just split from him after a drunken row at four in the morning, visits a company called Lacuna where they erase all memories of Joel from her mind. After visiting her at the bookstore where she works in order to patch things up (Valentine gift in hand), Joel is mortified when she simply doesn't recognise him, and, after discovering from friends what she has done, submits himself for the same treatment. This involves gathering together everything he can that reminds him of Clementine and then going through each object, one by one, whilst Lacuna's technology builds a cognitive map of where each memory is stored. However, midway through the deletion process, when Joel is 'inside' his own head and drugged out of the real world, he decides he'd rather keep the memories than lose Clementine both physically and mentally. Working against the eraser programme, which is manned by Stan (Mark Ruffalo), Mary (Kirsten Dunst) and Patrick (Elijah Wood), Joel conspires with his memory version of Clementine to try and hide her in unexpected, guilty, or repressed areas of his mind that lie outside of the memory map.

The story therefore provides a purpose for the string of hallucinatory and surreal images that follow as Joel moves back and forth through his memories, adapting and amending them to include Clementine, even as the memories he rescues her from are being destroyed. As a result, the film offers an original and curious analysis of an everyday relationship, and, most significantly, suggests how such a relationship is constructed, altered, and shaped by memory. As such, much of what is apparently being shared between Clementine and Joel only exists inside Joel's head. Back in the real world, this is paralleled by the misguided

attempt of Patrick to seduce Clementine by using Joel's discarded diaries and cartoons (a record of his love affair with Clementine) as crib sheets for romantic lines and set-pieces she has already, unwittingly, enjoyed once before – a wry swipe at Hollywood sentimentality and the 'Built-In Reaction'.

Kaufman also deliberately evokes, in order to reject, a psychoanalytic reading of the film by peering into the dark corners of Joel's mind, such as his mother catching him masturbating to a self-penned cartoon sex scene, featuring what looks like some sort of wolf creature, and later imaging himself as baby Joel (but full grown Carrey) bathing in the kitchen sink and getting an eyeful of Clementine's knickers (she in the guise of a next-door neighbour from the 1960s). Nevertheless, while certain taboos are played for laughs, the film does hint at a moral undertone. A brief kiss between Dr Howard Mierzwiak (Tom Wilkinson), the brains behind Lacuna, and his infatuated receptionist, Mary, unravels both his marriage and her relationship with Stan. But this affair implodes before it even begins when Howard is forced to admit they have been through this once already, and that, at Mary's behest, he erased it from her memory. The fact that he chose not to undergo the same process gives him power over her through knowledge she is no longer privy to.

In a dry analysis, this suggests the value of learning from past mistakes and infers the sinister aspects that relate technology, knowledge and power. However, to a more intuitive soul it also points towards love, passion and desire as innate emotional responses that cannot be eradicated through a quick fix, technological/medical, procedure. Subsequently, there is more at stake here than moral finger wagging or a latent technophobia, particularly as the Howard and Mary revelation is a necessary plot device required to set up the ending (Mary's response is to inform all past clients of Lacuna about what they have done to themselves). Looking at the bigger picture, Kaufman is clearly fascinated by the relationship between humans and technology, by how nature and culture intersect, and how individual emotional responses can't be reduced, simplified, reproduced or recorded like so much other data. Instead, *Eternal Sunshine* suggests that, good, bad or indifferent, such experiences have to be lived through.

As such, the film refrains from offering answers or preaching to its audience by veering away from the sort of resolution one would expect from more standard Hollywood fare – *Vanilla Sky* (2001) being a suitable comparison that just can't resist the feel good ending. By contrast, this isn't the sort of story where a flash of Tom Cruise's million-dollar smile can make the world seem alright again. Rather, Clementine and Joel are torn between a decision of the head and a decision of the heart. Blissfully unaware of what came before, they fall for one another a second time around, only to receive tape recordings of all the things they grew to hate about one other in the first place, from tacky hair colouring to puppy dog pouting – trapping them between an instinctive attraction and a rationalised retreat.

Pretty much back at stage one then, except that this time their emotional baggage, bitterly spewed out onto cassette, has just arrived by Fed-Ex in a jiffy bag – the ultimate tongue-in-cheek return of the repressed. However, whether this is a fresh starting point, with the slate wiped clean of previous sorrows, or the final nail in the coffin of a dying relationship, is left up to the viewer. Corny as it sounds, I can't help but feel that, through this inconclusiveness, Kaufman is asking each audience member whether their own personal cup is currently half-full or half empty…

My clichés aside, what makes *Eternal Sunshine*, and Kaufman's work in general, so appealing, is that he places the examination of character at the very centre of his writing. For all the surreal events that unfold, these people live in a recognisably contemporary world where things are familiar and, therefore, slightly drab. This is about people who commute by train, get by in average jobs and live in affordable looking apartment blocks. Technology doesn't rule their lives. Unlike the 'device creep' and 'continuous partial attention' that apparently define twenty-first century Western culture, neither Joel nor Clementine own mobile phones, swan around with laptops, 'interface' with colleagues or surf the internet.

Even the Lacuna equipment is relatively low-key: the big tin helmet Joel has to wear looks like something custom made in a garage, cassette tapes and paper files are used to record information rather than a swanky digital format, and the number of staff Mierzwiak employs can be counted on one hand. This isn't about big corporations and the life-changing technology they forever threaten to produce looming on the horizon. This is about the daily grind, and how people deal with the private chaos unfolding inside their heads.

As a result, this movie has got real soul. In the wrong hands it could have become deeply cynical, but director Michel Gondry lets the story unfold without letting some simple but effective camera tricks and detailed stylistic touches outshine the characterisation (e.g. titles on books vanish, one by one, followed by the shelves they stand upon and the memory they are all part of, before Joel steps straight out of the creeping darkness through a doorway into his friends' house, where he instantly joins the conversation without batting an eyelid). Kate Winslet wins plaudits for her return to form, and the casting of Jim Carrey deserves credit as a clever play on his star persona, internalizing his screen energy and relieving the audience of any rubber-faced antics. Mark Ruffalo is also a surprise, being almost unrecognisable as punk rock fan/techie nerd Stan after his sexually charged turn from *In The Cut* (2003).

Overall then, for those of us with a taste for the surreal rather than the saccharine, who are in need of an antidote to *Love Actually* (2003) and all the other Hollywood romances, both real and imagined, *Eternal Sunshine of the Spotless Mind* is a remarkable tonic.

