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**THE WELL-MADE SCREENPLAY**

**A Study of the Screenwriting of British Stage Playwrights, 1930-1956,**

**with special reference to the work of R.C. Sherriff.**

A thesis by Crispus David Cottis, submitted for the degree of Ph.D

At Birkbeck, University of London

I certify that the material in this thesis is all my own work,

## **Abstract**

This thesis examines the screenwriting of British stage playwrights between 1930 and 1956, with special reference to the screen career of R.C. Sherriff. It considers the process by which the techniques and forms associated with the well-made play became part of the vocabulary of the British cinema and argues that, contrary to the negative view of theatrical influence that scholars sometimes postulate, the skilful application of stage techniques was an important factor in the ‘golden age’ of the national cinema during and after the Second World War.

The thesis considers the work of working playwright/screenwriters, with a particular focus on that of high-profile writers such as Bernard Shaw, Noël Coward, and Terence Rattigan, whose stage reputation was part of the publicity for their film work.

The second part of the thesis is taken up with a detailed case study of the screen work of R.C. Sherriff, drawing on Sherriff’s own extensive archive at the Surrey History Centre. This section uses the existence of Sherriff’s multiple drafts, correspondence, and press cuttings to examine his working practices, and the extent to which the aesthetic of the well-made play made up an important part of his screenwriting technique.

## Acknowledgements

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This thesis would not have been possible without the resources of the Surrey History Centre, holders of the R.C. Sherriff Archive. Thanks are due to the staff there, especially Di Stiff, and to Ben Francis, who first helped me to find it. Roland Wales was writing his Sherriff biography there at the same time that I was researching this thesis, and I'm grateful to him for sharing information and DVDs.

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Val Taylor discussed the project with me in its early stages, and Eileen Cottis read, and commented on, an earlier version of Chapter One. James Martin Charlton gave me the opportunity to explore some of the ideas in my teaching at Middlesex University.

My examiners, Christine Gledhill and Charles Barr, pointed out some weaknesses and omissions, and prompted some new research and revision, especially in Chapters One and Four respectively.

This thesis is dedicated to Katerina Jugati and Rebecca Gould.

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## Introduction

The relationship between cinema and theatre has been a longstanding preoccupation of writing on British film. Early historians, such as Rachael Low, were often disparaging about the influence of the theatre, perhaps seeking to establish the specific identity of the cinema against the older and, at least in Britain, more prestigious medium. Later historians such as Christine Gledhill, working in a longer-established discipline, have seen a more complex relationship between the two media, identifying a relationship with the theatre, in terms of subject matter, technique, personnel, and philosophy, as one of the defining features of the British cinema.

This thesis is concerned with the relationship between the two media in terms of scriptwriting in the years between 1930 and 1956; roughly, between the changes in cinema marked by the coming of sound and the effects of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, and the changes in theatre marked by the British premieres of *Waiting for Godot* (1955) and *Look Back in Anger* (1956). In particular, it examines this relationship through a study of a number of prominent playwrights who worked in the cinema; George Bernard Shaw, Noël Coward, and Terence Rattigan, with a particular focus on the cinematic output of the playwright, novelist and screenwriter R.C. Sherriff. Although remembered primarily now for his most successful play, *Journey's End* (1928), Sherriff had a long, and very lucrative, career as a screenwriter, working initially in Hollywood, for Universal and M.G.M., and then returning to Britain.

Sherriff makes a useful primary case study for the purposes of this thesis, for two reasons. The first is a simple practical one; he left a remarkably full archive, which includes typescripts (often multiple) of many of his screenplays and treatments, and related correspondence, allowing a study of his process and development in unusual detail. The second reason is connected with his own history as a writer.



Sherriff was a self-taught playwright, who learned his techniques from a detailed study of the West End theatre, and from his close reading of William Archer's *Play-Making: A Guide to Craftsmanship* (1912), the leading guide in the U.K. to the techniques that sum up what is still referred to as 'the well-made play'. Throughout his careers in both theatre and cinema, he constantly applied the techniques learned from this apprenticeship to different circumstances, adapting to disparate studios, directors, and genres, but always showing a distinct sensibility, even when adapting other writers' prose work (as he did for most of his film career). Sherriff thus stands as an example of the adaptability of the well-made play, as a writer who consciously learned a series of techniques, and applied them in different ways and circumstances.

When originally conceived, this thesis was planned as a more general examination of the screen work of British stage playwrights within this period, looking at more writers in less detail, and more concerned with analysis of the product, rather than of the writing process. The discovery of the Sherriff Archive inevitably changed the focus, allowing for a more in-depth analysis of the means by which an individual author first learned how to write plays, then adapted his techniques for the cinema. Sherriff here stands as a representative of a larger group; writers negotiating the demands of the craft as it was understood and practiced within the theatre of the time, then applying these to the related, but different, demands of the cinema.

In some ways, it is Sherriff's very anonymity as a writer that makes him a suitable subject for this kind of study. While technically skilled and conscientious, he was not a writer with a distinctive style, or a natural talent; unlike Shaw, Coward, or Rattigan, he is a writer without an obvious signature. His plays and screenplays, while showing a certain set of preoccupations, are not, at least on first reading, obviously all the work of one person in the way that, for instance, the plays of Noël Coward or the

screenplays of Preston Sturges are. In this respect, Sherriff is, to use the classic *Cahiers du Cinema* distinction,<sup>1</sup> a Hawks rather than a Hitchcock; the themes and techniques of his work only become apparent when one views it as a whole. His skills were in observation and organisation of material, and he was fortunate in finding his ideal subject-matter in *Journey's End*, which gave him a theatrical success that he was never able fully to repeat.

Sherriff thus demonstrates the robustness of the techniques of the well-made play; his conscientious learning and application of the 'rules' sustained him through his career, despite his own limitations. The existence of multiple drafts of several scripts, together with correspondence and treatments, demonstrate his painstaking application of these principles to the machinery of scriptwriting. The four full-length scripts examined each demonstrate a different aspect of his technique: the careful adaptation and restructuring of *The Invisible Man* (US, James Whale, 1933), with his methodical use of Wells' novel; the creation of an overall shape for the episodic *Goodbye Mr. Chips* (US, Sam Wood, 1939) and the frustrations of its rewriting; the chronological shift, and subsequent change in meaning, in *The Four Feathers* (UK, Zoltan Korda, 1939); and the unusual dual-protagonist structure of *The Dam Busters* (UK, Michael Anderson, 1955). Even at the end of his career, thirty years after his initial reading of William Archer, his dramatic dicta, expressed in a rather frustrated letter to Michael Balcon during the scriptwriting period for *Dunkirk* (UK, Leslie Norman, 1958) remained those that had been carefully constructed by generations of playwrights, from many different countries, which Archer and the American theorist Brander Matthews encapsulated just before the First World War.

The aim of this thesis has been to re-examine the relationship between British theatre and screen writing in this period, when the well-made play entered the British

cinema, and became part of its dominant technique. It has argued that, contrary to the once-common view of the theatre as a wholly or primarily negative influence, the techniques of stage playwrights formed an important part of the coming-together of skills that characterised what Charles Drazin refers to as ‘the Finest Years’ of British Cinema, the period during and after the Second World War.

In this historical view, the early years of the 1930s represent a period of uncertainty, in which many playwrights worked within the British cinema, but without establishing a productive, comfortable relationship between the media. *Pygmalion* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1938) is thus a watershed film, showing how a star playwright could be a significant contributor to both the commercial and artistic success of a film, and emphasising the importance of collaboration, in linking the author with an experienced film-maker, thus establishing the precedent for the Coward/Lean and Rattigan/Asquith collaborations of the War years and after.

The view taken by this thesis is inevitably a selective one; many British playwrights worked in the cinema during this period, and many not examined here are worthy of study; Rodney Ackland, Clemence Dane, Jeffrey Dell, William Douglas-Home, Edward Knoblock, Miles Malleon, Roland Pertwee, Ben Travers, and Emlyn Williams are all mentioned tangentially, and each could have been the subject of more examination, as could John Dighton, Anthony Kimmins, Noël Langley, and Diana Morgan. Similarly, this thesis does not look at the case of British playwrights who, like Sherriff, worked in Hollywood, but unlike him, spent most of their screenwriting careers there; Alec Coppel, John van Druten, Benn Levy, Barré Lyndon, Dodie Smith, and Keith Winter all had careers that would repay more study, especially from scholars with access to US Archives.

## Literature Review

The most important general overview of the tradition of the well-made play in Britain is still John Russell Taylor's *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* (1967), which traces the form from its French origins, through its adaptations in Britain, with particular reference to its first heyday, towards the end of the nineteenth century. This thesis reaches some different conclusions from that book, particularly on the degree to which British playwrights theorised about their own work and practice, and the ways in which the form changed in the twentieth century. In a specifically American context, Kristin Thompson has discussed the influence of the well-made play on the Hollywood cinema in her chapters of *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production 1917-1960* (1985, co-written with David Bordwell and Janet Staiger). Edward Azlant's unpublished Ph.D. thesis 'The Theory, History and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897-1920' (University of Wisconsin –Madison, 1980) details the way in which the body of stage writing theory came into the cinema in the United States, which is important in the industrialisation of the film-making process that took place after the First World War, and which provided the model for the expansion of the film industry that took place in Britain following the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act.

On British cinema of the 1930s, Rachael Low's multi-volume history of British cinema, particularly *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (1985), is central to any study of this period. Low's negative view of the impacts of both the 1927 Cinematograph Act, and of the West End theatre, have been challenged in more recent scholarship, by authors such as Steve Chibnall in *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (2007) and the authors of the essays collected by Jeffrey Richards in *The Unknown 1930s; an Alternative History of the British Cinema 1929-39* (1998). Tom Ryall's *Alfred*

*Hitchcock and the British Cinema* (1986) makes a strong case for talking not so much of a British cinema during this period, but of a number of discrete British cinemas – the commercial, the prestige, the documentary, among others – which then came together towards the end of the decade, partly as a result of the imperatives of World War Two. Charles Barr's *English Hitchcock* (1999) demonstrates that the West End theatre was also an element in this environment, using the example of Alfred Hitchcock's British work, and the important influence on his style of the playwright and screenwriter Charles Bennett, who defined many of the features that were to characterise the director's work throughout his career.

The section on the film work of George Bernard Shaw is original research, based on Shaw's own archive material in the British Library. This material has been examined and analysed by Bernard Dukore in his editing of, and introduction to, *The Collected Screenplays of Bernard Shaw* (1980), although Dukore assumes that every change made by Shaw, both in adapting his plays for the screen, and in the subsequent rewriting, was made under protest, and represents a weakening of Shaw's original writing. This thesis takes a different view of the relationships between the different versions, and therefore reaches different conclusions, particularly about the many endings of *Pygmalion*., in both media. Michael Holroyd's four-volume biography of George Bernard Shaw deals with Shaw's film work in its third volume, *Bernard Shaw: Volume 3, 1918-1950: the Lure of Fantasy* (1991), seeing it as part of Shaw's 'rewriting' of his own life in his later years.

The section on Noël Coward draws on the typescripts of different versions of *In Which We Serve* (UK, Noël Coward/David Lean, 1941) and *Brief Encounter* (UK, David Lean, 1945) in the David Lean archive at the BFI. Coward's screen work has been analysed and edited by Barry Day, in his *Coward on Film: The Cinema of Noël*

Coward (2005), and his Introduction to Coward's *Screenplays* (2015), though this thesis draws different conclusions from his, specifically about the relationship between the play *Still Life* (1936) and the screenplay adapted from it as *Brief Encounter*. Joel Kaplan and Sheila Stowell's edited collection of essays, *Look Back in Pleasure: Noël Coward Reconsidered* (2000), includes a number of important analyses of Coward's work, of which two were especially important to this thesis: David Edgar's 'Noël Coward and the Transformation of British Comedy' which examines the way in which Coward changed the form of the well-made play, and Peter Holland's 'A Class Act' on Coward's portrayal of social class, and on *Still Life*. Edgar's essay shows Coward's developing of a technique – the self-conscious manipulation of the audience, and the explicit foregrounding of dramatic technique – which is then continued in his film work. Holland's essay discusses the differences between *Still Life* and *Brief Encounter*, and the way in which, despite their similar plots, the two works tell radically different stories. Philip Hoare's biography *Noël Coward: A Biography* (1995) is the major source for the relationship between Coward's life and art, which formed an important part of his persona in both media.

The chapter on Terence Rattigan is original research, drawing on Rattigan's archive in the British Library. Again, the chapter examines the relationship with Rattigan's stage work, and the way in which Rattigan used original techniques – the creation of meaning through clashing linguistic registers, and the use of the unsaid as a key dramatic tool – which then informed his screenwriting. Michael Darlow's biography, *Terence Rattigan: The Man and His Work* (2000) re-examines Rattigan's work, and uses some of the same sources, although Darlow writes little about Rattigan's film work.

The stories of Shaw, Coward, and Rattigan run parallel with those of the directors with whom they worked, and in particular Anthony Asquith and David Lean. These are the subjects of two books in Manchester University Press' British Film Makers series: *Anthony Asquith* by Tom Ryall (2005) and *David Lean* by Melanie Williams (2014), which provide views of the collaborative process from the other side, and examine two directors whose skill as collaborators is often underrated. Kevin Brownlow's biography *David Lean* (1996) offers a number of differing, and contradictory, perspectives on the writing process for Lean's two films with Coward, which raise interesting questions about the notion of 'authorship' and what this means, and on Rattigan's collaboration with Lean on *The Sound Barrier* (David Lean, 1952), which highlights the importance of the writer/director collaboration by showing one that was less happy for both parties.

The period covered by this thesis is bisected by the Second World War, an inevitably pivotal event on all aspects of British society, and one of the decisive factors in the coming-together of cinematic and theatrical techniques described above. In this respect, Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards' *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (New Edition, 2007) is an important study of the effects of the War on the national cinemas, as well as including individual chapters on two of the films discussed in this thesis; *In Which We Serve* and *The Way to the Stars* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1945).

The second half of the thesis is original research, based on typescripts and letters in the R. C. Sherriff Archive at Surrey History Centre, and the BFI collection. This thesis aims to trace Sherriff's development as a writer, both through his stage work, and the self-education of the unpublished stage plays written before his breakthrough with *Journey's End*, and in his adaptation of this education throughout his work in the

cinema. This thesis uses the existence of multiple versions, and of Sherriff's correspondence, to examine the ways in which Sherriff revised his own work, as well as the ways in which his work was adapted and revised, sometimes with his approval (*The Four Feathers*) sometimes without (*Goodbye, Mr. Chips*), and the implications of this.

Certain parts of these archives have been examined by other scholars and writers. Robert Gore Langton's *Journey's End: The Classic War Play Explored* (2013) deals briefly with the apprentice plays and in more detail with the writing of *Journey's End*. James Curtis has written on Sherriff's stage and screen collaborations with James Whale in his biography *James Whale; A New World of Gods and Monsters* (1998), while Roland Wales' *From Journey's End to The Dam Busters: The Life of R.C. Sherriff, Playwright of the Trenches* (2016) is an extensive and detailed biography. (Wales' book and this thesis were researched in Surrey History Centre over the same period, and his confirmation of certain facts is acknowledged in the footnotes.)

Certain individual chapters in the second half of the thesis deal with subjects that have been the focus of previous writing. H. Mark Glancy has described the phenomenon of the Hollywood 'British' Film in *When Hollywood Loved Britain; The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (1999), which includes material on *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*. John Ramsden's *The Dam Busters* (2003) is a general analysis of the finished film and its making, although it devotes little of its focus to the screenplay, and was apparently written without the use of the Sherriff archive.

Finally, Jill Nelmes' *The Screenwriter in British Cinema* (2014), although not quoted directly in the thesis, was an important book in its acknowledgement that '[n]either the screenwriter nor the screenplay in British cinema has received the



acknowledgement that either deserves',<sup>2</sup> and its analysis of multiple versions of several screenplays, showing the effects of rewriting and script development.

## Methodology

This thesis is primarily a study of method and process, and the techniques used by screenwriters in the writing and rewriting of their work. As such, the primary focus of analysis is the well-made play, and the use of various techniques associated with it, as identified in the opening chapter. The well-made play can be defined, broadly, as an aesthetic which places great emphasis on the moment-to-moment control and manipulation of an audience, in a way that generally seeks to conceal this manipulation. This control is achieved through a number of recognisable techniques: an emphasis on structure, initially in four, then later in three, distinct acts, the practice of starting the plot late in the story, changes in status between central characters, the planting of certain pieces of information to be utilised later, the importance of characters possessing differing levels of information, the use of physical objects, particularly letters, to convey this information, and a *scène à faire* or 'obligatory scene' towards the end, tying up the various plots. This thesis examines how playwrights, and R.C. Sherriff in particular, used these techniques in their screenwriting, and the gradual integration of them with the British cinema.

Frequently, the films and scripts analysed are themselves adaptations, sometimes of the playwright's own work – *Pygmalion*, *Brief Encounter*, *The Way to the Stars* – sometimes of a fictional or historical work by another hand – almost all of the Sherriff screenplays.

A useful concept here is that outlined by the critic Robert Stam in his book *Literature Through Film*. Stam argues that screen adaptations of literary works should

be regarded neither as imperfect translations with a greater or lesser degree of ‘fidelity’ (as, for instance, Bernard Dukore tends to view Shaw’s screenplays), nor as entirely independent, discrete works, but rather as ‘readings’:

The trope of adaptation as a ‘reading’ of a source novel, one which is inevitably partial, personal, conjectural, for example, suggests that just as any literary text can generate an infinity of readings, so any novel can generate any number of adaptations. An adaptation is thus less a resuscitation of an originary work than a turn in an ongoing dialogical process.<sup>3</sup>

Stam goes on to borrow a concept from Gerard Genette, arguing that cinematic adaptations are most productively seen as examples of ‘hypertextuality’;

The term refers to the relation between one text, which Genette calls ‘hypertext’, to an anterior text or ‘hypotext’, which the former transforms, modifies, elaborates, or extends. In literature, *The Aeneid*’s hypotexts include *The Odyssey* and *The Iliad*, while the hypotexts of Joyce’s *Ulysses* include *The Odyssey* and *Hamlet*. Filmic adaptations, in this sense, are hypertexts spun from pre-existing hypotexts which have been transformed by operations of selection, amplification, concretization, and actualization.<sup>4</sup>

In this thesis, the adaptations are examined as hypertexts of their stage or literary originals. This can be shown as playwrights writing hypertexts of their own work, as Shaw did with the many variations that he produced on *Pygmalion*, both as play and screenplay, or Coward revising his own play *Still Life* as *Brief Encounter*, retaining the same characters and much of the story, while completely changing the nature of their relationship. Other playwrights frequently adapt other writers’ work, producing new works that reflect their own preoccupations and themes. Sherriff’s screenplays in particular show a remarkably consistent, and conservative, worldview, even when adapting authors as different from himself as the socialist H.G. Wells and the liberal A.E.W. Mason.