The Fog of War

Dir: Errol Morris, USA, 2003

A review by Derek Gladwin, California State University, Chico, USA

Often labelled as an arrogant technocratic genius, Robert S. MacNamara has been perceived as the architect of the Vietnam War, amongst other things. Although in this documentary we see the Secretary of Defense for both the Kennedy and Johnson administrations perfunctorily interviewed, we also see a man who, contrary to popular opinion, probes and questions in earnest many substantial events in which he has been a part. Director Errol Morris finds a winning combination in his pursuit in the once unpopular, at least by Hollywood standards, documentary film. Although his past documentaries manifest eccentric qualities, *The Fog of War* received a well deserved Oscar for best documentary in 2003. This begs the question: what made this particular documentary work so effectively? Was it Morris' incredible devotion and talent to a film genre traditionally ignored? Or was it the fact that MacNamara provided such rich and probing questions on some of the most traumatic and influential events in the 20th century? Although both could be argued, the symbiotic relationship between these two definitely became the winning combination that allowed Morris to experience the kind of mainstream recognition rare to an avant-garde film maker. On one hand, the film beckons discussion in its depiction of controversial and profound statements made about a period in history that has influenced the United States' present International and foreign policies. On the other hand, Morris' documentary techniques are provocative and groundbreaking. He is often credited as the greatest living documentarian and could receive much attention and discussion. It seems that Morris, in effect, challenges the viewer to grapple with these two issues and somehow intertwines them into a flow of images and discussion left open ended.

The film catalogues the life and career of Robert S. MacNamara. He chronologically tells the events which he was either alive to witness, or directly involved with during his time in the U.S. military and later as Secretary of Defense. Although eighty-seven years old, his astute recollections and detailed review of his experience provided the viewer understanding of not only MacNamara's charm and charisma, but also his intelligence, precision, and self-critique from which to re-think the past. His timeline begins with his birth during the "war to end all wars" as President Woodrow Wilson proclaimed in 1916. It then systematically moves through his time at the University of California, Berkeley during the depression, his time as a graduate student and later a professor at Harvard, his service in WWII under the infamous Curtis Lemay, and his ascension up the corporate ladder through the Ford Motor Company. He was then to serve as President John F. Kennedy's Secretary of Defense, during which, heavily in the Cold War, he had to navigate through the Cuban Missile Crisis—the closest the world has ever come to nuclear war. It ends with his responsibility for untangling the Vietnam War, which eventually caused his resignation. During this process of recollection and retelling of his involvements throughout these historical periods, Morris captured the essence of MacNamara through not only a movie director's lens, but also through the eyes of a viewer.

Consequentially, the way MacNamara arrives at cataloging his life, in a uniquely didactic way, was to provide a list of eleven lessons learned throughout his life. The eleven lessons are as follows: 1) empathize with our enemy; 2) rationality will not save us; 3) there's something beyond one's self; 4) maximize efficiency; 5) proportionality should be a guideline in war; 6) get the data; 7) belief and seeing are both often wrong; 8) be prepared to reexamine your reasoning; 9) in order to do good, you may have to engage in evil; 10) never say never; 11) you can't change human nature. As each lesson is stated, Morris connects them with simultaneous images of history while the viewer hears MacNamara's voice in the background. In the end, MacNamara arrives at the conclusion that the fog of war is so complex that the mind cannot handle all of the factors. Therefore, the reality of war is a large haze, an incoherent nebulous of irrationality and contradiction for the human condition that seems to find its way into every generation. MacNamara asserts, "our judgment, our understanding are not adequate and we kill people unnecessarily."

The genre of documentary has gained critical and popular attention in the last decade due to not only creative film makers such as Errol Morris and Michael Moore, but also a whole generation addicted to reality TV. Looking at the traditional categorization of the six standard documentary formats used—poetic, expository, observational, interactive, reflexive, and performative—*The Fog of War* combines pieces from a couple. Whereas popular documentarian Michael Moore, *Roger and Me* (1989) and *Bowling for Columbine* (2002), employs interactive documentary methods, *The Fog of War* finds its way somewhere between expository and performative. In one perspective, although the authority of the film is not omniscient in the traditional sense, MacNamara plays the "voice of God" as he discloses information of the historical world in which he lived. In this way Morris pulls from the expository mode. Another approach is to look at the film as a performative documentary in the same way Morris made *The Thin Blue Line* (1988). The performative documentary is a more recent innovation beginning in the 1980's. In this mode the director can evoke an emotional response to an idea in the same way fictional films traditionally can. Through underscoring the narrative with the music of Philip Glass, the film lures the viewer into a state of artistic as well as informative pleasure. Glass' score gives the documentary an epic quality—as if one were watching an emotionally enthralling war movie.

Ultimately, this documentary is not viewed primarily for its development in the documentary genre, but as a film politically poignant in the wake of painstakingly parallel experiences from Vietnam to present day Iraq. As MacNamara stated without direct reference, "those who can't learn from history are doomed to repeat it." The true elements of greatness of this film involve both personality and timing. For one, MacNamara's intimacy with the viewer—due to Morris' creation of the Interrotron—provides an irresistible connection to the film. The Interrotron involves a two camera arrangement with Teleprompters created so the interviewee can actually make eye contact with a live video image of the interviewer, as opposed to the camera lens. Consequently, the Interrotron helps create a first person interaction between not only the interviewer and the interviewee, but also the most important linkage to the film—the subject being interviewed and the viewing audience. With the use of the Interrotron, the audience can make eye contact with the interviewee as if sitting in front of them, which in the case of *The Fog of War* helps hone in on MacNamara's personality, showing strength, uncertainty, grief, and wisdom in great detail.

Further, the timing of this film, as a result of the present political situation in Iraq also adds to its popularity. Although never directly referenced, MacNamara's experience in Vietnam was, I believe, directly part of the agenda Morris placed in front of the viewers of this film.

Although sparse, Morris' questions echoed off screen in the distance were indirect questions intended to connect the past with the present. MacNamara emphatically states, "I have participated in two wars and know that war ends when it has rolled through cities and villages everywhere seeing death and destruction; for such is the logic of war. If people do not display wisdom they will clash like blind moles and then mutual annihilation will commence…I think the human race needs to think more about killing, about conflict. Is that what we want in this 21st century?" Morris challenges the present day clashing of "blind moles" indirectly though his art form and yet at the same time avoids propagandist labeling—a phenomenal work on all levels.

Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkaban

Dir: Alfonso Cuarón, USA/UK, 2004

A review by Alice Mills, University Of Ballarat, Australia

The third Harry Potter film, *Harry Potter and the Prisoner of Azkeban*, bore great expectations of high quality due to the replacement of the previous two films' director, Christopher Columbus, with Alfonso Cuaron, director of *A Little Princess* and *Y Tu Mama Tambien*. To some extent these expectations were fulfilled: both the music and the visual representation of Hogwarts were generally more interesting in this film, and the adaptation of Rowling's intricate and extensive plot was by and large ably achieved. But *Azkeban* is overall a disappointing film.