## Chapter Breakdown

This thesis begins with two chapters that set out the two central areas that were to come together in the work of the playwright/screenwriters whose work will be examined. *Chapter One: The Well-Made Play* examines the techniques that became associated with the well-made play, from their origins in the French *pièce bien faite* through their adaptation by British dramatists through the nineteenth century, how these were theorised and formalised towards the end of the century, how they made their way into the American cinema, and how they had come to operate within the British theatre in the 1930s.

*Chapter Two: The British Cinema in the 1930s* considers the condition of a national cinema reacting both to the coming of sound and the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act. It defines the disparate strands acting within the British cinema, in terms both of art and commerce, and their different relationships with the theatre. These include the commercial cinema, and the effects of increased production that followed the 1927 Act, the prestige cinema instigated by Alexander Korda, which added a sense of social and commercial ambition, and the documentary movement, which was to influence the sense of artistic ambition in the British cinema of the late 1930s and 1940s.

*Chapter Three: The Screenwriter as Star* examines the work of George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward, two writers who formed an important part of the publicity for the films based on their work, and who helped to redefine the way in which writers were discussed within the British cinema. *Pygmalion*, in particular, is an important film in terms of relationships between playwrights and the cinema, as an example of a prestigious playwright adapting his work for the cinema, in collaboration with an

experienced film-maker. This chapter also considers the way in which both writers were dependent for their success on working relationships with sympathetic directors – Anthony Asquith for Shaw, David Lean for Coward – and how their work with other directors was less successful.

*Chapter Four: Terence Rattigan* looks at a writer who, while less obviously a screenwriter as star, was an important part of the films on which he worked, and considers the way in which, like Coward's, his screenwriting reflects the preoccupations and techniques that he had brought to the well-made play in his stage work. This chapter also examines the importance of collaboration, and the difference between his working relationship with Anthony Asquith, and the less comfortable collaboration with David Lean.

The following five chapters focus on the writing of R.C. Sherriff, and the ways in which four specific screenplays illustrate different aspects of his writing. *Chapter Five - R.C. Sherriff: Introduction* details Sherriff's apprenticeship as a playwright, and his biography within the cinema, showing Sherriff's systematic approach to his craft in both media.

*Chapter Six – R. C. Sherriff: The Invisible Man and The Well-Made Screenplay* looks at Sherriff's first filmed screenplay, the ways in which he applied his own theatrical techniques to adapting H.G. Wells' novel, and the way in which he placed this within the subgenre of the Universal horror film.

*Chapter Seven – R.C. Sherriff: The English Pattern and the Hollywood 'British' Film* deals with Sherriff's treatment of the subject of Britishness, and his negotiations of this within the form of the Hollywood 'British' film, in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *Mrs. Miniver* (William Wyler, 1942). The existence of extensive correspondence on

the first film and multiple versions of his work on the second sheds light on Sherriff's working patterns.

*Chapter Eight – R.C. Sherriff: Heroism and Duty: That Hamilton Woman and The Four Feathers* examines Sherriff's preoccupation with the theme of heroism, and how this was expressed in his screenplays for a Hollywood wartime film, and a pre-war British colonial adventure. *The Four Feathers* is another screenplay that exists in multiple versions, including some which include additional material by other hands, particularly Arthur Wimperis, which allows an examination of Sherriff's approach to both rewriting and collaboration.

*Chapter Nine – R.C. Sherriff: The Final Works.* *The Dam Busters and Notes on Dunkirk* looks at Sherriff's final filmed screenplay, and the complex process of its writing, through the treatments and screenplays written before Sherriff's involvement, his own treatment for the project, and multiple versions of the script. It also considers his work on an unfilmed screenplay for *Dunkirk*, and the notes that he wrote to Michael Balcon, which make up the closest thing he ever produced to a manifesto.

Overall, this thesis gives an account of the screenwriting work and processes of a number of successful stage playwrights, examining the theatrical and cinematic contexts from which they came, and shows how theatrical techniques were central to their work in the cinema.

## Chapter One – The Well-Made Play

In the *Spectator*, on 5 February 1937, Graham Greene, the magazine's film critic, used his negative review of *Sensation* (UK, Brian Desmond Hurst, 1937) to launch a critique of the weaknesses of the British cinema at that time. He concluded that there were three: 'Bad casting, bad story construction, uncertain ending; these are the three main faults of English films.'<sup>5</sup> In commenting on the film's poor writing and structure, he voiced a longstanding complaint; in 1932, L'Estrange Fawcett had written 'How many English films fall through rhythm failure!'<sup>6</sup>

This thesis argues that these problems were partly addressed by the increased involvement in the British cinema of skilful theatrical practitioners, and that the unusually productive period during and just after the Second World War owes a great deal to the intelligent application of theatrical techniques. This chapter aims to examine the skills that stage playwrights brought to the screen. These apply particularly to techniques of structure and construction, broadly characterised by the phrase 'the well-made play.'

British and American playwrights of this period inherited a debate about the mechanics of dramatic construction that had been going on since the first half of the nineteenth century. This debate was not just embedded in the plays themselves, but discussed in the press, in the writers' public pronouncements, and in the many manuals on playwriting published during that period, especially towards the end of the century. These all contributed to a well-established set of techniques of storytelling and of the careful management, moment to moment, of the relationship between the play and its audience.

To understand the way in which this orthodoxy developed, it is necessary to get a sense of its historical context. This chapter will therefore begin with a survey of how

dramatic form was developed in the nineteenth century French theatre, adapted and naturalised by British playwrights throughout that century, and given new possibilities through the influence of Henrik Ibsen. This will demonstrate the skills and techniques that stage playwrights had inherited by the time they came to begin their work in the British Cinema.

### **Origins of the Well-Made Play**

The phrase ‘well-made play’ entered the Anglophone theatre through the French *pièce bien faite*, which was first applied to the writings of the prolific Eugène Scribe (1791-1861) and his disciples in the French theatre, most notably Victorien Sardou (1831-1908). Between his debut in 1811 and his last play, nearly half a century later, Scribe wrote, alone or in collaboration, 216 short comedies, 35 full-length plays and the libretti for 28 grand operas, 86 *opéras comiques* and 9 *opéra-ballets*. This remarkable output was made possible by Scribe’s discovery, early on in his career, of a formula, a Platonic ideal of theatrical structure.

The *pièce bien faite* came out of a very specific moment in French theatrical culture, and one taking place in different forms across Europe, that can be summed up as the rise of the middle-class audience. In this respect, Scribe is very much a man of his time; born two years after the French revolution, he began his theatrical career under Napoleon and flourished in the reign of the ‘bourgeois king’, Louis-Philippe (1830-1848) and the Second Empire (1852-1870). The *pièce bien faite*, with its economical, very deliberate use of storytelling techniques and its narrative restraint, is well-suited to the middle-class audience that emerged in France throughout the nineteenth century.

The eighteen years of Louis-Philippe’s reign witnessed the formation of the first modern, middle-class audience, whether for newspapers, novels or the

theatre. In earlier days the bourgeois view might be balanced by the aristocratic, but now, through penury, powerlessness or simply through overfrequent contact with the bourgeoisie, even the aristocrats were becoming middle class in their views. If the writer wished to appeal to a mass audience, there was only one available [.]<sup>7</sup>

In this respect, Scribe's dramaturgy contrasts with both the classical aristocratic drama, and the popular theatre of the melodrama. Where both of these emphasise extremes, the *pièce bien faite* aims at a more restrained use of emotion, and where the melodrama achieves its end through a heterogenous use of technique, calling on high emotion, comedy, and spectacle, as well as the music that gives it its name –the *pièce bien faite* calls on a more limited artistic palette that comes back to one specific technique – the control of time.

It's worth pointing out that 'well-made play' is a somewhat misleading translation; the French adjective *fait/e* can mean 'made', but it also carries a number of additional meanings, including 'finished' and, especially relevant to this context, 'ripe'.<sup>8</sup> The context in which one is most likely to hear the phrase *bien faite* outside a theatre is in a grocery; a cheese or piece of fruit is said to be *bien faite* when it's at its best, ripest and ready to eat. The application of the phrase to playwriting carries a similar sense of good timing; the *pièce bien faite* is distinguished by the way in which theatrical events, particularly those concerning the release of information, occur at the moment of maximum dramatic effect, through a control of what the music critic Evan Eisenberg has termed 'the architecture of time'.<sup>9</sup>

Partly because of this confusion, to a modern British reader (or audience), accustomed to the form as it later developed in the U.K., Scribe's plays seem anything but 'well-made.' Even in his most successful plays, such as *Un Verre D'Eau* (*A Glass of Water*, 1840), events follow one on top of another, with what the British critic and playwright William Archer (1856-1924), whose *Play-Making: A Manual of*



*Craftsmanship* (1912) was the most influential manual of the well-made play in Britain, was to refer to as a 'feverish overcrowding of incident'.<sup>10</sup> However, Scribe's plays are characterised by a careful control of the audience's reaction, through the use of a number of techniques that became part of the toolkit of dramatic writing, first for the stage and later the screen.

[Scribe] saw that all drama, in performance, is an experience in time and that therefore the first essential is to keep one's audience attentive from one minute to the next. [...] His plays inculcated, not the overall construction of drama as Racine would have understood it, but at least the spacing and preparation of effects so that an audience should be kept expectant from beginning to end.<sup>11</sup>

The central feature of the Scribean drama is this control of time, and in particular the careful setting up of narrative devices that will be paid off later in the play. Scribe's talent was in the placing of these devices so that the audience always had a reason to continue following the story. William Archer refers to this technique as the 'finger-post', saying that '[t]he art of construction is summed up, first, in giving the mind of an audience something to stretch forward to, and, secondly, in not letting it feel that it has stretched forward in vain.'<sup>12</sup>

This process begins with what Archer was to call the 'late point of attack'.<sup>13</sup> Typically, a Scribe play will raise the curtain on a situation that has been in place for some time, with secrets and rivalries already in place. The interest for an audience lies in the gradual revelation of the former, and the playing out of the latter, with each curtain falling on either a major new discovery or a turning point in the protagonist's fortunes.

This reliance on previous events creates a technical difficulty for the writer, as it necessitates the use of a considerable amount of exposition, generally taking up most of the first act, with the plot only getting started just before the First Act curtain. Later

dramatists, following the example of Henrik Ibsen, often used servants as a kind of proletarian chorus, discussing their employers' affairs at the beginning of the play, then disappearing after the first act.<sup>14</sup> As this thesis will be explaining later, this technique carried on into the cinema – R. C. Sherriff does something similar in *The Dam Busters*, which opens with an expositional duologue between the protagonist's wife and a character who never appears again.

Scribe also bases tension on different levels of knowledge – characters are defined by virtue of what they know, whom they know it about, whom they tell it to, and when. The audience knows almost everything, and part of its enjoyment lies in our observing characters interact with different degrees of information, like, as Archer put it 'superior intelligences watching, with marvelous clairvoyance, the stumbling and fumbings of poor blind mortals straying through the labyrinth of life.'<sup>15</sup> This concept has been defined more recently by the screenwriter Michael Eaton as 'the choreography of knowledge',<sup>16</sup> and reaches some kind of limit in Emlyn Williams' comedy *The Druid's Rest* (1944), in which the plot depends on three copies of the same newspaper, each with a different section torn out.

Indeed, newspapers, letters, and other conveyors of information were all to become vital to the technique of the well-made play, as they help the playwrights ensure that different characters have the necessary different levels in their awareness. Victorien Sardou elevated the use of the letter to a personal trademark: when he was admitted into the French Academy in 1878, its Director spoke of this: 'The letter! It plays a major part in most of your plots, and every detail of it is vital, container and contents. The envelope, the seal, the wax, the stamp, the postmark, the shade of the paper, and the perfume that clings to it [...]'<sup>17</sup> Martin Meisel, writing of Sardou's play

*Les Pattes de mouche* (1861; the title literally means ‘Fly tracks’, though the play is known in English as *A Scrap of Paper*) is even more emphatic:

The play tracks the letter’s perils and humiliations. It is rescued from oblivion, concealed in plain sight (as in Poe), singed, twisted, tossed from a window, torn, turned into a beetle-holder, and eventually burned to ashes. [...] Unlike Othello’s handkerchief, which acts on an Othello already convinced and transformed and whose role is thus non-essential, Sardou’s scrap of paper is the indispensable heart and soul of the dramatic action – the Object (a visible hand-prop, renewed each night) as Protagonist.<sup>18</sup>

One particular application of the choreography of knowledge is the idea of the misunderstanding, or *quiproquo*, from the Latin *quid pro quo*, ‘something for something,’ a line or situation that is interpreted in different ways by different characters, with the audience in a position of superior knowledge to them all. This is hardly a new technique – the eponymous hero of a 1791 English play, *The Dramatist*, refers to it under the name of an *equivoque*<sup>19</sup> – but, in Scribe’s hands, it became a principle, if not a cliché, especially in the treatment of love stories.

In the penultimate act comes the *scène à faire*, a term originated by the French dramatic critic Francisque Sarcey (1827-1899), and translated by William Archer as ‘obligatory scene’. Archer defined it as ‘one which the audience (more or less clearly and consciously) foresees and desires, and the absence of which it may with reason resent.’<sup>20</sup> In particular, it refers to the final confrontation between protagonist and antagonist. Sardou, who refined and formularised many of Scribe’s techniques, revealed that he would often write a play by devising the *scène à faire*, then working out the plot in reverse.<sup>21</sup> In the 1930s, Noël Coward advised the emerging playwright Terence Rattigan to do the same.<sup>22</sup>

The final act is the *denouement* (literally ‘untying’), a development of the Aristotlean idea of *anagnorisis*, or realisation. This act ties up all the loose ends, revealing all hidden truths, identities, and deceits, and leaving the audience with a sense

of completeness. In this respect, Scribe's dramaturgy is distinctly parsimonious. Where a melodramatist like Douglas Jerrold will produce a previously unmentioned letter to get his hero out of trouble in the last act of *Black Ey'd Susan* (1829),<sup>23</sup> Scribe places great emphasis on using up all the narrative elements set up in the first act, so that by the end there is a sense of the narrative being closed up, with nothing left over. Richard Dyer, in his analysis of *Brief Encounter*, describes it as informed by a 'well made' tradition of drama, defined as 'that ideal of playwriting in which all loose ends are tied up and every detail contributes to the overall thematics of the work.'<sup>24</sup>

In the case of *Un Verre D'Eau*, the final crisis, leading to both the *scène à faire* and the *denouement*, is prompted by the Queen's drinking of the titular glass of water. It is a feature of the Scribean drama that great events spring from small causes. Indeed, the character Bolingbroke comments on this within the play:

Little things can lead to great ones. This war with France sprang from the wounded vanity of a courtesan. And look at me! Do you know how Henry St. John – once considered a dandy and a blockhead – do you know how I became a cabinet minister... Because I knew the latest dance-step, the saraband. And do you know why I lost power? I caught a cold.<sup>25</sup>

Again, this makes an important point about the world view of the *pièce bien faite*. Where the Aristotlean drama is aristocratic, suggesting an inevitability that includes the social order, and the melodrama is moralistic and Manichean, doling out justice to the malefactor 'as a sacrifice to its stern and hungry gods',<sup>26</sup> the Scribean drama is bourgeois and contingent, painting a world in which things can change, and do so, often for trivial reasons.

Of course, many if not all of these techniques are older than Scribe – letters have been important in theatrical storytelling since at least *Romeo and Juliet*, different levels of information became a tool of the dramatist when Sophocles added the third actor, allowing for deceit, alliance and concealment. Scribe and Sardou differ from earlier

dramatists in two significant respects. The first is a formalisation and categorisation of technique as the central feature of the dramatist's craft – the moment-by-moment manipulation of the audience becomes the skill by which a playwright is distinguished. The second, paradoxically, is a deliberate downplaying of the overt use of these techniques – where a melodramatist would make a feature of the emotional climaxes of his writing, Scribe seeks to conceal them within a more domestic setting. As we see, British dramatists and screenwriters, adapting the *pièce bien faite* for British audiences, were to take this sense of economy and restraint to even greater lengths.

The *pièce bien faite* was introduced by Scribe and perfected by Sardou, who turned it into a four-act formula: exposition - complication - *scène à faire* - *denouement*. (As the drama of intrigue became less dominant throughout the nineteenth century, the *denouement* gradually became less important, leaving the three-act structure still taught as the paradigm.)<sup>27</sup> The form was perfect, but empty. 'What the Scribean artefact lacked was life: character, thought, poetry.'<sup>28</sup> A century later, J. B. Priestley (1894-1984) summed it up from a British perspective:

The trouble with these Scribe-Sardou plays is that they are so much adroit contrivance and little else. They do not spring out of living characters and their circumstances. They are merely clever concoctions in which effective scenes, striking situations are thought of first and fleshed out with dummy characters.<sup>29</sup>

When British writers from T.W. Robertson to Arthur Wing Pinero were to take up Scribean principles, they turned the French *pièce bien faite* into a very different thing, with a very British emphasis on the ideas of realism, character, and comedy.

### **The Well-Made Play in Britain**

The French theatre had been influential in Britain since at least the seventeenth century, and attained a new fashionability in 1831, when Madame Vestris took over the

Olympic Theatre in London. Throughout the nineteenth century the plays of Scribe, Sardou, and other French dramatists, including writers of melodrama, were translated and adapted by English playwrights, though not always with acknowledgement. The English theatre remained dominated by French imports for nearly half a century, a situation that only began to change with the establishment of international copyright laws in 1875.

Thomas William Robertson (1829 - 1871) is the first British dramatic realist, creator of the 'fourth wall' and of dramas emphasising the details of middle-class life, dubbed 'cup-and-saucer drama.' His early plays were adaptations from the French, including two from Scribe – *A Glass of Water*, after *Un Verre D'Eau* and *The Ladies' Battle*, after *La Bataille des Dames* by Scribe and Ernest Legouvé. His later plays are Scribean in structure, but with a stronger, distinctly British, emphasis on character, dialogue, and comedy.