The lead characters, Harry, Ron and Hermione, variously disappoint. As Harry, Daniel Radcliffe has matured physically, but his acting skills remain limited. His face is rarely expressive, despite the range of emotions that he is called upon to express, such as surprise, apprehension and grief. When he shows his face after a bout of weeping, its tearless serenity is particularly inappropriate. Rupert Grint as Ron shone in the first film with vitality and joy, but dwindled in its sequel to a repertoire of grimaces. In *Azkeban* his range again proves limited, spanning little more than a scale from worry to panic. Emma Watson as Hermione is the ablest actor of the three, and her screen presence has developed over the course of the three Harry Potter films. In her case, it is the film that constrains her, rather than her acting range proving inadequate. The script dismisses her twice as "the brightest witch of her age". When Harry's godfather, Sirius Black (Gary Oldman) has finished sentimentally reiterating his compliment to Harry on his resemblance to his dead parents, he also reiterates his barbed compliment to Hermione as the "brightest witch". Despite her courage and compassion, her effectiveness in dealing with the school bully and her shy sexuality, she can only be finally honoured in this film for her cleverness, leaving the credit for heroism and the softer feelings to Harry. Neither Hermione nor the actor who plays her, deserves this reductive comment.

Despite pruning elements of Rowling's complicated plot, Cuaron has found space for several interpolated scenes. Some function as parodies of Disney pastoral; here the idyllic life of the bluebird is suddenly endangered by the Whomping Willow and picturesque bat-flight is terminated by the hippogriff's teeth. Rather more peculiar are the introduced episodes in which Harry practises magic under the bedclothes and, later, he and his friends experiment with eating bespelled sweets in their dormitory. The masturbatory implications of this first scene are obvious: Harry is waving his wand under the sheet, attempting to create the maximum emission of light, while his substitute father keeps opening the bedroom door to check what he is up to. Towards the end of the film, Harry achieves an even greater emission of light when he casts the Patronus spell to save Sirius from the forces of death; this results in a few drops of life-essence falling suggestively back into Sirius' mouth. Finally, in this phallic sequence, Harry's jubilation when he takes flight at the end of the film, with the best of all broomsticks firmly between his legs, has further masturbatory overtones. The scene in which Harry collapses from his broomstick, which is then snapped by the Whomping Willow, suggests both castration anxiety and impotence—not helped by Hermione's would-

be consoling remark, when Harry regains consciousness, that he should not blame himself for what had happened.

Complicating this reading are the scenes in which male characters dress, or appear to dress, in female clothing. Cuaron derives from Rowling's book the ridiculous image of the boggart (masquerading as Professor Snape) dressed in the clothes of an elderly, eccentric woman with a fondness for vulture accessories. There is, however, no foundation in the book for the scene in which Harry and his friends eat enchanted sweets. Here the boys' headgear or wigs look very like girls' plaits. Later, in Hogsmeade village, Ron wears a cap whose dangling ties look again like a girl's plaits, especially when tweaked by the invisible Harry. Meanwhile Harry is feminised (as in the first film) by the almost transparent veil of his cloak of invisibility. Even Harry's malicious enemy at school, Draco (Tom Felton) is feminised in that he responds to physical confrontation by bursting into tears ("blubbing like a girl", as the traditional British schoolboy story would put it). It is the girl hero, Hermione, who behaves in the most stereotypically manly way when she hits Draco hard on the nose. Such scenes convey anxiety about male sex roles and contribute to the film's subtext of male sexual performance anxiety. This is especially apparent in Draco's cowardice, Ron's cowering when Harry tweaks his tassels and the boggart-Snape's loss of momentum.

As well as its sexual implications, the brief scene in which Harry is hidden under the bedclothes, wielding his wand, can be seen in a Jungian context as introducing the psychological theme of inflation. The volume of space defined by his raised sheet is far too big for the activities of reading the spell and waving the wand; rather, it implies a body at least as greatly swollen as that of Harry's aunt (a cameo from Pam Ferris) a few moments later, as she shoots up from the table, distended beyond human limits by Harry's punitive spell. Physically, Harry is clearly not inflated in this way, but in Jungian terms the huge mound of whatever lies under his sheet is symbolic of psychological inflation, that is, the loss of groundedness in ordinary everyday reality, as one succumbs to grandiose fantasies. Harry's aunt is convinced of her own righteousness when she reviles his dead parents; in a Jungian reading, her blow-out to circular grossness, floating up into the sky, is a literalisation of psychological inflation, much like the corpulence of his self-righteous uncle (Richard Griffiths). Harry's inflated sheet corresponds with his desire to achieve the *maximum* outpouring of light.

Draco is one of the film's disappointments, having lost most of his malice and arrogance. No longer full of himself, he is very easily cowed: in effect, psychologically deflated. The dread menace of Professor Snape (played with typical suave menace by Alan Rickman) is equally easy to deflate. Harry's repeated collapses when confronted by the Dementors of Azkeban can also be seen as deflation, as a collapse into depression with its feelings of complete worthlessness and misery, a reading authorised by Rowling herself. Finally, as the plot nears resolution, Harry soars joyfully on the hippogriff, shaking off any trauma from his adventures, from his near-death, from his dashed hopes of meeting his dead father, from his recovered memory of his mother's dying scream. There is something emotionally hollow about his joyful triumph. Such soaring embodies the essential ungroundedness of Jungian inflation, and it is in the emotional emptiness of its closing scenes that this film ultimately disappoints.

The pleasures of *Azkeban* lie partly in the performances of the adult actors. Michael Gambon is a fine replacement for Richard Harris as Dumbledore (though his accent keeps slipping) and Maggie Smith is as good as ever in her role as Professor McGonagall. Emma Thompson

is an admirably frumpish, fraudulent divinations teacher and Timothy Spall a very convincing human/rat shapeshifter, far more so than the werewolf Lupin (David Thewlis) or the human/dog Sirius (Gary Oldman). Little time is allowed in the film, however, for anyone to reflect upon the violent alterations that have occurred in their understanding of the violent past, the revelations that the seeming traitor Sirius was really betrayed and the seeming good dead ratman was really a traitor, still alive and hiding as Ron's rat. The film tends to substitute action for emotional depth. Of the adult characters, it is only Hagrid (Robbie Coltrane) who shows any depth of feeling, as he weeps into the lake over the hippogriff's sentence of death.

It is the hippogriff who conveys the widest range of emotions in *Azkeban*, from curiosity to despondency, and who manifests the widest range of behaviours, from hauteur to aggressiveness to a stubborn refusal to save himself. This computer-generated creature is a finer actor than many of *Azkeban*'s flesh-and-blood actors, and its last-minute intervention is both admirably well prepared for in the film and genuinely surprising. For me, the hippogriff was the film's true star.