Robertson's reputation as a playwright rests on the six domestic dramas that he wrote for the Prince of Wales's Theatre, and its management, Squire and Marie Bancroft, who gave him artistic control over the productions of his own plays, making him the inventor of what was then called 'stage management,' and is now termed direction. His first major success for the Bancrofts, *Society* (1865), was criticised for its lack of visual authenticity, one reviewer writing that 'we may reasonably expect to see a fashionable drawing-room in the 'noble mansion' of Lord Ptarmigan furnished with more than one chair and with a carpet of visible proportions, especially as there are some allusions to the wealth of the British nobleman.'<sup>30</sup>

Robertson's reaction to this was to ensure that it could never be said again. By the time of *Caste* (1867), the opening direction reads as follows:

A plain set chamber, paper soiled. A window, with practicable blinds, street backing and iron railings, Door practicable, when opened showing

street door. Fireplace; two-hinged gas-burners on each side of mantelpiece. Sideboard cupboard, cupboard in recess, tea-things; teapot, tea-caddy, tea-tray & c., on it. Long table before fire; old piece of carpet and rug down; plain chairs; book-shelf back, a small table under it with ballet-shoe and skirt on it; bunch of benefit bills hanging under book-shelf. Theatrical printed portraits, framed, hanging about; chimney glass clock; box of lucifers [matches] and ornaments on mantel-shelf; kettle on hob, and fire laid; door-mats on the outside of door. Bureau.<sup>31</sup>

Notice the emphasis on stage features that are ‘practicable’; that is, actually capable of working. Critics of the time commented on the realistic details of Robertson’s sets, where doors had locks, windows had glass and sets had ceilings. This contributes to the sense of the onstage world as a real place, changing only with the fall of the curtain, as opposed to the wide-ranging dramaturgy of other periods. We can see here the beginnings of the domestic realism that remains, to a large extent, the dominant aesthetic in British theatre, film and television. It is worth exploring the implications of this.

Firstly, it tends to limit the social milieu of the play. If a naturalistic play is set in (for instance) a middle-class drawing-room, any characters from outside that class – whether above or below – will inevitably be seen outside their own context, as incomers. This creates a certain sense of the ‘normal,’ privileging the world of the protagonist. Here we can see the start of the narrowing of the class focus that was to characterise much of the British theatre (and later, cinema) until the 1950s.

Secondly, it calls for a high degree of technical skill. It is very hard to write a single-set play, especially without blackouts, as characters have to be given credible reasons for getting on and offstage, acquiring information at the right times, and generally doing what the plot requires of them. The well-made play requires a certain kind of writer, one whose skill may be devoted as much to this kind of mechanical achievement as to the more established ones of narrative and character. The playwright Arthur Wing Pinero (1855-1934), in one of his rare public lectures, made a useful

distinction between the ‘strategy’ and ‘tactics’ of play-writing, strategy here being ‘the general laying-out of a play’ and tactics ‘the art of getting [...] characters on and off the stage, of conveying information to the audience and so forth.’<sup>32</sup> The well-made play, as a form, demands more of the tactician than the strategist, which can prove a limitation.

[T]he utmost cleverness in tactics is usually attained by dramatists who hover, at their best, a little lower than the greatest [...] minor men, who deal with minor themes, have more attention left to be devoted to theatrical perfections.<sup>33</sup>

Critics of the well-made play have tended to focus on this aspect; both on the undue emphasis placed on the purely logistical, and on the occasional absurdities into which it drives the playwright. George Bernard Shaw (1856-1950), a lifelong opponent of the well-made play - or what he called ‘Sardoodledom’ - was constantly pointing out these absurdities, most famously Pinero’s *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* (1892), in which a character in his own home abandons his guests to go and write some letters, purely so that they can have a conversation about him.<sup>34</sup>

Thirdly, the one-set play, by limiting itself to part of the characters’ experience, invites us to use our imagination about the rest of it. Part of the technique of the naturalistic playwright lies in the implication of offstage action, and this was to prove important when playwrights such as Shaw were to start adapting their stage works for the screen. The critic John Peter applies this particularly to Henrik Ibsen (1828-1906), stating that an audience watching *Ghosts* (1882) may be expected to speculate about the books on Mrs. Alving’s shelves, wondering what they are and where she got them:

A sense of time, of past, present and future, are [*sic*] part of the texture of such a world: we sense that the characters and the objects in it had existed before the curtain rose, and may exist after the curtain has fallen, in a way which is relevant, sometimes even vital to the way in which we experience the play.<sup>35</sup>



Fourthly, and finally, this emphasis on visual realism makes the writer more important, as taking overall control, not just of the spoken word, but the physical aspect.

William Archer, writing in 1912, made this connection explicit:

There is no doubt that furniture, properties, accidents of environment, play a much larger part in modern drama than they did on the Elizabethan, the eighteenth century, or even the early-Victorian stage. [...] The stage now aims at presenting a complete picture, with the figures not 'a little out of the picture' but completely in it. This being so, the playwright must evidently, at some point in the working-out of his theme, visualize the stage-picture in considerable details; and we find that almost all modern dramatists do, as a matter of fact, pay great attention to what may be called the topography of their scenes, and the shifting 'positions' of their characters.<sup>36</sup>

This sense of the writer as overall controller of the play set Robertson apart from the theatrical norm of the period, which was still dominated by managers (what today we would call 'producers'), many of whom were also actors, and is one that becomes increasingly important to British writers such as Arthur Wing Pinero, George Bernard Shaw, W.S. Gilbert (1836-1911), Harley Granville Barker (1877-1946) and, a little later, Noël Coward. Pinero wrote of his own rehearsal technique:

All that we call 'business' is in the printed matter which I carry into the theatre. Why should it be altered when it has all been carefully and even laboriously thought out, *every detail of it*, during the process of construction? [...] Rehearsal is not – or certainly should not be – a time for experiment.<sup>37</sup>

Robertson proved a difficult playwright to imitate, and his early death put a temporary end to the revolution that he had begun. The great period of the well-made play in this country came about through the work of a new generation of British playwrights, led by Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones (1851-1929), and heavily influenced by the figure of Henrik Ibsen.

## Henrik Ibsen

If I were asked to name the perfect model of the well-built play of the French school, I should not go to Augier or Sardou for an example, but to Ibsen's 'Pillars of Society'. In symmetrical solidity of construction, complexity combined with clearness of mechanism, it seems to me incomparable.

William Archer<sup>38</sup>

Ibsen's awareness of Scribe is well documented (he spent six years working at the Bergen theatre as a dramaturg, during which time 75 of the 145 plays produced were French, 21 by Scribe himself, and more than half of the remainder by his followers)<sup>39</sup> and his early prose dramas are, whatever other qualities they have, finely-constructed plays on the Scribean model. *A Doll's House* (1879), his first major success in the prose theatre, is possibly the best example of this – he wrote himself that 'I cannot recall any work of mine that has given me more satisfaction in the solving of specific problems.'<sup>40</sup> and it is worth analysing in detail the methods by which he gets his effects. This also serves as an example of the craft of a skilled playwright of the late nineteenth century, and illustrates the techniques that stage playwrights, in Britain and elsewhere, were later to bring to the cinema.

### Case Study: *A Doll's House*

The play opens with the heroine, Nora, celebrating Christmas, eating macaroons, and talking to her husband, Torvald, about their idyllic life. Hints are dropped that she may be in financial difficulties<sup>41</sup> and these are confirmed in the next dialogue scene where Nora tells her old friend, the widow Mrs. Linde, that she got into debt to finance an important operation for Torvald. The exposition is carefully

smuggled in; motivated by Nora's desire to impress her older, wiser friend, it reveals her guilty secret, and an important pre-play event, through a boast.

Nora's creditor, the clerk Krogstad, is the antagonist and is introduced immediately after her boast of happiness. (Ibsen uses this technique – the juxtaposition of extreme good and bad fortune - later in the play; Krogstad's second appearance comes during Nora's game of hide-and-seek with her children.)<sup>42</sup> Ibsen tightens the screw by revealing that Nora forged her late father's signature on an I.O.U, making this document a Sardou-ish central prop.

The *quiproquo* is the one Scribean technique that Ibsen doesn't use; however, he frequently employs dramatic irony, through scenes in which characters with differing information speak at cross-purposes, or with a subtext not realised by all of them. Krogstad's exit is followed by a scene of this nature, where Torvald speaks of him in insulting terms that also apply to his wife:

Just think how a man with that load on his conscience must always be lying and cheating and dissembling – how he must wear a mask even in the presence of those who are dear to him, even his own wife and children. That's the worst danger, Nora...Every breath that the children draw in such a house contains the germs of evil.<sup>43</sup>

Nora's expression of her fear, that she may be as morally bankrupt as Krogstad, provides the first act curtain. The second act revolves around her continuous efforts to prevent her husband from seeing the incriminating I.O.U, as her efforts to prevent Krogstad's dismissal actually have the reverse effect, causing Torvald to speed it up. This technique is, of course, much older than Scribe; Aristotle quotes an example from Sophocles' *Oedipus* in which 'the Messenger, who coming to gladden Oedipus and to remove his fears as to his mother, reveals the secret of his birth.'<sup>44</sup>

The following scene, between Nora and the family friend Dr. Rank is the closest Ibsen comes to a *quiproquo*, and, as it might be in a farce, the misunderstanding is to

do with sex. It starts with Nora's failure to grasp the nature of Rank's hereditary illness (never named, but clearly syphilis) and leads to Nora's request for help, which is misread by Rank as an opportunity to declare his unspoken love for her. In structural terms, this scene doesn't advance the story at all, though it does tell us something about Nora's character, and her relationship with Dr. Rank. It also gives a plausible period of time for Krogstad to receive the letter dismissing him, and to arrive, bearing another letter:

KROGSTAD: I've got a letter here addressed to your husband.

NORA: Telling him everything?

KROGSTAD: As delicately as possible.<sup>45</sup>

Krogstad places this letter in Torvald's letterbox. From this point until almost the end of the play, *The Doll's House* is structured like a thriller; everything depends on Nora's efforts to keep her husband from reading the letter that will reveal her forgery.<sup>46</sup> In this respect, the letter is an example of a 'dangling cause'<sup>47</sup> – a narrative element that points towards a future resolution, and that implies a future *scène à faire*. Nora deliberately dances the tarantella badly, so that Torvald has to keep away from his mailbox to tutor her. The second act concludes with this bought time, and Nora calculates how long she has 'to live.'<sup>48</sup>

The third act opens with the first scene of any length not to feature the protagonist, a dialogue between Krogstad and Mrs. Linde. This is perhaps the only moment of faltering in Ibsen's stagecraft, his "tactics" in Pinero's terms. In order to keep to one setting, he has to contrive a reason why this scene takes place at the Helmers':

KROGSTAD: And must our conversation take place in this house?

MRS. LINDE: We couldn't meet at my place; my room has no separate entrance.<sup>49</sup>

We are informed of these two characters' former relationship, and it seems for a while that Mrs. Linde will act as a *deus ex machina*, causing Krogstad to ask for his letter back. However, that isn't her intention:

Helmer must know the truth. The unhappy secret of Nora's must be revealed. They must come to a full understanding. Here must be an end to all these shiftings and evasions.<sup>50</sup>

Ibsen is here both wrong-footing his audience, and questioning the very form of the play. Having spent two acts making us want Nora's secret to be kept from her husband, he's suggesting, through Mrs. Linde, that concealment and evasion are not themselves good bases for a marriage. The effect is startling; Torvald's discovery of the letter becomes not the feared outcome, but a desired objective. Ibsen delays it – Nora and Torvald are interrupted by Dr. Rank, who tells Nora of his impending death in ambiguous dialogue. Torvald is actually on his way to bed when Nora forces the climax: 'Read your letters now, Torvald.'<sup>51</sup>

The *scène à faire* follows, prompted by two letters from Krogstad, the one which has been in the letter-box since Act II, and a second in which he returns the I.O.U, withdrawing his threat. Events have reached their natural *denouement*, and the play can end.

Except, of course, that it doesn't. In Scribean terms, the play is over; the threat to Nora has been withdrawn, and she can resume her life. However, the *denouement* that follows is not Torvald's acceptance of his wife, but Nora's realisation that this life is not worth resuming:

You don't understand me. And I've never understood you – until this evening. [...] We've been married for eight years. Does it occur to you that this is the first time we two, you and I, man and wife, have ever had a serious talk together?<sup>52</sup>

The dialogue that follows, leading up to the iconic door-slam, attacks the very basis of their marriage (and, by implication, many others) and of the form in which it

has been portrayed. Ibsen has allowed us to think that, if Nora can conceal her indiscretion, all will be well, and has used the tools of the dramatist to make us want that. Now, in the play's final scene, he puts this conventional situation into realistic terms, and makes us question our own wishes. *The Doll's House* can reasonably be described as a well-made play that criticises its own well-madeness.<sup>53</sup>

This is very typical of the way in which Ibsen both uses and extends Scribean technique. In Ibsen, as in Scribe, plots hang on important events that took place before the play started, major characters have long-standing battles, protagonists undergo switchback changes of fortune in the final scenes, and inanimate objects – letters in particular – take on dramatic significance. However, Ibsen's use of these techniques works to a very different effect than Scribe's. In the words of the playwright, screenwriter and Ibsen translator Christopher Hampton:

[H]e was basically a modernist who co-opted traditional narrative techniques, like a film director who uses the horror genre or the science-fiction genre to say something interesting. [...] He was responsible for putting on a lot of awful French melodramas [*sic*] by popular nineteenth-century dramatists such as Scribe and Sardou, but he took their melodramatic techniques, like the hint which becomes a full-blown revelation, and applied them to really important themes – which, of course, was the last thing those French dramatists wanted to do; they just wanted to make a few bucks and get a decent audience.<sup>54</sup>

Leaving aside Hampton's questionable view of theatre history (Scribe and Sardou would have been quite surprised to hear their works described as 'melodramas'), there is an important point being made here. For Scribe and Sardou, the control of the audience was almost an end in itself; for Ibsen, it is a means, with the frustration of the audience's expectation itself functioning as part of the playwright's toolkit. This thesis will later be discussing the way in which dramatists, in particular Shaw, were to use this technique in their writing for the screen, and the difficulties which it sometimes caused, when their desires clashed with those of their producers and directors.

The other respect in which Ibsen develops and changes Scribean techniques is in his gradual elimination of overtly theatrical devices such as the monologue (in 1869, he wrote with some pride to George Brandes that he had successfully written *The League of Youth* without a single monologue),<sup>55</sup> and the correspondingly greater emphasis placed on the visual. John Northam's book *Ibsen's Dramatic Method* identifies three major ways in which this is achieved: illustrative action, stage properties, and costume. So, for instance, Northam identifies the way in which Nora's repeated eating of macaroons, always at times when she is girlishly rebelling against her husband's authority, serves as an example of illustrative action.

When she realises her husband's new power [over Krogstad, at the end of Act One], or rather, her own power over the intrusive masculine power of business, her terror is replaced by a feeling of confidence. Hence her almost open revolt against the masculine control of her husband, and her triumphant reassertion of her girlishness. Out come the macaroons.<sup>56</sup>

The Christmas Tree, which Nora carries in on her first entrance, becomes associated with domestic happiness, real or imagined, and reappears onstage at moments when that happiness is most under threat: for instance, Nora dresses it during her monologue after Krogstad's first appearance. At the beginning of the Second Act, the tree reappears, in a different form: 'In the corner by the piano the Christmas tree stands, stripped and dishevelled, its candles burned to their sockets.'<sup>57</sup>

Finally, Nora's state of mind is indicated by her changes of costume; a parti-coloured shawl when she dances the tarantella, a large black shawl over her party clothes in the final act. Here, as throughout the play, the visual is acting as an illustration of, and counterpoint to, the story told by the dialogue.

Again, Ibsen is taking and refining a Scribean technique – the emphasis on trivial objects and actions mentioned above. Where Scribe will use the drinking of a glass of water to convey a plot point, Ibsen imbues the eating of macaroons with emotional

significance, making them a synecdoche of Nora's whole state of mind. This imbuing of inanimate objects with emotional weight was a technique picked up by later dramatists – Terence Rattigan, whose dramaturgy on both stage and screen focused obsessively on the unsaid, frequently conveyed emotional points through the characters' use of physical objects, as in *The Way to the Stars*, where a cigarette lighter and a handwritten poem serve as markers of a character's state of mind.

### **The First Peak of the Well-Made Play in Britain**

Ibsen's plays came to Britain at a time when the theatre was undergoing rapid changes, with artistic, economic, and social factors all coming into play. William Archer, writing in 1902, identified the 1893 premiere of Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* as a pivotal event:

All the forces which we have been tracing – Robertsonian realism of externals, the leisure for thought and experiment involved in vastly improved financial conditions, the substitution in France of a simpler, subtler technique for the outworn artifices of the Scribe school, and the electric thrill communicated to the whole theatrical life of Europe by contact with the genius of Ibsen – all these converging forces coalesced to produce, in *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray*, an epoch-making play.<sup>58</sup>

The 'vastly improved financial conditions' are worth examining. The view that the history of literature is the history of the writer's bank balance is perhaps an oversimplification, but it is generally true that the most active and profound discussion of literary technique goes on in the medium where there is money to be made, as with the screenplay today, or the novel in the middle of the nineteenth century. Between the 1870s and the First World War, that medium was the theatre, largely thanks to the 1875 establishment of international copyright laws. Jerome K. Jerome, writing in 1888,



declared that '[a]t present rates, two or three lucky hits [as a playwright] are sufficient to set a man up for life if he is prudent.'<sup>59</sup> Robert Louis Stevenson wrote in a letter of 1883 that 'the theatre is the gold mine, and on that I must keep an eye',<sup>60</sup> and was one of the many Victorian poets and novelists who tried unsuccessfully to write for the stage.

The role and nature of the medium was very much under discussion; two of the best writers in the country – George Bernard Shaw and, later, Max Beerbohm (1872-1956) – worked as theatre critics and, when Shaw became a playwright himself, he joined Henry Arthur Jones and Oscar Wilde (1854-1900) in a generation of highly articulate and self-publicising dramatists. Ironically, it was Jones, whose plays are rarely staged now, who was the most vocal spokesman for this increased ambition, writing articles and giving hundreds of lectures and speeches on what he termed the Renaissance in British drama. He laid down his creed in a letter written to friend in January 1918, when he had fallen from favour:

The modern drama must be recognised a branch of English literature, and English men of letters must know and study and love it, not only in books but in the *theatre*, and must make their influence felt there.<sup>61</sup>

This increased seriousness of purpose was accompanied by the publication in English translation of classic foreign works of dramatic theory – Lessing's *Hamburgische Dramaturgie* was first translated in an abridged version in 1879<sup>62</sup> - and the re-appearance of Aristotle's *Poetics* as a subject for discussion. Never as popular in Britain as in the rest of Europe, the *Poetics* had been rendered even more unfashionable by the rise of Romanticism; Wordsworth blithely admits in the 1802 Preface to *Lyrical Ballads* that he had never read it.<sup>63</sup> The appearance of popular translations by S. H. Butcher (1895) and Ingram Bywater (1909) brought it back into discussion. In 1902, there was a minor controversy in the Correspondence section of

the *Times Literary Supplement*, inspired by a review of the dramatic poetry of Stephen Phillips, and concerning Aristotle's view of the relation between Plot and Character, specifically with the assertion in the *Poetics* that 'tragedy consists in representation not of men but of an action and life.'<sup>64</sup> It should be stressed that this was not merely an academic debate; the same publication's theatre critic quoted the *Poetics* in his review of Ibsen's last play, *When We Dead Awaken*.<sup>65</sup>

It must also be acknowledged that the Aristotle of these discussions was very much one seen through nineteenth-century eyes. John Jones has written on the way in which Bywater's translation rewrites the *Poetics* to create a single protagonist, a tragic hero, rendering 'good men' as 'a good man', 'bad men' as 'a bad man' and 'the change of fortune' as 'the change in the hero's fortunes.'<sup>66</sup> Aristotle is thus slotted into the debate between nineteenth century dramatic theorists, enabling the *TLS* reviewer to observe that, in his view of Plot and Character, 'Aristotle is only anticipating Professor Brunetière's [...] definition of drama as the conflict of a will against obstacles.'<sup>67</sup>

The 'Professor Brunetière' referred to here is the French critic Ferdinand Brunetière (1849-1906), a major figure in the writing of the time on the art of the playwright. Contrary to John Russell Taylor's assertion that 'British writers always tend to do first, and to theorise, if at all, afterwards',<sup>68</sup> the 1890s and 1900s saw a considerable body of theoretical writing on playwriting, some of which were studies by critics and academics, but many of which were practical manuals by practising actors and playwrights. J. Brander Matthews (1852-1929), Professor of English at Columbia University, (and a friend of both Henry Arthur Jones and William Archer, who dedicated *Play-Making* to him) gave a partial list of guides for the playwright in his own book *A Study of the Drama*, published in 1910:

There is an inadequate English translation of Freytag's *Technic of the Drama* (McClurg, 1895). Later books dealing with dramatic theory are

Jerome's *Playwriting* (reprinted from the *Stage*, 1888); Hennequin's *Art of Playwriting* (Houghton Mifflin Company, 1890); Calmour's *Practical Playwriting* (Arrowsmith, 1891); Price's *Technique of the Drama* (Brantano, 1892); [Frank] Archer's *How to Write a Good Play* (Sampson Low, 1892); Woodbridge's *Drama; its Law and Technique* (Allyn & Bacon, 1898); Price's *Analysis of Play Construction and Dramatic Principle* (published by the author, 1908); Caffin's *Appreciation of the Drama* (Baker and Taylor, 1908); and Clayton Hamilton's *Theory of the Theater* (Holt, 1910).<sup>69</sup>

These are by no means a homogenous group; Freytag, for instance, places great emphasis on reading classical models as far back as Aeschlyus, while Jerome states that '[a] book-worm never made a great author.'<sup>70</sup> However, they share certain characteristics. One is an emphasis on playwriting as a craft; Jerome refers to 'the carpentry of play-writing',<sup>71</sup> Hennequin to 'dramatic workmanship',<sup>72</sup> Frank Archer to 'the mechanism of a play'.<sup>73</sup> Associated with this is the sense of perfectability; that a play can be crafted in such a way as to be ideal for its purpose. Jerome K. Jerome expresses this in the form of advice to an aspiring author:

Note, above all things, how a story is told and the suspense maintained. Observe – when you get the chance – how the interest, set rolling in the first act, and gathering force at every scene, leaps forward, without pause, from act to act, till the great catastrophe is reached; and solve the method by which this is done very carefully indeed, for such a play will be an ideal play, and if you can construct another like it, there will be a big fortune in it for you.<sup>74</sup>

Two of the last, and most influential, of these manuals were Matthews' *A Study of the Drama* (1910) and William Archer's *Play-Making* (1912). The two men were to become the canonical writers on the craft of playwriting, much as Syd Field and Robert McKee are to screenwriters today, and are frequently quoted by playwrights of the post-WWI period as their major influences – Matthews by American authors, such as Preston Sturges,<sup>75</sup> Archer by Britons such as John van Druten<sup>76</sup> and R.C. Sherriff, who describes himself as having 'learnt [Archer's book] by heart.'<sup>77</sup>

By the start of the period covered by this thesis, the *pièce bien faite* had been converted into an Anglicised form that emphasised the moment-to-moment control of an audience, using the techniques originated by Scribe and Sardou, and gradually refined, and brought into a more restrained, less overt method by British and American dramatists. In 1916, the American playwright and actor William Gillette (1853-1937) summed it up:

A play or drama is not a simple or straight-told story: it is a device – an invention – a carefully adjusted series of more or less ingenious traps, independent yet interdependent, and so arranged that while yet trapping they carry forward the plot or theme without a break. These traps of scene, of situation, of climax, of acts and tableaux, or whatever they are, require to be set and adjusted with the utmost nicety and skill so that they will spring at the precise instant and in the precise manner to seize and hold the admiration – sympathy – interest – or whatever they may be required to capture, of an audience.<sup>78</sup>

Notice the metaphor – a ‘trap’, by definition, is only effective if it is unnoticed. Dramatists of the early twentieth century, although they took their techniques from the previous century, were less overt in using them, and were sometimes scornful of some of the more direct tactics of earlier years, such as the expository servant and the reliance on letters: in 1912, William Archer wrote that ‘[s]ome years ago, a little band of playwrights, and would-be playwrights, in fanatical reaction against the Sardou technic, tried to lay down a rule that [...] no letter must ever enter into the mechanism of the play.’<sup>79</sup> Archer was also scornful of the contrived use of the contrived quiproquo, especially in romantic comedies:

In the most aggravated cases, the misunderstanding is maintained by a persevering use of pronouns in place of proper names: “he” and “she” being taken by the hearer to mean A. and B., when the speaker is in fact referring to X. and Y. This ancient trick becomes the more irritating the longer the *qui pro quo* is dragged out.<sup>80</sup>

Similarly, a 1910 manual of playwriting opens its final chapter ('Some Things Worth Remembering') with this advice:

*Never* open a play with a servant soliloquising.

More than fifty per cent of would-be dramatists do this, and if it is not a servant soliloquising, it is two or more gossiping.<sup>81</sup>

Even the use of curtain lines, where writers would make a rare deliberate show of technique, in the use of what William Archer refers to as 'an emphatic *mot de la fin*',<sup>82</sup> became less ostentatious as the form developed; by 1912, Archer was commenting on 'the modern fashion for eschewing emphasis, not only in last acts, but at every point where the old French dramaturgy demanded it, and especially in act-endings.'<sup>83</sup>

### **The British Playwright Between the Wars**

In the period following the First World War, the West End contained an audience 'whose attention-span was at an all-time low.'<sup>84</sup> The war, which in Britain had disproportionately affected the young and educated, removed much of the audience for an innovative drama, and took much of the energy from those who remained. The Edwardian period had seen the growth of the 'New Drama', whose practitioners - Harley Granville Barker, John Galsworthy (1867-1933), St. John Hankin (1869-1909), and others - extended and developed well-made techniques, with wider social *milieux* and stronger use of symbolism, but few of these writers produced much of substance after 1918. The prevailing West End attitude was a kind of breezy philistinism, well expressed by the theatre critic and playwright A. G. Macdonell (1895-1941) in his

popular novel *England, Their England* (1933) where his protagonist, Donald, compares the work of continental writers unfavourably to the thrillers of Edgar Wallace:

[The Theatre-Going Public] will almost always go to see a good play, by which Donald meant a play that is good as a play and not as a poem, or as a piece of symbolism, or as a cinematograph, or as an essential transference of the plastic arts to histrionics, or as in interpretation of a mood, or as political propaganda, or as birth-control, pacifist, prohibitionist, nationalist, internationalist, bimetallist, spiritualist, economist, Bolshevik, or Fascist or any other sort of propaganda. But if a play is good as a play, then the T.G.P. will go to see it.

And finally, Donald concluded that it would have nothing to do with pretentiousness. [...] And that was why, Donald reflected, Kaiser and Toller and the rest of them could only be acted in front of Societies and Clubs consisting of people who wanted to write like Kaiser and Toller and the rest of them.<sup>85</sup>

Macdonell's xenophobic dismissal of '[Georg] Kaiser and [Ernst] Toller and the rest of them' sums up another feature of the British inter-war theatre - it was largely cut off from the rest of the world. In the same chapter, he is equally scornful about '[Luigi] Pirandello [...] [Anton] Tchekov, [Alfred] Savoir, [Henri-Rene] Lenormand, Martinez Sierra, [and] Jean Jacques Bernard'.<sup>86</sup> One important factor here was theatre censorship.

The Lord Chamberlain had acted as a licenser of scripts, as well as theatres, since the Theatre Regulation Act of 1843, and was to go on doing so until 1968. It had already been a source of irritation to some producers; in 1891, the Examiner of Plays, E.F. Smyth Pigott told the critic and producer J.T. Grein 'Do not come to me with Ibsen.'<sup>87</sup> During the period just before and after the First World War, the dictates of the Lord Chamberlain's office were very firmly at odds with the state of theatre on the continent where authors like those mentioned by Macdonell – he might also have added August Strindberg, Frank Wedekind, Arthur Schnitzler and Gerhart Hauptmann – were mixing sex, politics and formal innovation in a way guaranteed to antagonise the Lord

Chamberlain's Office. Many of the masterpieces of the late nineteenth/early twentieth century were refused licenses (*Miss Julie* in 1925, *Six Characters in Search of an Author* in 1924)<sup>88</sup> or simply not submitted; Wedekind's *Spring Awakening* was not staged in Britain until the 1970s. The effect was to create a theatre cut off from the kind of pace-setting that Ibsen had provided in the 1890s, and that Brecht and Beckett would provide in the 1950s. (Though Ibsen's plays had also been the subject of censorship, they were brought into the popular consciousness through club performances, published translations, and champions, including Shaw and Archer, in the press.)

Domestic authors also suffered as a result of censorship. Harley Granville Barker, the most distinguished playwright to emerge in the first decade of the century, saw *Waste* (1907) banned because of its implication of abortion.<sup>89</sup> After the war, Somerset Maugham. Noel Coward and Terence Rattigan all wrote plays that led to run-ins with the Lord Chamberlain; the first two for their representations of well-heeled adultery in respectively *Our Betters* (1924) and *The Vortex* (1925), the last for his negative portrayal of an unnamed foreign dictator in *Follow My Leader* (1938).

None of this created an atmosphere well-suited to a particularly challenging or radical theatre. When Cyril Connolly listed the important authors of the late 'twenties, he mentioned seventeen writers, only one of whom (Shaw) was primarily a playwright. One (Yeats) was a poet/playwright, and five (Lawrence, Joyce, Maugham, Arnold Bennett and Galsworthy) were novelist/playwrights, with varying degrees of theatrical success.<sup>90</sup> (Lawrence was only recognised as a major playwright in the 1960s, thanks to a series of revivals at the Royal Court Theatre.). Writing in 1948, B. Ifor Evans characterised writing between the wars as concerned with the 'exploration of the

individual personality',<sup>91</sup> a project that is ill-suited to the theatre, and for which British playwrights did not find a language until the 1950s.

West End plays of the 1930s are a strange hybrid, displaying a considerable technical skill, derived from the writers of the 1890s, but without any of the seriousness of purpose that defined that group – tactics without strategy. Emlyn Williams (1905-1987), writing about his own apprenticeship as a young playwright in 1927, depicts the attitude well:

[The actor] Alan Napier...noted that for an aspiring dramatist my visits were unadventurous. I shirked the Old Vic, knowing it was brave but pedestrian. 'What about G.B.S.?' I said I had a blind spot about Shaw – 'he sounds like a schoolmaster being funny.'  
'What about that play next Sunday from the Finnish, with new techniques and masks – symbolism, expressionism, don't they fascinate you?'  
My mind balked at them as a stomach rejects food: as for new techniques, I was too intent on mastering the old ones.... All I wanted, passionately, was to sit in the middle of an audience which was being completely held by a play which was holding me too, one moment emotionally, the next through laughter.<sup>92</sup>

Later chapters will examine how British stage dramatists (including Williams himself) were to adapt these 'old techniques' to the new medium of the cinema.

### **The Rise of the Photoplay Manual**

By the time of the invention of the cinema, the British and American theatres had witnessed over half a century of intense debate over the nature of theatrical structure. This was still indebted to Scribe – the 1911 edition of the *Encyclopedia Britannica* states that 'his plays are still regarded as models of dramatic construction'<sup>93</sup> - but had been developed by French and British playwrights, and modified by the example of Henrik Ibsen. Inevitably, this work fed into the birth of the narrative



cinema; D. W. Griffith (1875-1948) first approached the Edison Studio in 1908 with a screenplay based on Sardou's *La Tosca*.<sup>94</sup>

In 1911, the United States Supreme Court ruled that film-makers could no longer make free use of theatrical and literary source materials. This, combined with the rise of the narrative film, created an explosion in the demand for original stories, a situation described by Edward Azlant as 'Scenario Fever.'<sup>95</sup> Studios set up scenario departments, often headed by playwrights such as William de Mille (1878-1955), who was brought in by his brother Cecil to run the Lasky scenario department after training with Brander Matthews at Columbia, and a successful career on Broadway.<sup>96</sup>

The first correspondence courses on the writing of photoplays appeared as early as 1910 and were, according to Epes Winthrop Sargent (1872-1936), largely fraudulent, 'based on material appearing in some of the magazines devoted to writers and on the instruction sheets then issued by the Vitagraph, Lubin and Essanay companies.'<sup>97</sup> An industry directory published in 1915 listed over sixty scenario or photoplay schools across the United States.<sup>98</sup> Between 1910 and 1920, over ninety books on photoplay writing were published, many of them by established industry figures. Azlant describes this as 'perhaps the largest body of instruction in an aspect of film production within the materials of film history.'<sup>99</sup>

As with the earlier fashion for books on playwriting, certain features tend to connect the photoplay manuals. Many of them are by industry professionals; three of the most important writers – Marguerite Bertsch (1889-1967), Eustace Hale Ball (1881-1931) and Epes Winthrop Sargent – had worked as scenario editors, at the Vitagraph, Reliance and Lubin studios respectively.<sup>100</sup> While they generally seek to distinguish the photoplay from any other art form, they also acknowledge a debt to the theatre, and the body of theoretical work that it had inspired. Frances Taylor Patterson, Instructor of

Photoplay Composition at Columbia University, wrote in *Cinema Craftsmanship – A Book for Photoplaywrights* (1921) that ‘[t]he photoplay has a language of its own – the language of the camera’,<sup>101</sup> but is equally clear about the importance of the work that had been done by playwrights and stage critics:

[T]here can be no greater aid to the student of the new photodramatic art than the vast mass of critical material upon the practice and theory of the theatre. The student of plot analysis [...] should consort with the master minds of dramatic criticism. From the Stagirite [Aristotle] to Sarcey, from Brunetière to Brander Matthews.<sup>102</sup>

Similarly, Howard T. Dimick, in *Modern Photoplay Writing; Its Craftsmanship* (1922) cites Archer, Matthews and W. T. Price in his recommended reading on ‘General Principles of Dramatic Structure and Effect’ and writes that ‘the modern photoplay author is still a playwright, using a playwright’s methods and indebted to a playwright’s techniques for success.’<sup>103</sup>

The other striking thing about this body of instruction was quite how quickly the ground rules were laid down, and how similar they are to those taught in screenwriting manuals today; to the extent that, by the early 1920s, several writers were talking about a ‘formula.’ Dimick, for instance, defined ‘the photoplay formula’ in terms of three elements:

- a) The CRITICAL CONDITIONS beginning the play
- b) The EXCITANT, or acting dramatic force
- c) The RESULT, caused by the introduction of the excitant into the critical conditions or circumstances.<sup>104</sup>

The ‘excitant’ is a similar concept to what William Archer, borrowing a term from Freytag, had called the ‘*erregende Moment*’ or ‘firing of the fuse’,<sup>105</sup> and what Robert McKee and modern screenwriters call the ‘inciting incident’.

The most influential manual was Sargent's *The Technique of the Photoplay*, which, by its author's own account, 'has been accepted as standard in many studios, both here and abroad, and has been recommended by practically everyone in authority.'<sup>106</sup> This was no idle boast; the book went through three editions between 1912 and 1916, with a publishing history that provides a potted history of the development of narrative cinema. Originally reprinted from a series of weekly articles published in *Moving Picture World* magazine, the book was revised in 1913, partly in response to 'the acceptance of the multiple-reel as a regular release instead of as an occasional novelty',<sup>107</sup> and again in 1916, by which time he could state that the 'writing of photoplays has ceased to be a pastime by which the dabbler could make a few dollars. It is now a profession and must be prepared for with the same serious attention as any of the other professions.'<sup>108</sup> Indeed, so rapidly was the medium changing that the second and third editions are virtually two different books. In the second edition, Sargent still finds it necessary to assert the specific nature of the medium:

There are, of course, the broad basic rules of literary construction and dramatic development, applicable to all forms of literature, whether written or verbally expressed, but in the past few years the art of writing photoplays has become possessed of a technique that is applicable only to the writing of picture plays and to no other.<sup>109</sup>

By the third edition, this point doesn't need to be made; the study of screenwriting has become so established that Sargent can increase the number of chapters from 30 to 72, and number the individual paragraphs 'to aid those who may use the work as a college text book.'<sup>110</sup> Similarly, while the second edition starts with a description of a visit to a cinema, the third opens with a detailed account of the working practice of a studio, with particular emphasis on the work of the scenario department.

Unlike other writers of photoplay manuals, Sargent refers very little to the theatre, going to some length to distinguish the screen from the older medium. In a chapter about the possible future of talking pictures, he argues that ‘it is not to be supposed that the talking pictures will ever replace the silent [film] drama since it merely gives back a poor travesty of the speaking stage and the injection of dialogue defeats the end of the motion picture.’<sup>111</sup> His points of comparison are more frequently from the written narrative, and one of the few theoretical books that he recommends (in the third edition) is Robert Wilson Neal’s *Short Stories in the Making* (1914).

This, however, does not tell the full story: Neal’s manual bears a subtitle ‘A Writer’s and Student’s Introduction to the Technique and Practical Composition of Short Stories, *including an Adaptation of the Principles of the Stage Plot to Short Story Writing*’ (my italics). Neal goes on to say in his introduction that ‘Plot being indispensable to the true short story, or *conte*, and the short story being in effect a narrative drama, this book undertakes to re-present the familiar theory of the stage play, but to present it adapted and applied to the nature and needs of the short story.’<sup>112</sup> Neal never mentions any specific theatrical models for his view of story construction, but the pattern is clearly drawn from Scribe and Freytag. He analyses plot in terms of several divisions, representing stages of progress.’<sup>113</sup>

A. The EXPOSITION, or stage of introductory explanation. The ends with the *exciting moment*, or *inciting impulse* – the moment at which the complicating influences first appear and the conflict begins to reveal itself....