The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp

Dir: Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1943
A Matter of Life and Death

A Matter of Life and Death

Dir. Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, UK, 1946

A review by Sarah Knight, University of Warwick, UK

Representations of nationhood and heroism are particularly important in films whose subject is war. In *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (1943) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger engaged directly with these topics to create films of rare wit and profundity, skewering pomposity. During the Second World War and immediately afterwards, many critics did not know how to respond to their irreverent scrutiny, characterised by Pressburger's biographer, Kevin Macdonald, as "confusing playfulness" (Macdonald, 1994: 258). Sometimes their playfulness relies on the use of a mock-heroic register, subverting the epic tone favoured in the war films of their contemporaries. In film as in literature, mock-heroism derives its impact from a grand treatment of the trivial or from a redefinition of grandeur as pomposity. Mock-heroism deflates military *gravitas* in films such as Kubrick's *Doctor Strangelove* (1964) and Altman's *M*A*S*H** (1970), which turn theatres of war into theatres of the absurd in order to make an eirenic point. Powell and Pressburger, filming in the midst and in the immediate aftermath of the Second World War, did not share this savagely satirical pacifism, and their 'war films' do not promote an anti-war message. However, *Colonel Blimp* and *AMOLAD* concertedly examine military excess to give a wry perspective on soldierly behaviour and to consider the complex nature of 'national character'. These two films show how Powell and Pressburger used mock-heroism among other methods to represent 'Englishness', patriotism and the construction of national stereotypes (patriotism's dim offspring).

One of the central aspects of patriotism and of social order that Churchill's Ministry of Information sought to control during the 1940s was the cinematic depiction of national character. The Ministry's 'Programme for Film Propaganda' (dating from *c*.1940) lays particular emphasis on the depiction of 'Englishness'. The 'Programme', particularly the key clauses 4 (a) (i) ('*British Life and Character*') and 4 (a) (ii) ('*British ideas and institutions*'), presents a serious-minded contrast to the witty anatomies of nationhood we see in the work of the Archers (Powell and Pressburger's production company). According to the 'Programme', the apparently realistic treatment of British heroism was to be fostered. Yet Powell and Pressburger were less interested in didactic realism, and more in characters as vehicles for ideas. In his autobiography, Powell describes the decision to make *Colonel Blimp* as "a challenging step to take in 1942" (Powell, 1986: 399). Sir James Grigg, then Minister of War, turned down the Archers's request, while Churchill himself furiously tried to halt a "foolish production" promoting "propaganda detrimental to the morale of the army" (Powell and

Pressburger, ed. Christie, 1994: 44). The unease of Churchill's administration stemmed from a sense that *Colonel Blimp* was in some way troublesome because it aimed to call 'Englishness' into question. The Ministry of Information at this crucial point of the war would not support what Powell called "a hard-hitting film which lampooned the military mind" (Powell, 1986: 399). Lampooning got the Archers into trouble: in daring to scrutinize 'the military mind', even to represent it in certain instances as absurd, they transgressed the propagandistic norms of 1940s British cinema.

Three years later, by contrast, *AMOLAD* was produced with the backing of the Ministry of Information. However, central themes that had threatened to deflate *Colonel Blimp* before it was airborne still prompted dissent, even after *AMOLAD* premiered as the first Royal Command Performance. The detached examination of nationhood provoked particular criticism in the immediate aftermath of war. The reviewer for *Kinematograph Weekly* identified "anti-British feeling shown during the trial scenes" (Christie, 2000: 60). In the *Daily Graphic* too the Archers were taken to task for their ideological ambivalence: "Ancient charges against British 'Imperialism' which, for the most part, never had any real substance, are paraded – and no defence is offered" (Christie, 2000: 60). So even though the later film enjoyed official approval, similar objections were raised to its representation of patriotism as were levelled at *Colonel Blimp*.

The *Daily Graphic* critic's use of the word "paraded" implies that the Archers made this representation somewhat showily. The verb is accurate. As Ian Christie has noted, *Colonel Blimp* in particular presents "an England 'made strange' in Brechtian fashion by the witty, self conscious manner of its presentation" (Christie, 1994: 47). Central to both films' treatment of national characteristics and behaviour is a slightly theatrical notion of what it might mean to be 'English'. Typically of the Archers, this self-conscious presentation of nationhood is both amusingly and meaningfully executed. We see this theatrical treatment – the grand undercut by the showy, or the impressive rendered performative –in *Colonel Blimp*, from the credits sequence onwards. The back-cloth to the credits is a *faux* medieval tapestry depicting a knight on a white charger, but this stitched representation of bygone chivalry is undercut by the vaudevillian lettering announcing the names of cast and crew. The tapestry's depiction of archaic nobility is shredded when the knight is shown to be a moustachioed reactionary, the Colonel who first appeared in David Low's cartoons for the *Evening Standard*. In *Colonel Blimp* the Blimp-ish character Clive Candy (Roger Livesey) is chivalrous, certainly, but he is also comical, marked by this juxtaposition of grandeur and bluster, particularly as he ages.

As viewers watching the film, we move from a general impression of venerable chivalry (the august-looking tapestry) to the realization that a particular – and potentially humorous – subject is being identified. A similar movement from the general to the specific occurs at the beginning of *AMOLAD*, which opens with a sweeping view of the cosmos. However, as in the *Colonel Blimp* credits, sardonic wit undercuts a sense of awe, as the matter-of-fact narrator refuses to be moved by the spectacular view ("This is the universe. Big isn't it?"). In his analysis of the film, John Ellis argues that the sequence "poses an order very strongly at the outset"(Ellis, 1978: 93). Yet just as the Colonel's red-faced indignation and the gaudy circus lettering undermine the impressiveness of the earlier film's credits, so in *AMOLAD* this grand cosmic order swiftly breaks down. We move abruptly from the leisurely panorama as the narrator with sudden urgency tears himself from contemplating the solar system when a burning, noisy planet comes into view. This is Earth on the second of May, 1945, and it is "night over Europe". Tellingly, it is also three days before ceasefire. Immediately the viewer is plunged into a consideration of the particular plight of one individual, airman Peter Carter

(David Niven). Carter should have died on this very night but stubbornly refuses to join the ranks of the dead, playing havoc with the forces of fate and cosmic order. We might compare the awkward insistence of Peter Carter with Blimp staring out belligerently from an archaic tapestry, refusing to merge with his tranquil setting. In both cases, stubborn individuals (who both happen to be soldiers) are at odds with a larger order. This questioning of established order and fixed fates, as potentially disruptive people jar with a governing system, contributes to the 'confusing playfulness' of these films. A celebration of individualism as set against a governing order suggests that the values and codes this order sanctions can be called into question. Powell and Pressburger do not suggest such an interpretation forcefully, but these films certainly consider sympathetically independent thinking within overarching socio-political structures, and examine how such independence can be accommodated within notions of proper patriotic behaviour and national character.