B. The RISING ACTION, or critical period. This begins with the inciting impulse, or moment, and continues, often by successive stages of increasing power or intensity to the *decisive moment*. This point – that at which the outcome is, by the process of events made now sure – should when possible coincide with the so-called grand climax, height or climactic moment...

C. The FALLING ACTION. This part is that which follows the decisive moment. It can be regarded as the beginning and approach of the end [...]

D. The OUTCOME (also called by some *denouement* or *catastrophe*). In modern plotting, the tendency is more and more to telescope falling action and *denouement* into outcome, ending the action as quickly as possible after the decisive moment and the grand climax.<sup>114</sup>

This terminology was not something peculiar to Neal; Eustace Hale Ball, writing the same year, uses Freytag's phrase 'rising action' in almost exactly the same way, and links it explicitly to the theatre:

The 'rising action' follows the introduction of the situation. Then the series of powerful incidents finally culminate in what we call the climax. On the stage, this is generally at the end of the next to the last act.<sup>115</sup>

While these manuals were clearly being read in Britain - the third edition of Sargeant's book bears a brief introduction by Philip Wright Whitcomb, of Britain's Hepworth Studios – the native cinema did not yet have either the structures or the will to put them into practice. Indeed, some British producers were still arguing the relative unimportance of the writer. Rachael Low quotes a correspondent in the *Bioscope* for 30 November 1916:

While admitting that the picture play is a composite creation, I contend that the producer always has been and always will be its main progenitor. The author can supply only the basic idea; it is the producer who provides the treatment, and it is in the treatment not the selection of material, that all forms of art consist.<sup>116</sup>

With such attitudes around, it is not surprising that '[t]he low standard of the scripts [...] was often mentioned as an important weakness in the British film.'<sup>117</sup> Part of the problem was simply to do with money – whereas in the United States in 1916 the Famous Players company could offer the equivalent of £250 for a thousand word synopsis, the normal rate for a fully worked out script in Britain a year later was between £5 and £50.<sup>118</sup> Partly for this reason, film-makers remained wedded to the idea of properties taken from plays or novels; Low quotes the *Bioscope* for 13 July 1916 as estimating that 'as much as 95 per cent of all [British] film stories were adapted.'<sup>119</sup>

The British film pioneer Cecil Hepworth (1874-1953) stated the problem in his autobiography:

But I always had the feeling that picture making was an art in itself and should depend for its own original writers for its material. It was while I was waiting for those original writers to show up that I agreed to the making of such films from books as those quite successful Dickens films and the plays I have mentioned.<sup>120</sup>

Hepworth is perhaps flattering himself here – he carried on making adaptations, mostly from popular novels, throughout his career, and the film which he regarded as his most important, *Comin' thro' the Rye* (1923), was both an adaptation (from the novel by Helen Mather), and a remake of one of his earlier successes, a choice which Low describes as ‘a sign of his unadventurous approach to the question of story.’<sup>121</sup> What is interesting is his view that the important writers for the screen had yet to appear. Harold Weston, in *The Art of Photo Play Writing* (1916), wrote that, in this country, ‘writing men have not yet realised the necessity of grappling with the technique of the film.’<sup>122</sup> With rare exceptions, such as Arnold Bennett’s screenplay for *Piccadilly* (UK, E. A. Dupont, 1929), this was to remain the case throughout the silent era and much of the 1930s.

The well-made play, defined in the early nineteenth century French theatre, was adapted to many different purposes over the next hundred years – T. W. Robertson showed that it could be used to a more realistic, character-based effect, Ibsen and the English writers who followed him made it into a vehicle for a serious, sometimes didactic, drama, the early screenplay departments made it into the model for the narrative film.

The rest of this thesis will be examining the ways in which British stage playwrights first began to apply their techniques to cinema, and considering the different ways in which their stage and screen work were related. Before looking at the

effect that stage playwrights had on the British cinema, it is necessary to examine the state of that cinema at the time.

## Chapter Two – The British Cinema in the 1930s.

In his book *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, Tom Ryall makes the case that, in writing of the 1930s, it is helpful to think less of a ‘British cinema’ than of a number of discrete ‘British cinemas’, which were to come together in the next decade, partly because of the Second World War. This chapter will examine the disparate elements that made the national cinema, including those which came from the theatre.

The influence of the theatre, and the West End in particular, has for a long time been seen as a wholly negative factor in the interwar cinema. George Perry, writing in 1974, made the theatre into one of the prime villains of his history of British cinema:

Excessive theatricality was for many years a hallmark of the British film. In America not only was the cinema to discover the wide open spaces, but it was able to put a whole continent between the theatres of the east and the studios of the west. In Britain, on the other hand, the cosy scale of the country led to the grouping of the major studios in the capital so that an actor could film all day and appear on the West End boards in the evening.<sup>123</sup>

While this view is less common than it used to be, it still reappears, as for instance in a mass-market paperback, published in 2006:

Too many British films of the era looked to the theatre for its [*sic*] inspiration, so the history of the British cinema in the 1930s is littered with forgettable farces, dire musicals, drawing room comedies à la Noël Coward and damp squib thrillers.<sup>124</sup>

To understand the influence of the theatre on 1930s British cinema, whether positive or otherwise, it is necessary to look at the larger picture. During this period, the British cinema industry was assimilating two major structural changes. The first was the passing of the 1927 Cinematograph Films Act, often referred to as ‘the Quota Act’, which led to a massive expansion and reorganisation of the industry. This was combined with the second change, common to all national cinemas at that time, that caused by the coming of sound.



## **The 1927 Cinematograph Films Act**

Following its promising beginnings at the start of the twentieth century, the British cinema industry had, by the end of the First World War, found itself outflanked by other countries, both in terms of productivity and of artistic ambition. Throughout the 1920s, there was a gradual falling off of production – in 1926, British studios made just thirty-seven pictures, accounting for about 5% of the films shown in British cinemas.<sup>125</sup> The proportion of screen time taken up by British films may have been even lower than this, because of Hollywood's hold on the distribution process, through the practices of blind and block booking.<sup>126</sup>

The Quota Act was thus partly a response to defend the industry, partly a reaction to postwar cultural anxiety about national identity, in particular a fear of 'the danger arising from the Americanisation of the British Empire from the excessive number of American pictures shown.'<sup>127</sup> The Act set up measures to guard against restrictive booking practices, but, more significantly, picked up on an idea that had been suggested as early as 1917, in establishing a minimum percentage of British films that were to be shown or distributed within native cinemas.<sup>128</sup> The percentage was set up to increase gradually throughout the next ten years, starting at 5% for exhibitors and 7.5% for distributors, and growing to 20% in both cases. (The distributor's quota was initially set higher, in order to give exhibitors a wider choice of material.)<sup>129</sup> For the purposes of the Act, a British film was defined as one with all studio scenes shot within the British Empire, with at least 70% of the labour costs paid to British subjects and with a scenario written by a British subject.<sup>130</sup> (Notice how, in pre-auteurist days, the scenarist is seen as the only person who can, as an individual, define a film's nationality.)

The immediate effect of this was an immense captive market for British films, and a consequent growth and industrialisation of the production process. In the five years after the passage of the Act, 233 new production companies were registered, though most didn't survive very long.<sup>131</sup> A number of Hollywood studios, including Fox and Warner Brothers, also set up production companies in Britain, possibly fearing the shrinking of an important overseas market. By 1936, a little less than ten years after the introduction of the Quota, the number of sound stages in film production had nearly quadrupled, and the number of films by a factor of six, making the British industry the second largest in the world after Hollywood.<sup>132</sup>

The Quota Act was by no means universally popular within the industry, especially among the artistically ambitious - Herbert Wilcox (1890-1977) described it as 'inept, fatuous and suicidal'<sup>133</sup> - and was opposed by most exhibitors, especially those in urban areas. Particularly singled out for vilification was one of the Act's unintended consequences, the creation of a genre of cheaply-made supporting pictures - 'Quota Quickies' - that existed for no reason other than to make up the numbers. Michael Balcon (1896-1977) wrote that, during the 'thirties, 'For many people, "a British film" became the rubbishy second feature you had to sit through, or avoid, if you wanted to see a Hollywood picture.'<sup>134</sup> For a long time, most historians of the British cinema followed the lead of Rachael Low in regarding the Quota as an almost entirely negative development, leading to a growth in quantity at the expense of quality. Matthew Sweet describes the Quota Act as the 'villain' of Low's history.<sup>135</sup>

There can be no denying that some of the producers brought into the industry by the Quota were simple opportunists, churning out the product at the minimum expenditure of a pound a foot, with little concern for aesthetics or craft. Ronald Neame (1911-2010) has a telling anecdote of his time directing at Fox's Studios in Wembley:

One sequence I shot called for a man to come out of a house, cross the road, and go into a phone booth. The next day, after he had seen the rushes, the producer stormed onto the set in a great rage asking me why I hadn't put the phone booth at the end of the street. He yelled 'You idiot, it would have taken the actor ten more seconds to walk there. That's fifteen feet and that's fifteen extra pounds for me.' He did have a point.<sup>136</sup>

Low-budget film making also led to a conservative attitude towards screenwriting; scenarios tended to be 'adapted by staff writers from modest stage, novel, magazine or radio sources',<sup>137</sup> and tended to privilege dialogue over action, as being easier to film. These tendencies made it difficult for writers to develop a visual style of storytelling, and gave British films of the period a reputation overseas for being 'all talk and no action.' Chibnall quotes William 'Buster' Collier Jr., a US B-picture producer sent over by Warner Brothers to their Teddington Studios:

[American B pictures] have to rely on their speed. They just have to possess plenty of action. And that is where your British 'programme pictures' fail. Because of the Quota Act, you pad them instead of cut them. Apart from your 'A' pictures, I reckon I could cut a thousand feet at least from practically every British picture I have seen.<sup>138</sup>

While there is clearly some value in the traditional view of the Quota as encouraging certain negative tendencies in the British cinema, more recent film historians have acknowledged its importance in the establishment, for the first time, of a studio system on the industrial model used in other countries, the United States in particular. The simple increase in output caused by the Quota changed the culture of film-making, creating a system in which skills, careers, and genres could be developed, in a way that had not been the case before. This quality – what Thomas Schatz has referred to in an American context as 'the genius of the system'<sup>139</sup> – was one which the British cinema had previously lacked and which was necessary before the national cinema could grow. The British cinema of the 1930s served as a training ground for those who were to emerge as important creators in the British cinema renaissance

during and after the Second World War. Even a speaker who opposed the continuance of the Quota in 1935, the Leeds exhibitor Harry Hopkins, acknowledged that it had served a function:

It is no use beating about the bush – most of us want to give the British Quota Act a nice funeral. *It has served its purpose* and it is time it went.<sup>140</sup> (my italics)

## **The British Cinema and the Theatre**

The British cinema had always treated the theatre as a rich source of both material and personnel, and the changes of the early 1930s increased that. The playwright and screenwriter Rodney Ackland (1908-1991), in his co-written autobiography *The Celluloid Mistress*, gives an account of his own initial employment at British International Pictures, following the success of his play *Dance With No Music* (1930): ‘I did not know at the time that film companies are smart enough to send their own representatives to see and report upon every play that is given in London [.],’<sup>141</sup> Once employed by the studio, he was given an office that had previously belonged to the scenarist Frank Launder and that still contained Launder’s ‘reports on plays he has seen in London,’<sup>142</sup> including three of Ackland’s.

The coming of the Quota and of sound also saw an increase in the number of directors coming from the stage. David Lean (1908-1991), then working as an editor, was one who complained that ‘directors were being hired by the studios from the London stage; they were familiar with spoken dialogue, but not with cinematic techniques.’<sup>143</sup> Ernest Borneman describes (through his fictional surrogate Cameron McCabe) the frustrations of working with a director who ‘liked his picture to look exactly as it would on the stage [...] That’s why his pictures were always photographed theatre. They never became films.’<sup>144</sup>

This thesis will be arguing later on that the work of stage playwrights was an important factor in the development of the British cinema during the late 1930s and onwards. It is less easy to argue for the positive effect of theatre writers and directors in the early 1930s, for a number of reasons.

Firstly, as suggested in the previous chapter, the West End theatre of the 1930s was not especially inspiring. The most successful and innovative writers of the period were initially wary of the medium – both George Bernard Shaw and John Galsworthy insisted on contracts that specified that not a word of their plays would be changed in screen adaptations<sup>145</sup> - and those who did move from the theatre to the cinema tended to bring with them the aesthetic of a middlebrow and complacent West End. Graham Greene summed it up in a 1938 essay:

Life as it is and life as ought to be: let us take that as the only true subject for a film, and consider to what extent the cinema in fulfilling its proper function. The stage, of course, has long ceased to fulfil it at all. Mr. St. John Ervine, Miss Dodie Smith, these are the popular playwrights of the moment: they have no sense of life as it is lived, far less even than Mr. Noël Coward, and if they have some dim idea of a better life, this is expressed only in terms of sexual or financial happiness.<sup>146</sup>

When the theatre did throw up an interesting development, it didn't necessarily make it to the screen. When, in 1936, Gaumont-British submitted a script of the theatrical phenomenon of 1934, *Love on the Dole* by Walter Greenwood and Ronald Gow, to the British Board of Film Censors, it was rejected, with the Reader, Miss N. Short, writing that:

I do not consider this play suitable for production for a film. There is too much of the tragic and sordid side of poverty, a certain amount of dialogue would have to be deleted, and the final incident of Sally selling herself is prohibitive.<sup>147</sup>

Secondly, many British films of the 1930s use theatrical properties that were already past their moment. B.I.P. made two films based on Victorian farces by Arthur Wing Pinero, *Those Were the Days* (UK, Thomas Bentley, 1934) based on *The*

*Magistrate* (1885) and *Dandy Dick* (UK, William Beaudine, 1935) based on an 1887 play. One might also add such ventures as G & S Films, set up in 1937 specifically to film the Gilbert and Sullivan productions of the D'Oyly Carte Company (in the end, only one - *The Mikado* [UK, Victor Schertzinger, 1939] – was made), and the series of low-budget films made at Twickenham in the early 'thirties, including such long-runners as Sir John Martin-Harvey in *The Lyons Mail* (UK, Arthur Maude, 1931) based on a play first staged in 1877, and Sir Seymour Hicks (the opening credits emphasise his title) as *Scrooge* (UK, Henry Edwards, 1935), a part he had been touring since 1901. Even a film as prestigious as Alexander Korda's *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (UK, Harold Young, 1934) was based on a novel and play that had first been produced simultaneously in 1906. At times, the 1930s British cinema seems like the place where theatrical warhorses were put out to grass.

Thirdly, and most importantly, stage practitioners were coming into a cinema that was still, in the early 1930s, aesthetically underdeveloped. Tom Ryall compares the situation with that in the United States at the same time:

Although the American cinema was subjected to [*sic*] a considerable influence from the Broadway stage at the advent of the sound picture, during the silent era it had established a strong and vigorous tradition of essentially visual genres such as slapstick comedy, the melodrama, the Western and the costume epic, and these survived into the sound period albeit in modified forms. In the British cinema the arrival of the sound track, and particularly the dimension of dialogue, simply accentuated the well established dependence of the British cinema upon the forms and values of the West End play.<sup>148</sup>

In this respect, it is interesting to compare two films made the same year: *Rookery Nook* (UK, Tom Walls, 1931), the film version of Ben Travers' Aldwych farce, and *The Front Page* (US, Lewis Milestone, 1931), a Hollywood film based on another comedy, by Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur. The first is largely a record of a stage performance, filmed mostly in long takes, with entrances held for applause and long

pauses for laughter, and making no concessions to the medium. The latter is fast-moving, in a style that would later become associated with screwball comedy, with ‘racy dialogue punched out by the hacks gathered in the press room.’<sup>149</sup> The stylistic difference is, to a large extent, just a question of experience; *Rookery Nook* was directed by its star, Tom Walls, (1883-1949) here making his screen debut at the age of 47, *The Front Page* by Lewis Milestone (1895-1980), younger than Walls, but already an experienced (and Oscar-winning) director, following up his success with *All Quiet on the Western Front* (US, Lewis Milestone, 1930). To put it at its simplest, the British cinema did not, at this time, have enough skilled film directors and writers to use stage talent effectively. This thesis will argue in Chapter 3 that *Pygmalion* (1938) is a key film in this respect, as the first time when an experienced British screen director successfully used his skills on an adaptation of a stage play.

The fact that *Rookery Nook* and its successors were financially successful didn’t help matters: Michael Balcon took the view that Walls ‘did not understand films in any technical or creative sense and would not accept that fact because of many successes in the early days of sound films.’<sup>150</sup> Early audiences, especially those outside London, may have watched the films explicitly as a substitute for the theatrical experience, as an audience today will watch a live broadcast. On these terms, the films can still work, at least for certain audiences; Geoff Brown described *Rookery Nook* getting laughs at a 9 am screening at the 2017 UK Silent Film Festival.<sup>151</sup>

## The British Studio System

The expansion of the industry caused by the Quota led to a major reorganisation, with new production companies being founded, and older ones adjusting to the new situation. Three companies in particular emerged as industry leaders – Gaumont-British, British International Pictures, and British and Dominion Pictures.

Gaumont-British was registered as a public company in 1927, and began its association with Michael Balcon's Gainsborough Pictures the year after. Balcon (1896-1977) was, after Alexander Korda, probably the most artistically and commercially ambitious of all British producers, and it was at Gainsborough that he developed the collegiate attitude to film-making that was to characterise his later work at Ealing, first employing many of the mostly public-school, Cambridge graduates who were to work with him at that studio, including the screenwriters Frank Launder (a former actor and playwright) and Sidney Gilliat,<sup>152</sup> and scenario head Angus Macphail. Macphail, at this stage, defined the screenplay as occupying a place somewhere between the play and the novel; he wrote in a memoir to Balcon on the subject of adaptation that a useful criterion when deciding if a novel was filmable would be to consider if it would make a good stage play: '[a] novel which possesses stage play value (a concise and dramatic plot) in addition to its own peculiar qualities bridges the gap between the two media and strikes the half-way position of the ideal talking play.'<sup>153</sup>

*The Good Companions* (UK, Victor Saville, 1933), a film based on a novel which had itself been adapted for the stage, is an important film in terms of Balcon's collaborative view both of cinema and of Britain; J.B. Priestley's 1931 novel was already a celebration of British native diversity, switching between three protagonists from different social and geographical backgrounds, and emphasising the inclusive



quality suggested by the title, which is the name given to a concert party troupe that they all join. The film version, adapted from both the novel and a stage version by Priestley and Edward Knoblock (in line with Macphail's views, above)<sup>154</sup> takes a similarly inclusive view of British theatrical entertainment, casting Jessie Matthews, John Gielgud (as Jollifant), and Max Miller, stars respectively of the musical, classical, and variety stages.

*Friday the Thirteenth* (UK, Victor Saville, 1933) was similarly integrative, with Matthews and Miller this time joined by a cast that included classical actor Ralph Richardson, musical theatre star Sonnie Hale, Aldwych *farceur* Robertson Hare, and the Welsh playwright and actor Emlyn Williams. The film is an ancestor of later Ealing multi-story films like *Dead of Night* (UK, Charles Crichton/Alberto Cavalcanti/Basil Dearden/Robert Hamer, 1945) and *Train of Events* (UK, Sidney Cole/Charles Crichton/Basil Dearden, 1949); like the latter film, it opens with a crash, on this occasion of a London bus, and then flashes back, showing how the various passengers, all from different social classes and areas, got there. Williams plays a blackmailer and wrote some of the dialogue, showing the preoccupation with criminal psychology that he had already illustrated in the play *A Murder has Been Arranged* (1930) and was to explore further in *Night Must Fall* (1935).

The second major studio of the period was British International Pictures. The company was headed, in hands-off fashion, by John Maxwell and was run by Walter Mycroft (1891-1959), a former journalist and founder member of the Film Society, who had become scenario editor in 1927, in which capacity he collaborated with Alfred Hitchcock (1899-1980) on *Champagne* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1928) and *Murder!* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1930), before becoming Director of Productions. Mycroft (whom we shall encounter again in connection with *The Dam Busters*) was less

ambitious than Balcon and Korda, and the studio's films tend to be less well-budgeted and made than those of his rivals, especially after he alienated the studio's greatest asset, Alfred Hitchcock, who left the studio for Gaumont-British in 1932.

British and Dominion Film Corporation, based at B.I.P.'s premises at Elstree, was run by the producer and director Herbert Wilcox. A skilled self-publicist, Wilcox was more charismatic than Mycroft, though his studio was initially as dependent on theatrical properties – an early sound success was the above-mentioned *Rookery Nook*, which led to a series of films based on Ben Travers' stage farces. The company also developed the screen careers of Jack Buchanan and Anna Neagle (Wilcox's especial protégée and, later, wife).

This period also saw a rapid growth in the number of new film companies. Associated Talking Pictures was established in 1929 by the West End entrepreneur Basil Dean (1888-1978) and the actor Gerald du Maurier (1873-1934).<sup>155</sup> Both men were immensely well connected in theatrical and literary circles, and the studio's early output reflects this, including adaptations of plays by Dean's friend John Galsworthy, *Escape* (UK, Basil Dean, 1930), starring du Maurier, and *Loyalties* (UK, Basil Dean/Thorold Dickinson, 1933), which made a bid for the American market with the casting of Basil Rathbone.

*Escape* was a bold choice for adaptation, and shows Dean's early ambition for the studio. The play, premiered in 1926, is closer in its construction to the literary picaresque tradition than the well-made play. Rather than acts and scenes it is divided into nine 'episodes' and a prologue, all but one dealing with the adventures of an escaped convict, Matt Denant, as he encounters different individuals and their reactions, finally turning himself in to avoid incriminating a kindly clergyman. Dean keeps the episodic structure, but adds sequences between the scenes, showing Denant's travels.

These are often wordless, making bold use of sound effects and montage; the film opens with a bravura, Eisenstein-ish montage sequence of a fox hunt, with the first line of dialogue not occurring till nearly six minutes into the film. Dean emphasises the balance of words and visuals with an unusual opening credit; ‘Scenario and Direction by Basil Dean. Dialogue by John Galsworthy.’

Dean is an underexamined figure in British film history; neither as flamboyant as Korda nor as populist as Balcon, he tends to be treated as a footnote in the opening chapters of books on Ealing, which ATP turned into after Dean’s departure in 1938. Dean’s work as producer and director is an important part of the story of the British cinema of the ‘thirties, and particularly in the development of strategies for dealing with stage material. His thinking on the subject is summed up in a 1938 article in the anthology *Footnotes to the Film*:

The film that says, in effect “I am something entirely original and entirely superior, and it is quite impossible to reproduce the thoughts and the emotions that I express in any other art form,” betrays the cardinal error of failing to acknowledge its own parentage. Similarly, the pedestrian film that follows slavishly the play or novel, and which makes no attempt to explore the possibilities of the medium for which its ideas are to be expressed, is equally at fault.<sup>156</sup>

Dean left the studio and returned to the theatre before he succeeded in finding a productive relationship between the two media; however, his essay, and his work at the studio, showed the way in which this relationship was being discussed.

The most important of the new Independent studios was London Films, founded by the Hungarian émigré Alexander Korda, which was to change the ambition and nature of the British cinema in the late 1930s more than any other single factor.

## The Korda Revolution

Alexander Korda (born Sandor Laszlo Kador, 1893-1956) came to Britain in November 1931, after careers as a journalist in his native Hungary, and as a film director in Austria, France, and Hollywood, where he began to put together the artistic team that was to follow him to Britain, including his brothers Zoltan (1895-1961) and Vincent (1897-1979), a director and art director respectively, and the Hungarian playwright and screenwriter Lajos Biro (1880-1948).

Biro was one of the first people that Korda employed when setting up London Films in 1932, together with the West End playwright Arthur Wimperis (1874-1953). Wimperis was a veteran of the musical and variety stage (he wrote the lyrics for *The Arcadians* [1909], the most successful British musical of the Edwardian era, and the WW1 recruiting song 'I'll Make a Man of Any One of You'), and his style, particularly in comedy, was to become a feature of Korda's output; sometimes as script-doctor and gag-man, as we will see in Chapter 8, through his work on rewrites on R.C. Sherriff's script for *The Four Feathers*.

Korda's first big British hit, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (UK, Alexander Korda, 1933) was, as Greg Walker says, 'probably the most important film produced in Britain before the Second World War.'<sup>157</sup> Though its artistic achievements are significant, it's praised more by British film historians for its status as a financial and conceptual marker, and as the film that changed the perception of British cinema at home and abroad, particularly in the United States. H. Mark Glancy credits the film, together with *Cavalcade* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1933) as inspiring Hollywood's preoccupation with 'British' subjects throughout the 1930s.<sup>158</sup>

The immense success of the film, both commercially and critically, established certain features that were to characterise British prestige pictures throughout Korda's career and, to a certain extent, up to the present day. Most obviously, there is the sense of tradition, epitomised by the period setting. This has become such a mainstay of the national cinema that it's easy to forget that, in 1933, it was going against conventional wisdom; Walker quotes an article in *Film Weekly*, shortly before the film's release, saying that 'costume pictures, whether grave or gay, are not favoured by the film trade.'<sup>159</sup>

The film draws on images of British 'high' culture, including Holbein's portrait of the King, which Charles Laughton, as Henry, recreates on his first appearance, and the theatre, especially Shakespeare's *Henry VIII*, in which Laughton was playing the King at the Old Vic, directed by Tyrone Guthrie, at the time the film opened. Indeed, a London theatregoer attending the film could easily have read it as a sequel; Shakespeare's play ends with the birth of the future Elizabeth I to Anne Boleyn in 1533, the film starts with Boleyn's execution three years later.

However, this invocation of tradition is also undercut by an air of irreverence, and the idea that we are getting an unauthorised look at the central character, as promised in the film's title. Korda had used the same linguistic construction in an earlier film, *The Private Life of Helen of Troy* (US, Alexander Korda, 1927), and was here repeating it in a specifically British context, with an added quality given by the first performance, in between the two films, of Noel Coward's *Private Lives* (1930), which, like the 1933 film, was partly about the difficulties of divorce. This title also illustrates the preoccupations of Lajos Biro, whose stage plays frequently take historical or mythic protagonists (Napoleon, Elizabeth I, Adam and Eve) and look at him, her, or

them in an unguarded private context. In Biro's short play 'Scandal in the House of Zeus' (a very Korda-esque title), the god Hermes stresses the importance of gossip:

On high Olympus the immortal gods are assembled. Do you know what is the food of the gods of which you have heard so much? It's gossip. And what is the great divine gift by which you are elevated above animals? Animals have no gossip. Gods and human beings are attracted and edified by a neat scandal. So let's begin.<sup>160</sup>

*The Private Life of Henry VIII* follows Hermes' philosophy, undercutting the characters' royal status from its opening scenes – the very first thing we see, after some establishing shots of Hampton Court, is the royal bed, and the first spoken lines come from an excited group of court ladies as they examine it with a voyeurism that echoes that of the viewer:

1<sup>ST</sup> LADY: So that's the King's bed.  
NURSE: Yes, my dear. (*Slips her hand down the bed.*) And he has not long left it – feel!  
*The girl feels the warm sheets. Her eyes are creating a picture – there is a tiny pause before she speaks. Other girls now come into the picture, feeling more at ease.*  
1<sup>ST</sup> LADY: I wonder what he looks like – in bed.  
2<sup>ND</sup> LADY: (*a rival beauty*) You'll never know!<sup>161</sup>

This combination of prestige and prurience was central to the film's success, and formed a major part of its marketing. The film set the template for a certain strain in British cinema that has endured to the present day.

*The Private Life of Henry VIII* achieved another mark of prestige, particularly for its writing, as the first British film to have its script published in book form. This was edited and introduced by Ernest Betts, film critic of the ultra-conservative *Sunday Express*, and his introduction provides an insight into the way in which he, and implicitly Korda, wished the film to be perceived. Betts carefully separates the film from the mass of commercial, mostly Hollywood, product:

The picture, as every one knows, has affected talkies profoundly, and enjoyed an astonishing success all over the world. It proved that an intelligent film, finely photographed and well produced, could appeal to vast multitudes of film-goers despite the fact that their tastes had been ruined by countless reels of sickly celluloid.<sup>162</sup>

At the same time, Betts takes pains to dissociate the film from those that were championed by what he calls 'the specialised audiences of film societies and coteries.'<sup>163</sup> For him, film is at root a populist medium:

[I]t would be absurd to regard the cinema as anything other but a popular medium of expression. It is a show which must suit the rough-and-tumble of the average man's judgement. There are films which fulfil that need and yet remain good film-craft. They are not 'pure movie' to use the undergraduate phrase of the *avant garde*, but they select with care the story, cast and director, the sounds, scenes and speeches of which film plays are composed.<sup>164</sup>

Korda's cinema is always positioned between extremes; irreverent yet grand, literary yet populist, and aimed at an international market while, according to Betts, 'as English as a Sussex field.'<sup>165</sup>

### **Film Societies and Documentaries**

Betts' scornful remark about 'film societies and coteries' is a reference to a movement that had arisen in the 1920s, and went on to exercise a considerable influence on interwar British film culture, particularly in terms of artistic ambition. The Film Society was set up in 1925, by a group of mostly university-educated young *cinephiles* led by Ivor Montagu (1904-1984) and Hugh Miller (1889-1976), and including Walter Mycroft, at this point a journalist on the *Evening Standard*. Their purpose was to present artistically interesting films that would otherwise not be seen in the UK, particularly (though not exclusively) those emanating from the *avant garde* cinemas of France, Germany and the young Soviet Union. The Society was modeled partly on similar organisations that had existed in France,<sup>166</sup> but also, more explicitly, on the

Stage Society, which had introduced the plays of Ibsen and Shaw to London in the nineteenth century. The Film Society's prospectus made it clear that, like the members of the Stage Society, they were interested in affecting the course of their medium in the future:

The Film Society has been founded in the belief that there are in this country a large number of people who regard the cinema with the liveliest interest, and who would welcome an opportunity seldom afforded the general public of witnessing films of intrinsic merit, whether young or old. [...] It is felt to be of the utmost importance that films of the type proposed should be available to the Press, and to the film trade itself, including present and (what is more important) future British film producers, editors, cameramen, titling experts and actors.<sup>167</sup>

The Film Society included among its organisers many people who either already were, or went on to be, important figures in both the commercial and documentary cinemas: as well as Walter Mycroft, Council Members included Anthony Asquith (one of the Society's first guarantors in 1925, he joined its Council six years later), John Grierson (also 1931), Thorold Dickinson (1932) and Basil Wright (1936). Among those who attended regularly were directors including Victor Saville, Herbert Wilcox and Alfred Hitchcock. George Bernard Shaw, another of the initial guarantors, didn't like leaving his home at weekends, so would 'drop into the cutting rooms, and we ran films especially in the projection theatre for him.'<sup>168</sup> The society also organised talks and lectures, given by important figures from the *avant-garde* cinema (Thorold Dickinson recalled seeing Sergei Eisenstein giving a talk there in 1930)<sup>169</sup> as well as from the more commercial end: Charles Bennett, Hitchcock's principal screenwriter at this time, addressed the Society on 'The Story in the Film' in February 1936.<sup>170</sup> Outside London there were, by 1938, over a hundred groups organized on the model of the Film Society, with a variety of philosophies, but all connected by a stated aim of '[t]he study and advancement of film art.'<sup>171</sup>



The Film Society, particularly in its original London incarnation, overlaps in philosophy and personnel with the Documentary movement – the most artistically ambitious strand in British cinema at this period. The movement was largely the creation of one person, John Grierson (1898-1972), in his capacity as head of the film unit of the Empire Marketing Board (1928-1933) and documentary producer for the General Post Office (1933-1937). As with the Film Society, the administrative model was theatrical – Sir Stephen Tallents (1884-1958), the civil servant who employed Grierson at the EMB and GPO, ‘claimed that the documentary unit had been conceived along similar lines to Michel St Denis’s multitasking theatre group Compagnie de Quinze.’<sup>172</sup> Grierson, by contrast, disliked the theatre; he was a Scottish Calvinist of strong social convictions, and his religious view of cinema is made very clear in his description of his first experience of it, in a bill that included a Lumière actuality film of a boy eating an apple:

The significant thing to me now is that our elders accepted this cinema as essentially different from theatre. Sin still, somehow, attached to play-acting, but, in this fresh new art of observation and reality, they saw no evil. I was confirmed in cinema at six because it had nothing to do with the theatre, and I have remained so confirmed. But the cinema has not. It was not quite so innocent as our Calvinist elders supposed. Hardly were the workmen out of the factory and the apple digested than it was taking a trip to the moon and, only a year or two later, a trip in full colour to the devil. The scarlet women were in, and the high falsehood of trickwork and artifice was in, and reality, and the first fine careless rapture were out.<sup>173</sup>

The imagery is striking; cinema is a religion, in which one is ‘confirmed’, and documentary the lost Eden from which the medium was excluded when, like Eve, it ate the apple. The references to *Le Voyage dans La Lune* (France, Georges Méliès, 1902) and *Les Quatres Cents faces du Diable* (France, Georges Méliès, 1906) make it clear that, in this cosmogony, Méliès plays the part of the serpent. This opposition, between Lumière and Méliès, was identified by Siegfried Kracauer as a central theme in cinema history,<sup>174</sup> although it is rare to see it expressed in such Manichean terms.

Elsewhere, Grierson distinguishes the documentary both from the post-lapsarian narrative cinema, and from the West End theatre:

Cinema has a sensational capacity for enhancing the movement which tradition has formed or time worn smooth. Its arbitrary rectangle specifically reveals movement; it gives it maximum pattern in pace and time. Add to this that documentary can achieve an intimacy of knowledge of effect impossible to the shim-sham mechanics of the studio, and the lily-fingered interpretations of the metropolitan actor.<sup>175</sup>

‘Lily-fingered’ is a telling-phrase; Grierson is drawing a distinction between documentary, represented as masculine and straightforward, as opposed to both the narrative cinema and the theatre, which are artificial, sexualized (remember his reference to the ‘scarlet women’ that entered the cinema with Méliès) and suspiciously effeminate (the reference to lilies inevitably carries a suggestion of Oscar Wilde and the aesthetic movement of the 1890s). Grierson’s world-view here is predictive of the Royal Court dramatists of the 1950s, who similarly positioned themselves as representatives of a masculine, heterosexual realism, as against the artifice of an effete West End.<sup>176</sup>

### **Case Study – Alfred Hitchcock and Charles Bennett**

A recurring theme in British cinema writing of the ‘thirties is the question of the relation between the theatre and cinema, and the ways in which the older medium could serve the younger. As already noted, one person who wrote on this subject was Basil Dean; another important thinker, more surprisingly, was Alfred Hitchcock.

A lifelong theatregoer,<sup>177</sup> who frequently cast actors that he had seen on stage,<sup>178</sup> Hitchcock’s early sound output includes five films based on stage originals; *Blackmail* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1929), *Juno and the Paycock* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1929), *The Skin Game* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1931), *Number 17* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock,

1932), and *Waltzes from Vienna* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1934). While the last two are half-hearted exercises<sup>179</sup> and the first departs very far from its source, *Juno and The Skin Game*, based on plays by Sean O’Casey and John Galsworthy respectively, show the beginnings of the experimentation with stage-based effects that Hitchcock was later to explore in *Rope* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1948) and *Dial M for Murder* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1954).