Colonel Blimp engages from the outset with obvious manifestations of Englishness, as Powell and Pressburger wrote to the Ministry of Information:

What are the chief qualities of Clive Candy? They are the qualities of the average Englishman: fairness in fighting, based upon games: fairness after the fight is over: a natural naiveté engendered by class, insularity and the permeability of the English language...(Macdonald, 1994: 208)

Clive Candy is presented as an 'average Englishman' according to the standards of his class, profession and era, who personifies his assertion made early in the film that "England isn't as bad as all that". Clive is an enthusiastic soldier whose devotion to fighting fair sees him through the Boer War and the First World War, but he does not merely conform to patriotic stereotype. Unlike Peter Carter, Clive is not a cerebral or imaginative man, expressly defining himself against the type of the "sickening long-haired poet", but both men share a capacity for disruption, even though Clive is superficially such an 'Establishment' figure. Clive provokes a diplomatic incident in Germany at the start of the film, and half a century later his behaviour is equally incendiary: because of his "ill-timed" opinions, he is not allowed to make an intended broadcast for the BBC. Clive might embody many qualities of an 'Establishment' figure, but as an individual he still challenges a fixed social order.

At key moments in the film Clive is satirically presented as an embodiment of Empire. The famous sequence in which the animals he has shot suddenly appear mounted on the walls of his aunt's London house showcases the boyishly bloodthirsty hobbies deemed appropriate for this 'average Englishman'. We are deprived of a big-game hunting sequence and never actually see Clive *shoot* the animals, a tactic employed several times throughout the film with particular purpose. The film-makers deny us a view of action and conflict and dwell instead on a character's behaviour in the immediate prelude to or aftermath of a violence that never gets shown. Consequently, we can concentrate on the character rather than the action. This denial of violence occurs perhaps most significantly in *Colonel Blimp* during the pivotal duel Candy fights with Theo Kretschmar-Schuldorff (played with great dignity and delicacy by Anton Walbrook). When the camera pans upwards into the Berlin night, refusing the viewer even a glimpse of the cuts and parries in the duel, we might feel cheated, but as A.L. Kennedy remarks in her study of the film: "the duel is now superfluous. It will not develop character in a useful way, it will provide a false dash of swashbuckling in precisely the wrong place" (Kennedy, 1997: 49). Powell and Pressburger do not include the duel for 'swashbuckling' purposes, as many other forties directors or screenwriters would have done. Instead, they employ the behaviour of the two duellists and the social scaffolding around the

encounter – military etiquette, political implications – to develop their anatomy of Englishness.

The friendship that soon develops between Candy and Kretschmar-Schuldorff gives the Archers their opportunity to further investigate their 'average Englishman'. Crucially, the appraisal of Candy's behaviour that will continue for the rest of his lifetime is made by his new friend, the German originally intended to wound him. Although Clive is a sympathetic individual, he is also too much of a national stereotype (good soldier and patriot) to be able to view his nation with detachment. The most vehement critique of military behaviour is uttered by Theo: after an awkward encounter with soldiers and politicians in Clive's dining room, Theo condemns the English upper classes in particular for their "childlike stupidity", telling his compatriots that "they are children, boys playing at cricket". Theo pinpoints the 'fairness in fighting, based upon games' the Archers identified as crucial to their depiction of Clive Candy. Later in life, he both recognizes his earlier comments as embittered, and acknowledges that the Englishness represented by Clive (and, crucially, his English wife who has died) is an ideal conceived sentimentally, "very foolishly", but strongly enough to cause him to seek refuge in England during the war. After his own experience of the rise of Nazism, however, and despite his emotional nostalgia for England, Theo nonetheless realizes that Clive's sportsmanlike approach to warfare needs to alter. "If you preach the Rules of the Game while they use every foul and filthy trick against you," Theo says in exasperation, "they will laugh at you!"

For Theo, Clive becomes a surrogate for his nation, simultaneously charming and exasperating, basing his conduct on outmoded notions of 'fighting fair'. The film's attitude to such Englishness is ambivalent, which the Ministry of Information saw as a "dangerous... over complication of ideas" (Powell and Pressburger, ed. Christie, 1994: 33). Powell and Pressburger justified their representation of the Englishness Clive embodies by arguing that such innocence needs carefully to be stored during crueller times: "We think these are splendid virtues: so splendid that, in order to preserve them, it is worth while shelving them until we have won the war" (Powell and Pressburger, ed. Christie, 1994: 37). In the film, tellingly, Theo is the one to articulate this idea. Powell and Pressburger's use of a foreign mouthpiece to question patriotism and 'Englishness' was extremely unusual at the time: the act of questioning becomes even more resonant when carried out by a foreigner as intelligent and perceptive as Theo.

We have seen how some early critics of *AMOLAD* reacted to perceived 'anti-British feeling' in the film's celestial trial scene. Much of this feeling comes from the counsel for the prosecution of Peter Carter, Abraham Farlan (Raymond Massey), first victim of a British bullet during the American War of Independence. Farlan is a Bostonian patriot, unapologetically prejudiced against English society, who delivers his Anglophobic tirade to an audience of soldiers and politicians in heaven. In his memoir David Niven describes him as "the 'heavy'" (Niven, 1971:247), but Farlan is not a cartoonish thug or a mere demagogue. In his bravura critique of Englishness, Farlan contemptuously recounts the various inconveniences of the country, its "warm drinks, cold rooms, draughty windows, smoky chimneys, faulty plumbing." Farlan's list of English flaws is persuasively given, and addressed to a jury that is – in Farlan's words – "already prejudiced against your country". Farlan's prosecution begins by judging Peter Carter's personal right to life or death but swiftly expands to a larger investigation of an Englishman's place in the world historically. The "prejudiced" jury includes a Boer from the Transvaal, a Punjabi and an Irish soldier, all from countries occupied or invaded by the British Empire. As in *Colonel Blimp*, in *AMOLAD* we

see the presentation not only of an individual's plight in wartime but also warfare's status at a particular historical moment.

War is debated carefully in these films, which both examine past military success, and relentlessly historicize warfare. In *AMOLAD*, a variety of dead souls from wars spanning centuries watch the young British airman on trial: seventeenth-century Parliamentarians and Napoleonic casualties of war sit in judgement as an aristocrat from the French Revolution acts as counsel for the defence. In *Colonel Blimp*, we do not see such a dizzying historical synthesis, but nonetheless three different wars are presented to us, and each war has its own particular codes of behaviour. This panoramic representation of various wars within a single film has the effect of de-centering warfare and turning it into an abstract notion, particularly since we see very little combat. We have already considered how the camera in *Colonel Blimp* swerves away from depicting Clive and Theo's duel: similarly, we only meet Clive *after* he has won his Victoria Cross in the Boer War, and we see the First World War only as aftermath. The battle tactics of the Second World War are only playacted in the military exercise sequence that frames the film. No battle scenes are shown in *AMOLAD* apart from the initial sequence in which Peter Carter's Lancaster bomber is about to crash. Consequently, we have to ask why these films were set during wartime and what the point of this context was if not to show thrilling conflict. One answer is that Powell and Pressburger seem to have intended the emphasis of their films to rest on national *character* rather than on a depiction of national combat.

We might fancifully interpret the motif of the Archers, an arrow aimed at a red-white-and-blue target, as an indication that patriotism will be sharply examined in the film that follows. Certainly such an interpretation proves true for these two films, and contemporary critics – including the Churchill administration – were swift to pick up on the sharpness of the examination. The attitudes the political authorities demonstrated towards the production of these two films were in some ways markedly different: Churchill's government treated *Colonel Blimp* with suspicion while *AMOLAD* was commissioned by the Ministry of Information. Nonetheless there are key similarities in critical response, deriving from how national character is presented, for contemporary critics seem to have regarded Powell and Pressburger's wry take on a particular kind of 'Englishness' as subversive.

Critics have drawn attention to the archetypal nature of the Archers' characters. Both *Colonel Blimp* and *AMOLAD*, Ian Christie argues, are examples of "modernised allegory" (Christie, 2000: 19). In the case of *Colonel Blimp* particularly, the War Office chose to view this allegorical characterization as a presentation of flattened national stereotype. Sir James Grigg wrote to Powell in May 1942 that the film "revolves around a character that is more fictitious than real," and "a caricature" (Powell and Pressburger, ed. Christie, 1994: 27). But Candy is not a caricature: he is an idea, a personification of a kind of Englishness the Archers were most interested in dissecting. By making Englishness to some extent 'obvious', a technique condemned by the 'Programme for Film Propaganda', the Archers illustrate symbolically how such Englishness functions as an idea, and question it philosophically. They do not neatly map '*British life and character*' onto 'films of heroic actions' but instead problematize the connection between the two categories. Both films ask us to examine how such 'life and character' may be manifest, and how these might link with 'heroic actions'.

Mock-heroism becomes one means of examining national character: the advantage of a mock-heroic register is that it enables the film-maker simultaneously to celebrate and to satirize national virtues. The two protagonists, Clive Candy and Peter Carter, could both be

viewed as types: Clive is the Good Soldier and Peter, as Ian Christie has argued, represents the ideal aviator and poet (Christie, 2000: 17-18). However, the ways in which their individual heroism manifests itself are perhaps less obvious than we might expect from such archetypal characters. 'Obvious' characters, stock types, offer the potential for subversion, through subtle alterations and challenges in how the 'obvious' is presented. Consequently, and counter to the Ministry of Information's decree, it is through such characterization that 'heroic actions' are considered. Both films are embedded within a world at war, but the conduct of warfare is curiously de-centred, and human responses to strange, testing situations take its place. *Colonel Blimp* and *AMOLAD* prize other human qualities beyond stiffness of the upper lip and playing of the game. However, although an exaltation of such qualities in a 'national character' to the exclusion of all else is questioned in these films, these qualities are not cursorily dismissed. Powell and Pressburger considered nationhood and patriotism with compassionate detachment, and this approach resulted in two extraordinary films that offer thought-provoking perspectives on the cultural and cinematic representation of 'Englishness'.

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The Olive Harvest

Dir: Hanna Elias, Palestine, 2003

A review by Lina Khatib, Royal Holloway, University of London

The Olive Harvest is one of the latest offerings of Palestinian cinema. Despite the harsh conditions in Palestine, cinema in the occupied territories is currently enjoying a boom. The first Palestinian International Film Festival took place in Ramallah in June 2004, and Palestinian films are being exhibited across the globe at several international film festivals. Most of the Palestinian feature films have carried a message of peace and resistance to the oppression of Palestinians. Films like *Rana's Wedding* (2002) and *Divine Intervention* (2002) have put forward a subtle, sometimes surreal, message about the conditions of living in Palestine. Their narratives and their characters have been a fresh insight into Palestinian life and culture, without preaching or in-your-face political agendas.

The Olive Harvest is US-based director Hanna Elias' first feature film, and tells the story of two Palestinian brothers in an unnamed Palestinian village who fall in love with the same girl. Mazen, the elder brother, is released from an Israeli prison to rejoin his brother Taher, who in turn is in love with Raeda, the innocent local village belle. However, Taher is too involved in politics to demonstrate his commitment to Raeda; in steps Mazen, with his poetry and sweet words, mistaking Raeda's friendliness for affection, and eventually falling in love with her. The film's subplot revolves around the threat of the presence of Israeli settlements on Palestinian life and the peace process, demonstrated by the juxtaposition of the innocent Palestinian landscape, with its olive groves, with the cancerous expansion of the Israeli settlements.

The film attempts to put forward a message of peace through condemning the two brothers' division after they fall in love with the same girl. Mazen and Taher are meant to allegorically represent Israelis and Palestinians who are fighting over the same land, represented by Raeda. However, while the film's message may be a positive one, it is put across without subtlety. The result is a less-than-convincing statement that is caught up in clichés.

The film succeeds in criticizing both the expansion of Israeli settlements and the Palestinian governmental incompetence at dealing with this issue. The opening sequence of the film shows healthy, hilly olive groves in the golden sun. The camera lingers on olives on the ground, then seems to hug an olive tree trunk as it rises up, in close up, along the trunk and to the leaves, as if caressing them. The shot is abruptly cut to a close up of barb-wire, after which the camera moves back to reveal an Israeli observation tower and an Israeli flag. We discover that the olive groves are under the gaze of Israel, the discovery leaving the audience to feel a chill after the warmth generated by the scene of the peaceful olive groves.

Later in the film Israeli settlements are shown being built around and closing in on the olive groves. The film then depicts a bulldozer uprooting olive trees in order to build settlements in their place. This building of settlements is juxtaposed with the weakness of the government,

who is are depicted as being preoccupied with ceremonies rather than dealing with the issue, which in the film is left to Taher and his colleagues working for the NGO Settlement Watch. A memorable scene in the film shows Taher discussing the building of new settlements with his colleague Abu Youssef, where we see Yasser Arafat in the background, stepping out of a glossy black Mercedes and being saluted by troops, seemingly oblivious to the pressing issues around him. However the film is unconvincing in depicting Taher's involvement in Settlement Watch as the reason behind his inability to propose to Raeda. This depiction is especially pertinent when compared to the life-affirming weddings-under-occupation seen in films like *Wedding in Galilee* (1988) and *Rana's Wedding*.