In an essay written for the 1938 anthology *Footnotes to the Film*, Hitchcock set out his view of the difference between stage and screen techniques, specifically with reference to acting. He commented on the difficulties of working with actors who preferred long takes:

[I]f I have to shoot a long scene continuously I always feel as if I am losing grip on it, from a cinematic point of view. The camera, I feel, is simply standing there, *hoping* to catch something with a visual point to it. What I like to do always is to photograph the little bits of a scene that I really need for building up a visual sequence. I want to put my film together on the screen, not simply to photograph something that has been put together already in the form of a long piece of stage acting.<sup>180</sup>

Later in the same essay, he contrasts this technique with that of a stage actor:

This way of building up a picture means that film work hasn’t much need for the virtuoso actor who gets his effects and climaxes himself, who plays directly on the audience with the force of his talent and personality. The screen actor has got to be much more plastic; he has to submit himself to be used by the director and the camera.<sup>181</sup>

Hitchcock’s analysis shows an understanding of both media; in his view, theatre and cinema are aiming at similar ‘effects and climaxes’; the difference is that on screen, the director is responsible for these, on stage, the actor. *Rope* shows this principle in action – Hitchcock’s camera moves about the space in imitation of the way that a skilled theatrical ensemble would guide the eye of an audience member.<sup>182</sup>

When speaking of writing, Hitchcock's dramaturgy is very much that of the Edwardian theatre of his youth; In a 1934 essay, "'Stodgy" British Pictures', he refers to 'the masters of the modern stage – Barrie and Pinero, for example.'<sup>183</sup> However, he also compared British screenwriters unfavourably with what had been seen more recently in the theatre:

See what happens on the stage. A play like *The Last of Mrs. Cheyney* [by Frederick Lonsdale, 1925] has comedy in the first act, which builds up to the drama of the second, and concludes with a third act of pure farce. The continual change from one mood to the other keeps the audience interested and heightens the effect of both the comedy and the drama. But if you suggested doing that in the average British film, you would be greeted with howls of horror.<sup>184</sup>

An important factor in Hitchcock's relationship with the theatre was his collaboration with the actor and playwright Charles Bennett (1899-1995) who first worked with him on *Blackmail* (1929), having written the play on which the film was based. Bennett went on to collaborate with Hitchcock on five more films, as well as contributing to another twenty British films. In January 1936, the *Era* magazine referred to Bennett as Britain's 'Most Successful Screen-Story Writer.'<sup>185</sup>

Bennett's particular skill was in the application of well-made dramaturgy to cinematic ends. In one of his first films, *Deadlock* (UK, George King, 1931), he came up with a new twist on the choreography of knowledge by having the leading man's innocence revealed thanks to '[f]ilm footage, discovered in a camera that had slipped from its platform during filming'<sup>186</sup> (Bennett is here following in the traditions of nineteenth century playwrights who would seek out new ways of conveying information; Dion Boucicault had earned considerable publicity for being one of the first dramatists to use a photograph as a plot device in *The Octoroon* [1859]<sup>187</sup>). Like Victorien Sardou, Bennett would sometimes start with the *scène à faire*:

I suppose I was the best-known constructionist, scenarist, scenario writer in the world at that time. I'm not being conceited, but I was awfully bloody

good, and Hitch recognized this in me. The fundamental thing - and Hitch always used to say this - is that you've got to get the story line first. By *construction* I mean architecture - knowing the ending before you know your beginning, then working up to that ending.<sup>188</sup>

Bennett was also important in the development of what Angus MacPhail was later to christen the 'MacGuffin', defined by Bennett as 'a plot device that motivates the characters but becomes less important to the unfolding story.'<sup>189</sup> His use of this device predates most of his work with Hitchcock - he writes of *The Secret of the Loch* (UK, Milton Rosmer, 1934), a film ostensibly about the Loch Ness monster, that 'the monster is unimportant, a device to propel the love interest.'<sup>190</sup>

### **Retreat and Retrenchment**

The success of *Henry VIII* led to a period of increased optimism and financial over-investment in the national film industry. There was a wave of films dealing with British history; Gaumont-British's *Tudor Rose* (UK, Robert Stevenson, 1936) is a quasi-sequel to Korda's film, starting just after Henry's death and dealing with the brief reign of Lady Jane Grey, while Herbert Wilcox made *Nell Gwyn* (UK, Herbert Wilcox, 1934), a remake of a subject he'd already dealt with in 1926, as well as two rather more reverential films starring Anna Neagle as Queen Victoria, *Victoria the Great* (UK, Herbert Wilcox, 1937) and *Sixty Glorious Years* (UK, Herbert Wilcox, 1938).

Korda himself failed to achieve another hit as big as *Henry VIII*; following it up with a minor success in *The Scarlet Pimpernel* (UK, Harold Young, 1934), co-scripted by the American playwright Robert Sherwood, then a number of troubled productions including *Things to Come* (UK, William Cameron Menzies, 1936), an overpriced *succès d'estime*, and *Rembrandt* (UK, Alexander Korda, 1936), an attempt to create another vehicle for Charles Laughton. Both productions had problematic scripts:

*Things to Come* was adapted by H. G. Wells from his own 1933 speculative fiction *The Shape of Things to Come*, and reproduces that book's episodic structure, while showing Wells' discomfort in writing spoken dialogue. (Drazin suggests that Korda was too intimidated by Wells' literary prestige to ask for rewrites.)<sup>191</sup>

*Rembrandt* was scripted by the German playwright Carl Zuckmayer, and, like *Things to Come*, is structured episodically, almost as a series of unrelated short narratives that happen to feature the same protagonist. This is a general feature of Zuckmayer's work; his best-known play, *The Captain from Kopenick* (1931) and screenplay, *Der Blaue Engel/The Blue Angel* (Germany, Josef von Sternberg, 1930) are similarly loosely structured.<sup>192</sup> Graham Greene was especially critical of this aspect in his review of the finished film, relating it to a wider problem in British cinema:

[T]he film is ruined by lack of story and continuity; it has no drive. Like *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, it is a series of unrelated tableaux. [...] From the dramatic point of view, the first might as well be last and the last first. Nothing is led up to, nothing is led away from.

[...]

'Scenes from the Life of...' – that is how this picture should be described, [...] it is chiefly remarkable for the lesson it teaches, that no amount of money spent on expensive sets, no careful photography, will atone for the lack of a story 'line', the continuity and drive of a well constructed plot.<sup>193</sup>

By 1936, Leonard Wallace was referring to Alexander Korda as 'a Napoleon of Dreams' for having announced at least thirty-nine projects after *Henry*, and only delivering eight.<sup>194</sup> The previous over-investment led to a financial crisis in 1936, which itself contributed to a shrinking of the industry, paving the way for the near-monopoly enjoyed by J. Arthur Rank after the Second World War.

In 1938, the industry was also affected by a new Cinematograph Act. This modified the earlier Act by imposing a minimum budget for quota films (acting, at least in theory, as a form of quality control, and ending the era of the quota quickie) and

allowing films to count as double- or triple-quota films if they met more than one of the criteria used to define British films. If the aim was to ensure that there were fewer, but better, British films, the new Act was at least halfway successful; production fell from 228 in 1937-8 to 103 the following year.<sup>195</sup> The success of the second aim is less easy to quantify, though some critics at the time argued that the crisis, and the subsequent focus on the domestic market, had brought its own benefits. One such critic, unsurprisingly, was Graham Greene, whose review of *Inspector Hornleigh* (UK, Eugene Forde, 1939) opened with a slightly racist dig at Korda: ‘How the financial crisis has improved English films! They have lost their tasteless Semitic opulence and are becoming – English,’<sup>196</sup> suggesting a few weeks later that ‘[i]n another twelve months we may find ourselves pursuing English films into obscure cinemas in the Edgware Road.’<sup>197</sup> (The suggestion that this would be desirable perhaps sums up the difference between Greene and Korda.)

The late ‘thirties thus caught British cinema in a period of transition; retreating from the ambitions of the Korda era, the national industry was redefining itself. In this respect, the 1938 book *Footnotes to the Film* is an interesting artefact, providing a snapshot of the industry just before the war. Chapters were contributed by many important industry figures – Alfred Hitchcock, John Grierson, Alexander Korda, Basil Dean. (The only chapter written by a woman, the Irish novelist Elizabeth Bowen, was about the experience of the audience.) The editor, Charles Davy, provided a postscript entitled ‘The Film Marches On’ which itself quotes an essay by John Grierson on the prospects for the British cinema (showing, incidentally, that Grierson’s indifference to narrative was not as great as he sometimes suggested):

Grierson speaks of “two profound weaknesses in British production.” One is lack of co-ordinated team work: “a gang working together who know how to hand it out, and also take it – and especially take it – is a vital necessity in the exacting business of film-making”. The other weakness is in scripts: ‘The

only first-rate British script that has been seen recently was the one for *Farewell Again* [Tim Whelan, 1937], the only one, in fact that has had the sense of timing, the sense of filmic bits and pieces about it, necessary to story-telling on the screen.” We have got to find or train new writers[.]<sup>198</sup>

As mentioned above, the story of the British cinema in the 1930s is that of the gradual development of number of discrete national cinemas. The quota system had created a popular cinema and an industrial basis, Korda had created a prestige cinema and international success, then showed its limitations, and the film society and documentary movements had provided a context for artistic ambition. In the ‘forties and ‘fifties, these strands were to come together. Part of the purpose in this thesis is to show how the skills of stage playwrights were a vital element in this process.



### Chapter Three – The Screenwriter as Star – George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward.

During the 1930s, George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward were the two most publicly acclaimed playwrights in the UK. Though films were made of both men's plays, both before and just after the coming of sound, neither writer was involved in their making, and both were wary of the cinema. Both men finally entered the cinema, Shaw with an adaptation of his most successful play, *Pygmalion*, Coward with *In Which We Serve*, an original screenplay that owed a lot, in its atmosphere and structure, to his own play *Cavalcade* (1931), then even more successfully with *Brief Encounter*, an adaptation of his own short play *Still Life* (1936). (In between, Lean also directed two films based on Coward plays, *This Happy Breed* [UK, David Lean, 1944] and *Blithe Spirit* [UK, David Lean, 1945], without Coward's direct involvement.). All three films were made in collaboration with experienced film-makers who went on to enjoy long periods of collaboration with other stage playwrights – Anthony Asquith for Shaw, David Lean for Coward.

This thesis will be arguing that the commercial success of these films, and the techniques that the playwrights developed to adapt their skills to the screen, were to have a considerable effect on the relationship between stage and screen writing in the late 1930s and after. In particular, the films of *Pygmalion* and *Brief Encounter* use similar techniques for opening out the stage plays, utilising the well-made play's already-mentioned evocation of an offstage world as the basis for additional scenes. In both cases, these were so successful that the 'opened-out' versions of the plays have become the definitive versions for stage productions.<sup>199</sup> Both writers produced screenplays that were, in effect, hypertexts of their own earlier work.

## George Bernard Shaw

By the beginning of the 1930s, George Bernard Shaw had entered into the final phase of his long career. Having been in the public eye as a critic and polemicist for nearly half a century, he settled into a period of re-examination and re-framing. Shaw's biographer, Michael Holroyd, describes it in appropriately literary terms:

Shaw's last twenty-five years can be viewed in part as a rewriting of his first seventy years. He ghosted more biographies; he re-edited his collected works for their Standard Edition; he pursued obsessive themes in new plays as well as in the transposition of old plays on to radio and into films [...]<sup>200</sup>

Shaw had been interested in the cinema for a long time, both as a leisure activity and a possible forum; as early as 1908 he suggested, in a letter to Arthur Pinero, that the synchronisation of film with the gramophone record could open up a new career for both of them,<sup>201</sup> while by 1912 he was telling his most intimate correspondent, Mrs. Patrick Campbell, that he 'cannot keep away from the cinema.'<sup>202</sup> This enthusiasm remained throughout the silent era; in a 1927 interview he declared that 'I am very fond of the movies. I am what they call in America a "movie fan".'<sup>203</sup> As noted in the previous chapter, when the Film Society was founded in 1925, Shaw was one of its first guarantors.

Shaw first considered writing for the medium in 1913, when he accepted an invitation to visit Gaumont Studios, and negotiated the possibility of writing both an adaptation of one of his plays, and an original scenario.<sup>204</sup> Throughout the 1920s, he turned down several offers to have his plays filmed, sometimes citing pragmatic reasons, arguing that a film version would kill the play's potential for revival, and sometimes artistic ones, saying that the strength of his plays lay in their dialogue and that '[a] play with the words left out is a play spoilt.'<sup>205</sup>

The coming of sound removed at least one of Shaw's objections (probably the greater one; as he himself must have realised, the two objections are to some extent contradictory). He declared himself open to offers in a *New York Times* interview in 1929, asserting that the lack of sound 'was the only reason I did not permit the filming of my plays, because their greatest strength was their dialogue.'<sup>206</sup>

Given the considerable interest in Shaw's work, and the number of people wanting to film it, it's a little surprising that the two British film adaptations that precede *Pygmalion* are both low-key affairs, one of a minor one-act play, one of a piece better known through an unauthorised musical version, and both made by an inexperienced director, Cecil Lewis (1898-1997). (Dukore suggests that Shaw's granting of the rights for the first film may have been a personal favour to Lewis, which explains why the author didn't risk a more commercial property.) Both films – *How He Lied to Her Husband* (UK, Cecil Lewis, 1931) and *Arms and the Man* (UK, Cecil Lewis, 1932) - can reasonably be described as interesting failures.

According to his own account, Shaw wrote the play *How He Lied to Her Husband* (1904) in four days, when the actor-manager Arnold Daly asked for a piece to fill out a double-bill with *The Man of Destiny* (1897). Shaw himself describes the play as '[t]rifling' and justifies its printing as 'a sample of what can be done with even the most hackneyed stage framework',<sup>207</sup> in this case, an encounter between a husband, his wife, and her lover. Shaw goes out of his way to emphasise the generic nature of the situation; the characters, although they have names, are referred to in the stage directions simply as 'He', 'She' and 'Her Husband', and the plot revolves round the most Scribean of devices, a bundle of manuscripts.

The play, which has only three characters and one situation, would seem like an odd choice for filming. This was emphasised by Shaw's contract which insisted, in

unpunctuated legalese, that the play be filmed ‘without transpositions interpolations omissions or any alterations misrepresenting the Author for better or worse except such as the Author may consent to or himself suggest’.<sup>208</sup> In other words, every word of the play had to be in the film, and nothing else.

The author’s status ensured that this film would be seen as something of an event: Vera Lennox (1903-1984), who played ‘She’, recalled that ‘it had been publicised that for the first time Shaw was going to permit one of his plays to be made into a talkie [...] I thought – everybody thought – that if you played in that, you were made.’<sup>209</sup> Shaw’s position as the real star is shown in a moment suggested by the film’s scenarist, Frank Launder. Where the play has the young lover entering his mistress’ room and placing his top hat on the piano, Launder suggested having him put it on a bust of GBS himself. (Shaw was unamused, and the joke isn’t in the film).

*How He Lied To Her Husband* is an exercise in cinematic perversity, never moving from the play’s one set and three characters. Shaw himself argued that this wasn’t in itself uncinematic:

The usual changes from New York to the Rocky Mountains, from Marseilles to the Sahara, from Monte Carlo, are replaced by changes from the piano to the sideboard, from the window to the door, from the hearth rug to the carpet.<sup>210</sup>

Michael Holroyd suggests that ‘[i]n film technique *How He Lied* explores similar ground to the experiment Alfred Hitchcock was to make in 1948 with Patrick Hamilton’s claustrophobic stage-thriller *Rope*.’<sup>211</sup> This is to flatter Lewis’ directorial technique; directors who have made a success of one-location films, as Hitchcock did with *Rope* or Sidney Lumet with *Twelve Angry Men* (US, Sidney Lumet, 1957) – and, indeed, as Anthony Asquith was to do with the interior scenes in *Pygmalion* – do so by creating mini-locations within the set, making the small changes significant in exactly the way that Shaw described. Lewis is not as skilled; he films the set mostly from one

side, as if through a proscenium arch, even in the first establishing shot. He also fails to establish the relationships within the room, several times ‘crossing the line’ in dialogue scenes. In a remarkable piece of carelessness, he even retains a take where Vera Lennox (as ‘She’) misspeaks a line and corrects herself.

It’s unclear how successful *How He Lied to Her Husband* was: Walter Mycroft writes in his autobiography that it lost money even on a tiny budget, while Cecil Lewis claimed that it was greatly acclaimed, and led to him being offered a contract by B.I.P.<sup>212</sup> What is indisputable is that B.I.P. employed Lewis to direct a second Shawian adaptation, *Arms and the Man*. Given the mixed reception to the earlier film, Shaw’s motivations here are uncertain; Dukore suggests that he may have seen the film as a spoiler operation to pre-empt filming of *The Chocolate Soldier*, an unauthorised musical version of the play that had enjoyed great success.<sup>213</sup>

Shaw’s handwritten notes on the screenplay suggest that his attitude to cuts and alterations was softening; while he objects to some of Lewis’ changes, he approves others, and occasionally suggests additional ones. Dukore takes the view that ‘Shaw makes more effective use of film technique than Lewis does,’<sup>214</sup> particularly in his suggestions for close-ups.

It’s hard to judge *Arms and the Man* from the finished film; following disappointing reviews, B.I.P. cut the film down to 85 minutes, with the intention of selling it as a second feature, and this cut version is the only one that survives. The film is more obviously ‘cinematic’ than *How He Lied*, with less line-crossing, and at least one moment when dialogue and visuals are set in witty counterpoint – as a character praises his own library, we are shown a single shelf holding a total of fifteen books. The film’s critical and financial failure marked the end of B.I.P.’s association with the author.

Shaw's frustrating film career didn't improve until the arrival of the producer and entrepreneur Gabriel Pascal (1894-1954), and Shaw's sale to him of the film rights to *Pygmalion*.

### **Case Study – *Pygmalion***

Since its first production in 1914, *Pygmalion* has always been the most commercially successful of Shaw's plays. One reason for this was indicated in the report of the Lord Chamberlain's reader, G.S. Street, who read the play in an anonymous edition, credited only to 'a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature':

It is understood that this is by Bernard Shaw and on internal evidence no one else could have written it. It is in his happiest light manner and contains, what is unusual with him, a passage of genuine and tender feeling.<sup>215</sup>

The passage referred to is that at the end of the play, when the signature Shavian discussion, here between the Professor of Phonetics Henry Higgins and his protégée/experiment Eliza Doolittle, takes on the quality of a lovers' quarrel. As we will see, Shaw himself always claimed to disapprove of any attempt to portray this relationship in romantic terms. This may have been a little disingenuous; if Shaw had genuinely wished to avoid any suggestion of romance between the two, he could have given the play a different title. Whatever Shaw's stated intention, there is no denying that audiences and actors have frequently wanted to see the two characters end up together. Dukore's judgement that 'the play dramatizes neither scenes of wooing nor flirtation between them'<sup>216</sup> would be disputed by most actors who have played either part; Frances Barber, for instance, who played Eliza at the National Theatre in 1992, believed that after throwing the slippers at Higgins' head, Eliza would want to have 'made love with him later.'<sup>217</sup> By contrast, her relationship with Freddie Eynsford-Hill

is (at least in the play's original version) a blank; he and Eliza are onstage together for roughly four of the play's eighty pages, and are only alone for a half-page exchange at the end of the first act.

In this original version, the play ends with a suggestion that Eliza will return to the Higgins/Pickering household, as companion if not lover (all quotations from Shaw's plays retain his idiosyncratic approach towards spelling and punctuation):

HIGGINS: [...] And buy me a pair of reindeer gloves, number eights and a tie to match that new suit of mine, at Eale and Binnans. You can choose the color. [*sic*]  
LIZA: (*disdainfully*) Buy them yourself. (*She sweeps out.*)  
MRS. HIGGINS: I'm afraid you've spoilt that girl, Henry. But never mind, dear; I'll buy you the tie and gloves.  
HIGGINS: (*cheerfully*) Oh, don't bother. She'll bring 'em all right enough. Good-bye.