The film highlights the artifice of the settlements by portraying them as empty, ready-made houses being slotted into place by cranes, their identical shapes standing out in an otherwise harmonious Palestinian landscape. This is emphasized when the lifeless settlements are juxtaposed with the hustle and bustle of life in the Palestinian village, with its old brick houses, streets full of proud men riding horses and cheerful kids on bicycles, and its women happily peering out of windows. However, it is this idealized representation of Palestine that lets the film down. Palestine as symbolized by the nameless village is so mythical an existence that one finds it hard to relate to. One scene in the film starts with a wide shot of the vast landscape, inhabited by a grazing flock of sheep as we hear a call for prayer (performed by Cat Stevens as we find out in the end credits). The scene is then cut to that of Mazen emerging into a garden, sniffing the fragrant leaf of a lemon tree, and surrounded by roses, where he later sits and recites poetry. This idealism is particularly seen in the film's olive harvest sequence. The harvest season begins with the playing of traditional musical instruments and women singing as they harvest the olives, while the children run freely in the groves. It is in the groves that Taher and Raeda steal an innocent kiss behind a tree, the branches framing their union. This all-singing-all-dancing romantic life becomes an over-the-top melodramatic representation of innocence, an Orientalist vision of an uncorrupted Palestine.

This is not helped by the film's stance on modernity, where the city is frowned upon as a place detached from tradition. Raeda's sister Areen—who, in contrast to Raeda who, with her tumbling curly locks, wears a series of traditional colorfully embroidered *abayas* in the film, has short hair and is always seen wearing modern dark clothes—falls out with their father because she has chosen to live alone in Ramallah. In a conversation between the sisters, Raeda expresses her wish to join Areen in the city, to which the latter replies "no, you belong to the groves". To stress the point further, when the father falls ill and is visited by Raeda, his first comment to her is how she smells of olives. The film thus becomes consumed with representing an "authentic" Palestine, where a typical day is a carnival, where Woman and Earth are one, and where the true way of life is that of tradition, not modernity.

The emphasis on tradition is also seen in the family relations in the film. Raeda and Areen's father wants both his daughters to marry and stay in the village so they can take care of him in his old age. Raeda's mother in turn expresses her undying devotion to her husband when he is diagnosed with cancer, and agrees with his views on marriage. In this sense, tradition is interpreted as patriarchy, which is what seems to hold families together. When Raeda's father, unknowing of her relationship with Taher, orders her to marry Mazen, all she can do is accept. The result is a physical fight between Mazen and Taher, naturally set in the olive groves. Raeda, in her allegorical role as the motherland, tries to stop the fight by shouting to the brothers that she loves them both, and that "brothers never fight".

And thus starts the film's descent into political preaching. What makes films like *Chronicle of a Disappearance* (1996) powerful is their ability to invoke messages, rather than ram them down the audience's throats. One of the most evocative scenes in *Chronicle of a Disappearance* is that of a Palestinian woman singing an Israeli song about longing for Zion, juxtaposed with old footage of a stage performance of a traditional Arabic dance, where the dancers' movements seem to be in sync with the singing. This scene evokes many layers of meaning, and hints at the existence of a shared culture between Israelis and Arabs while also being critical of politics. *The Olive Harvest* takes the opposite approach, as if scared that its message would be lost on the audience if not emphasized again and again. On the day of Raeda and Mazen's wedding, Raeda escapes into the olive groves, calling for Taher. Taher in turn, in a bout of anger, had burnt the grove's oldest tree, who we find is called the "family tree" (as Raeda's father had put it earlier, "a 2000-year old tree that belongs to everyone, no one owns it"). As the blue-black smoke from the tree fills the sky, rain pours down, as if nature itself is protesting against the brothers' feud. This causes Raeda to stumble in her white wedding gown. She falls on the muddy ground, her dress becoming stained brown, consequently giving her the same color as the land. Mazen follows, calling after Raeda from her right, while Taher calls after her from the left. Unable to choose between the brothers as they engage in another fight over her, she calls after them both, finally merging their names together: "Maher". The film ends with Raeda's crying as we hear a repetition of her father's speech to her from earlier in the film: "Look at all those trees. This tree is your aunt. This one is your grandmother. They communicate. This is the family tree, the tree of peace".

However, one cannot help but feel that the repetition of the father's speech is unnecessary. The film's message about Palestinian and Israeli brotherhood had been made clear a long while ago and repeated at regular intervals throughout the film to the extent that it overshadows its more successfully presented criticism of settlements. For instance, in the final third of the film, Mazen and Taher are revealed to be the children of a man called Abraham, this religious reference further stressing the same point. The message had actually also been made clear outside of the film itself, with its website declaring how the film was made with an Israeli crew and a Palestinian cast, and announcing that the film is "one element of a comprehensive effort to foster peace by building personal bridges between Palestinians and Israelis" (www.theoliveharvest.com). While it is interesting to see a Palestinian film attempting to advocate a message of co-existence, the film's consumption with its co-existence/brothers allegory (which by the end of the film becomes more in-your-face than a mere allegory), its actors' wooden delivery of lines, its one-dimensional characters played by actors who, in the case of Raeda and Taher, look much older than what they are supposed to be and its over-reliance on clichés gradually distance the audience and deprive them from any chance of empathy with the characters or engagement with the narrative. The overwhelming impression that one takes from the film eventually is a mere picture-perfect image of Palestine that is several miles away from the political realities the film attempts to address.

The Return

Dir: Andrei Zvyagintsev, Russia, 2003

A review by Brian Gibson, University of Alberta, Edmonton, Canada

The opening of *The Return* [*Vozvrashcheniye*] is fittingly echoed near the film's end. It is a Sunday in an unspecified year. A boy, the last of five is jumping from a tall wooden tower at the end of a stone pier into the water below; he climbs the tower railing to make his leap, but then clambers back to the platform. Unable to take the plunge because of his fear of heights, but stubbornly refusing to leave because of his pals will call him "stupid and a chicken," he sits there in his bathing trunks, huddling into himself as the wind rises and the afternoon ebbs. Eventually, as dusk approaches, his panic-stricken mother comes to help her shivering son climb down.

It is a simple, gripping scene, minimally told and distilled to its essence by Zvyagintsev. The boy's stubborn determination to suffer is even greater than his creeping fear. The lichen-covered rocks of the pier, the wooden-slatted tower and the glassy, cloud-whisked water spreading into the grey, cold sky.

The Return is a stark, haunting debut that strips characters to their rawest core, pares the story down to its bare bones, and pulses with brooding menace. Zvyagintsev's work (based on a script by Vladimir Moiseyenko and Aleksandr Novototsky) can easily be misunderstood as ponderously artful or wilfully bleak, but it is nothing more nor less than a naturalistic mood piece, in the vein of a Terrence Malick film or Lynne Ramsay's childhood elegy *Ratcatcher*. Like Malick, Ramsay, and David Gordon Green, Zvyagintsev immerses us, and frames the action, in an indifferent environment that both diminishes the human scale and heightens the emotion of the blossoming tragedy.

The boy on the tower is Ivan (Ivan Dobronravov), and his older brother Andrei (Vladimir Garin) was one of the other boys who leapt into the water. The next day, Andrei, pressured by his peers, calls Ivan a "chicken" too, and Ivan's angry pursuit of Andrei turns into a race home through barren streets and past empty buildings, Mikhail Krichman's cinematography filtering the cityscape through a bruised, blue-grey lens as the film begins to develop its sharply gritty feel and visceral sense of urgency. Seeping into *The Return* like deathly water, this chilling tone is accentuated by Andrei Dergachyov's shimmering, glacial score.

Once home, their mother (Natalya Vdovina) stops them short with the casual announcement that their father (Konstantin Lavrovenko) is napping on the bed. They have not seen their dad in twelve years, and they are both awed and scared by his homecoming. They observe him sleeping and compare the real-life person to the old photo of him kept in a book up in the attic. The grandmother's look at the glowing coals in the grate speaks ominous volumes, as does the mother's gaze off into the distance later that night, when she waits in bed for her long-absent husband.

The boys' large stone home has nothing on its walls, and the sobering look of the home is underpinned by the family's tense first (and last) supper. Messiah-like, their father has returned, and the boys are unsure if he will be a saviour or a wrathful Father figure. (Earlier, Ivan asked his mother, "Where did he come from?" "He just came," she replied.) Mop-haired, wide-eyed Andrei looks expectant and eager, and happily obeys the man, while Ivan, with his downturned mouth and set jaw, is suspicious and wary. Andrei and Ivan, pleaser and rebel, soon learn that they will be going on a fishing trip with their father.

The eerie, foreboding ambience of the film grows as the trio set out in an old car and Zvyagintsev's shots of whizzing asphalt and tilted telephone poles lining the road cut to Andrei taking a black-and-white photo of Ivan grinning out the window as he lets a plastic bag whip in the wind. Their father demands that they end all their questions to him with "Dad," says little, is unemotional, eyes a woman from the driver's seat as Ivan looks on, and disciplines the boys sternly, particularly disobedient Ivan. Resolutely hard, the father tells Ivan to eat his soup at a restaurant within the next two minutes as he takes his watch off to time him. Soon after, he calmly drives off, brings back a boy who beat up the brothers for the father's wallet – which he had entrusted to his sons while he made a mysterious phone call – and tells his children to beat up the thief in retribution. When the boys refuse, the father gives the hungry boy some money for food from his recovered wallet. Later, when Ivan complains about not staying where they had camped to fish, he lets Ivan out at a bridge where the boy sullenly waits in the teeming rain until his father and Andrei return.

Inscrutable and imperturbable in his authoritarianism, the father takes his boys out to an island for no clear reason. Is he a thief, a smuggler, or worse? When the boat's motor breaks down, the father commands the boys to row to the isle, a tall lookout tower at its heart. Once there, not long after the father goes off and digs a strange box out of a pit, the boys row off to fish but are hours late coming back, and with the father's explosive response to their disobedience, the deadly ripples building for so long surge into a sudden, disastrous wave.

Zvyagintsev's greatest achievement in this taut narrative may be the epilogue, when the seething drama has climaxed and a bitterly sad backwash laps at the edges of the frame. The bracing, icy mood has finally been broken and yet, even with the film's foreboding so thrillingly realized, Andrei's resigned calm, suddenly reminiscent of his father – suggesting this tragedy will make him as detached and emotionless as his dad – and Ivan's boyish panic, mingle in a sobering, chilling rush. Before the credits roll, we see Andrei's black-and-white photos from the ill-fated trip, and the snapshots frame Zvyagintsev's celluloid achievement—*The Return* is one long, honest glimpse, the shutter held a little longer, capturing a collage of emotions that add up to a sublime sum of oblique parts.

There is, I think, a deeper undercurrent to this 2003 Venice Film Festival Golden Lion winner. Pavel Chukhrai's 1997 film *The Thief* concerned a triangle between a boy, his mother, and a soldier who acts as an authoritarian, surrogate father and claims to be related to Stalin. The boy's fear and hatred of his new dad grows, and he tries to kill him. The allegory for Russia's love-and-hate relationship with Stalin – the most murderous dictator of the 20th Century who not only killed thousands of his own people and banished millions in the Gulag system of Siberian prison camps, but also led the country to victory over Hitler and industrialized a mostly agrarian country – is clear in Chukhrai's film, and certain plot points are echoed in *The Return*.

Zvyagintsev's film, immersed in vast Russian landscapes that it strips down to their basic elements of wood, water and sky is a more sweeping allegory, reflected in the triangle between a father figure who rules with an iron fist over his two sons. *The Return* is a more general exploration of Russians' perverse fascination with autocratic leaders and the population's simultaneous fealty to, and distrust of, tinpot dictators whom many revere as saviours, while others bitterly resent such false idols. Ivan, perhaps symbolizing the younger generation, constantly chafes under his father's bit and is often angry with his older brother, who is all too eager to please and obey their father. On the island, separated from their mother and homeland, the sons (especially Ivan), so often spurned and harshly treated by their father, finally strike back, leading to the father's sudden abandonment of his charges. Faced with the loss of their demanding leader, the boys try to honour his memory, but in a suggestion that even dictators cannot be revered forever, nature conquers the kids' efforts, and the father disappears, reclaimed by the indifferent, all-encompassing Russian landscape. Without their dad at the helm to direct them, the boys' return in the boat seems purposeless and drifting, though Andrei, the eldest, seems to be adopting an impassive, dictatorial role.

The boys' suffering on land and sea for their father, ironically, was filmed around Lake Ladoga and St. Petersburg, where Stalin's loyal citizens withstood a 900-day siege by the Nazis, a triumph of suffering that led to the defeat of Hitler's armies on the Eastern Front. The interplay of good and evil in father and sons is suggested by the use of light in the film; shadows and strips of sunlight on the walls of the boys' house are beautifully shot, and in another scene we watch the clouds' filtering of sunlight into a darkening, then lightening wood. Then there are the concluding black-and-white photos, the sole documentary evidence of a past journey haunted by a repressive father figure turned martyr. These parallels with, and echoes of, Soviet history and Russia's present political climate make *The Return* a transcendent tragedy that delicately bridges art and allegory through a refined sense of a deep, lingering, irretrievable loss. The sad fact that, not long after *The Return* was shot, young Vladimir Garin, who played Andrei, drowned in the same lake where many of the film's scenes were shot, is a resounding epitaph for this hushed masterpiece that traces those moments of still motion which lead to tragedy.