(*They kiss. Mrs. Higgins runs out. Higgins left alone, rattles the cash in his pocket, and chuckles.*)<sup>218</sup>

(The 1931 edition, published after the play had been produced, is even more emphatic; the final stage direction reads '*Higgins, left alone, rattles his cash in his pocket, chuckles and disports himself in a highly self-satisfied manner.*')<sup>219</sup>

*Pygmalion* is also the play in which Shaw, the most vocal critic of the well-made play, made the greatest use of its techniques. Two examples will make the point.

Firstly, the use of foreshadowing, and what William Archer called 'finger-posts', to prepare the audience for the play's comic high-point, Eliza's 'Not bloody likely!' The swear-word is planted subliminally in the audience's mind by a dialogue in the previous Act between Higgins and his housekeeper, Mrs. Pearce:

MRS. PEARCE: You swear a great deal too much. I don't mind your damning and blasting and what the devil and where the devil and who the devil –  
HIGGINS: Mrs. Pearce: this language from your lips! Really!  
MRS. PEARCE: (*not to be put off*) – but there is a certain word I must ask you not to use. The girl used it herself when she began to enjoy the bath. It begins with the same letter

as bath. She knows no better; she learnt it at her mother's knee. But she must not hear it from your lips. [...] Only this morning, sir, you applied it to your boots, to the butter, and to the brown bread.

HIGGINS: Oh that! Mere alliteration, Mrs. Pearce, natural to a poet.<sup>220</sup>

(It's also worth noting that this scene serves to suggest an affinity between Eliza and Higgins; they use the same swear-words.) In the next act, the danger that Eliza's vocabulary may not match her trained accent is hinted at by an interrupted dialogue between Higgins and his mother:

HIGGINS: [...] She talks English almost as you talk French.  
 MRS. HIGGINS: That's satisfactory, at all events.  
 HIGGINS: Well, it is and it isn't.  
 MRS. HIGGINS: What does that mean?  
 HIGGINS: You see, I've [*sic*] got her pronunciation all right; but you have to consider not only how a girl pronounces, but what she pronounces; and that's where –

*(They are interrupted by the parlor-maid, announcing guests.)*<sup>221</sup>

The scene plays out, a comic set piece based around the disjunction between Eliza's pronunciation and subject matter. It is only when Eliza is leaving, and the audience has relaxed, thinking that the scene is over, that we get the punchline:

LIZA: (*nodding to the others*) Goodbye, all.  
 FREDDY: (*opening the door for her*) Are you walking across the park, Miss Doolittle? If so –  
 LIZA: (*with perfectly elegant diction*) Walk! Not bloody likely. (*Sensation.*) I am going in a taxi. (*She goes out.*)<sup>222</sup>

Shaw has here created an expectation, appeared to frustrate it, then fulfilled it when the audience has ceased to expect it; Archer describes the technique very precisely, describing cases where 'it may be advisable to beget a momentary



misapprehension on the part of the audience, which shall be almost instantly corrected in some pleasant or otherwise effective fashion.’<sup>223</sup>

A second example of Shaw’s craftsmanship comes in his use of the choreography of knowledge, keeping an important piece of information from the audience. In the second act, Higgins and Pickering set up the bet that structures the play; that, in six months, Higgins will take Eliza to an Ambassador’s garden party and pass her off as a lady. Having set this up as a *scène à faire*, one which the audience might reasonably expect to see, Shaw keeps it offstage, and, at the start of Act IV, shows us the aftermath, rather than the garden party itself: Pickering, Higgins and Eliza enter the Wimpole Street laboratory around midnight, in evening dress. It’s not until after nearly one and a half pages of dialogue between the two men that we discover the outcome of the experiment:

PICKERING: (*stretching himself*) Well, I feel a bit tired. It’s been a long day. The garden party, a dinner party, and the opera! Rather too much of a good thing. But youve [*sic*] won your bet, Higgins. Eliza did the trick and something to spare, eh?

HIGGINS: (*fervently*) Thank God it’s over!  
(*Eliza flinches violently; but they take no notice of her; and she recovers herself and sits stonily as before.*)<sup>224</sup>

This scene is also remarkable for the use that Shaw makes of Eliza’s silence; as the above stage direction suggests, she doesn’t speak during the pair’s opening dialogue, only breaking the silence three pages into the scene by throwing Higgins’ slippers at his head. Her presence as an unspeaking character is easy to miss in reading the play; onstage, she becomes the scene’s dominating presence, an unusual use of silence by the most verbal of playwrights. This is an example of what Martin Meisel refers to as silence as ‘a kind of subtext’:

The function of *revealing* through what is spoken here includes its opposite, the still unspoken – what the unconditioned words do not or will not or cannot say. It is another form of resistance in the discourse, complicating what the

actors are asked to do with the words, a negative element whose extreme limit is silence.<sup>225</sup>

Shaw first came to adapt the play for a 1935 German screen version, and it was this script that formed the basis of the 1938 screenplay. Shaw states explicitly in his handwritten notes that this is a different work from the original play, and that his ‘omissions from and additions to’ the play ‘are so extensive that the printed play should be carefully kept out of the studio, as it can only confuse and mislead the producer and performers.’<sup>226</sup> Shaw’s method is to retain edited versions of the play’s scenes, while adding scenes in between them, which he refers to as ‘*entr’actes*’. Ironically, the limited locations preferred by West End theatre of this period makes the plays very suitable for this kind of treatment – as discussed in Chapter One, part of the technique of the well-made play lies in its implication of offstage action and history, so playwrights adapting their own work already have an idea of what occurs in the additional scenes.

One particular focus of these ‘omissions and additions’ is Shaw’s stated desire to downplay any idea of romance between Eliza and Higgins. He had already made this clear in an afterword that he added to the 1931 edition of the play:

The rest of the story need not be shewn [*sic*] in action, and indeed, would hardly need telling if our imaginations were not so enfeebled by their lazy dependence on the ready-mades and reach-me-downs of the ragshop in which Romance keeps its store of ‘happy endings’ to misfit all stories.<sup>227</sup>

He then goes on to narrate the events that follow the end of the play, including Eliza’s marriage to Freddie Eynsford-Hill.

Of course, afterwords are not shown on stage (though, as we will see, Shaw used material from this narrative in one of his many endings for the script), and audiences have continued to read the relationship as romantic. Shaw is determined

that the film's audiences (and makers) should not misunderstand him in this way. On Higgins' first appearance he writes that the character should be in his 40s and 'in strong contrast to Freddy, who is 20, slim, goodlooking [*sic*] and very youthful':

(The Producer should bear in mind from the beginning that it is Freddy who captivates and finally carries off Eliza, and that all suggestion of a love interest between Eliza and Higgins should be carefully avoided.)<sup>228</sup>

Shaw's excisions and additions often back up this aim; he eliminates a discussion between Higgins and Pickering about the former's relationship with women, and, more surprisingly, takes out much of the play's dramatic climax, the final confrontation between Higgins and Eliza. Where the play's ending had been ambiguous, Shaw attempts, in the screenplay, to close down the debate with an additional scene. After the moment that ends the first version of the play, with Higgins 'disporting himself in a highly self-satisfied manner,' he goes to the window, from where he sees Mrs. Higgins and Liza (as Shaw calls her at this point) getting into a limousine:

49. *Freddy appears.*

LIZA: Here he is, Mrs. Higgins. May he come?

MRS HIGGINS: Certainly, dear. Room for four.

*Liza kisses Freddy.*

50. The balcony.

Higgins' smile changes to an expression of fury.

He shakes his fist at the kissing couple below.

51. The Embankment.

Liza cocks a snook prettily at Higgins and gets into the car.

Freddy takes off his hat to Higgins in the Chaplin manner and follows Liza into the car.

The car drives off. Wedding march.<sup>229</sup>

(It's striking that even here, when ostensibly trying to avoid any flirtation between Eliza and Higgins, Shaw can't quite manage it; why is that 'prettily' there?)

Shaw also adds a love scene involving Eliza and Freddy, between the play's fourth and fifth acts, as well as two other '*entr-actes*' – a pageant-like scene showing

the passage of time between the second and third acts, and a sequence, between the third and the fourth, that shows the start of the Ambassador's Ball (no longer a garden party). At this stage, Shaw carefully fades out the scene before Eliza is presented, preserving the surprise of the fourth act reveal. He also adds a scene of Eliza being given a bath by Mrs. Pearce, offstage in the original play. Shaw was clearly aware of the sexual potential of this scene, he states that 'Liza is of course dressed from the waist to the knees; but she is masked by Mrs. Pearce during the moment between the snatching off of the bathing gown and the concealment of her bathing drawers by the side of the bath.'<sup>230</sup> The intended effect seems to be a technique that both suggests and avoids nudity. (The scene was heavily featured in the reviews of the finished film – by the time of the 1945 tie-in book for *Caesar and Cleopatra*, it was being referred to as 'the famous glimpse of Eliza in the bath-tub.')<sup>231</sup>

Shaw's determination to eliminate all traces of romance sometimes extends to individual words. In the pair's final exchange, Higgins describes Eliza as 'a tower of strength: a consort battleship':<sup>232</sup> the screenplay cuts the word 'consort'. In the same scene, Shaw also plays down the original script's hint of sado-masochism; Eliza's 'I dont [*sic*] mind a black eye'<sup>233</sup> becomes 'I shouldn't mind...'<sup>234</sup>

During the shooting of the 1938 film, Shaw made a number of additional revisions and additions. At the suggestion of the film's director, Anthony Asquith, he added a scene of Higgins tutoring Eliza, and expanded the Ambassador's Ball scene, so that we actually see Eliza's success, which Shaw describes as an 'ordeal'. This, of course, removes the mystery from the beginning of the play's fourth act. Shaw replaces mystery with suspense by adding a new character in the ball scene, a former pupil of Higgins' (named Nepommuck in the screenplay, Karpathy in the finished film) who may be able to expose Eliza.

Most significantly, he wrote a new ending, his third. Shaw disapproved of the casting of Leslie Howard as Higgins, describing him as ‘fatally wrong’<sup>235</sup> and fearing (correctly, as it turned out) that the actor was likely to turn the film into a love story. Possibly in reaction to this, Shaw wrote the most unambiguous of his four endings. This incorporates material from the afterword of the 1931 edition, in the form of a flash-forward:

A vision of the future.  
A florist’s shop in South Kensington, full of fashionable customers. Liza behind the counter, serving in great splendour. The name of the shopkeeper, F. HILL is visible. Half the shop is stocked with vegetables. Freddy, in apron and mild muttonchop whiskers, is serving. Dreamlike silence.<sup>236</sup>

While the previous endings had shown Higgins either disbelieving in Eliza’s marriage to Freddy, or infuriated by it, this version has him accepting of it, using a phrase that one can imagine Shaw hearing from Asquith and Pascal in story discussions:

Higgins standing rapt. A policewoman comes along. She stops and looks curiously at Higgins, who is quite unconscious of her, and visibly rapt.

POLICEWOMAN: Anything wrong, sir?  
HIGGINS: [waking up] What?  
POLICEWOMAN: Anything wrong, sir?  
HIGGINS: [Impressively] No, nothing wrong. A happy ending. A happy beginning. Good morning, madam.  
POLICEWOMAN: [impressed] Good morning, sir.

Higgins raises his hat and stalks away majestically. The policewoman stands to attention and salutes.<sup>237</sup>

Of the many endings of *Pygmalion*, this surely has to be the weakest. It’s hard to say which is most out of character; Higgins’ cheerful stoicism, the image of Freddy as a contented greengrocer, or the idea that Eliza would allow her name to be left off the shopfront. (One must also sympathise with the actress playing the policewoman, having to be impressed by Higgins’ greeting-card bromide.) The awkwardness of this conclusion illustrates how central ambiguity is to the story; any attempt to give it a definitive ‘happy ending’ is inevitably unsatisfying.

The finished film is one of the most successful British films of the 1930s, and the national cinema's most fully realised adaptation of a stage play before *Henry V* (UK, Laurence Olivier, 1944). Anthony Asquith uses a fluid, mobile camera style, making the long dialogue scenes cinematic in the way that Shaw had described (though Lewis hadn't achieved) as early as *How He Lied to Her Husband*. For example, in the scene that corresponds to the play's second act, Asquith uses the furnishings in Higgins' laboratory (particularly a collection of Buddhas) as landmarks, creating a sense of location within the single set.

In other respects, Asquith's film must have confirmed Shaw's worst fears. He restored much of the material that Shaw had cut, particularly that which contributes to the romantic story – the Pickering/Higgins dialogue, much of the final (or, in this case, penultimate) Eliza/Higgins scene; even 'consort battleship' and 'I don't mind a black eye' are back in.

Most notoriously, the finished film has yet another new ending. According to Asquith's own account, he filmed three endings before coming up with the one he used; one followed Shaw's 1938 screenplay, one was a compromise, suggesting but not showing the 'happy ending,' and one returned to the ambiguous ending of the play. Unsatisfied with all of these, he finally constructed a new ending, in which Eliza returns to Higgins in his laboratory. Since he couldn't write new dialogue for this scene, Asquith had both characters quote lines from earlier in the script; Eliza's returning to her earlier accent for 'I washed me face and 'ands afore I come here' and Higgins repeating the line that had earlier caused their quarrel 'Where the devil are my slippers, Eliza?' (David Lean, who assisted Asquith on the film, and directed the montage sequences, claimed in a 1964 letter that this line was his idea.<sup>238</sup>) Even in this 'romantic' ending, there is no embrace; the film ends with Higgins turning away from the camera

and leaning back in his chair, tipping his hat over his eyes in a shot that echoes his first appearance in the film.

Critical and public opinion have both long been divided over this ending. Dukore calls it ‘ridiculous’<sup>239</sup> and argues that it makes nonsense of what we have seen in Eliza up to this point. However, it is the ending that has remained in the popular imagination, not least through its use in the play’s musical adaptation, *My Fair Lady* (1956). Dukore describes this as an example of the desire to find a romantic ending that he attributes to ‘adaptors into German and Dutch movies and American musical comedy.’<sup>240</sup> Like Shaw himself, Dukore assumes that this desire is simply a default choice, a wish to fit the play into a predetermined idea of what a story should be. This is unfair; as we have seen, Asquith shot three endings before settling on the final one, while Alan Jay Lerner, *My Fair Lady*’s lyricist/librettist, makes it clear that his departure from Shaw was a conscious decision; he writes in the published text of *My Fair Lady* that he omitted Shaw’s afterword because ‘in it Shaw explains how Eliza ends not with Higgins but with Freddy and – Shaw and Heaven forgive me! – I am not certain he is right.’<sup>241</sup>

As for Shaw himself, he decried the ending in his correspondence, at the same time suggesting that it wasn’t especially important. ‘They devised a scene to give a lovelorn complexion to Mr. Leslie Howard, but it is too inconclusive to be worth making a fuss about.’<sup>242</sup> Whatever his true feelings were, he supported the film in public, accepting an Oscar for Best Screenplay.

In 1941, Shaw published what was to be his final version of the script; an edition which married the play’s uncut text with some, though not all, of the scenes written for the film; a sequence with Eliza at home, Eliza’s bath, the elocution lesson, the Ambassador’s Ball (with a necessary slight rewriting of the scene that follows it) and

the Freddy/Eliza love-scene. He suggests, in a ‘Note for Technicians’, that these should be considered as optional extras:

A complete representation of the play as printed for the first time in the edition is technically possible only on the cinema screen or on stages furnished with exceptionally elaborate machinery. For ordinary theatrical use the scenes separated by rows of asterisks are to be omitted.<sup>243</sup>

Dukore suggests that Shaw ‘did not want new film sequences added to stage productions’ and that he therefore ‘published only those unlikely to find their way onto the stage, such as Liza Doolittle’s bath.’<sup>244</sup> This is a rather perverse view: while some of the additional scenes would be hard to stage, for physical or economic reasons, (the bath, the Ambassador’s Ball), there are others (the lesson, the Eliza/Freddy scene) that wouldn’t. Also, as Dukore knew, there were sequences in the screenplay, mostly unfilmed, that would be far less stageable than the ones which Shaw included; for instance, a fantasy sequence where Eliza imagines herself ‘in a coronet and diamonds, like Queen Alexandra, but with an expression of extreme hauteur.’<sup>245</sup> Dukore also ignores the fact that the bathroom scene was licensed for performance in 1941, soon after the revised script’s publication.<sup>246</sup>

This 1941 version of the play has become the ‘definitive’ version; it’s the only one that’s readily available in the UK (the situation is different in the United States, where the 1914 version is out of copyright), and has become the text used for most stage productions – when Peter Hall used the original version for his 2008 production at Bath Theatre Royal, it was a rare event. (*My Fair Lady* is again a factor here – Alan Jay Lerner uses the 1941 script as the basis for his libretto.) This script adds a fourth Shavian ending, which we may take as his last thought on his subject:

HIGGINS: Goodbye mother. [*He is about to kiss her, when he recollects something.*] Oh, by the way, Eliza, order a ham and a Stilton cheese, will you? And buy me a pair of reindeer gloves, number eights, and a tie to match that new suit of mine. You can choose the color. [*His*



*cheerful, careless vigorous voice shows that he is incorrigible.*]

LIZA: [*disdainfully*] Number eights are too small for you if you want them lined with lamb's wool. You have three new ties that you have forgotten in the drawer of your washstand. Colonel Pickering prefers Double Gloucester to Stilton; and you don't notice the difference. I telephoned Mrs. Pearce this morning not to forget the ham. What you are to do without me I cannot imagine. [*She sweeps out.*]

MRS HIGGINS: I'm afraid you've spoilt that girl, Henry. I should be uneasy about you and her if she were less fond of Colonel Pickering.

HIGGINS: Pickering! Nonsense: she's going to marry Freddy. Ha ha! Freddy! Freddy! Ha ha ha ha ha!!!! [*He roars with laughter as the play ends.*]<sup>247</sup>

Shaw is here simultaneously affirming and denying the affinity between Eliza and Higgins; the extension of Eliza's lines (instead of the original play's 'Buy them yourself') establishes the extent to which she has become part of the Higgins/Pickering household, while the last line tells us explicitly that the expected Higgins/Eliza romance isn't going to happen. Of course, Shaw ironises this by putting the announcement in the mouth of Higgins himself – where his film endings had shown Eliza and Freddy together, this filters their romance through Higgins' laughter, which can be read (by both the actor and the audience) as expressing many things, including bravado, mockery, and disbelief. (It's also possible to see Higgins' reaction as similar to that of the many readers who have, like Alan Jay Lerner, been unconvinced by Shaw's afterword.) The audience's reaction is also problematised if this ending is played in a version that doesn't use the additional scenes – the Freddy/Eliza romance is largely a product of the scenes written for the screenplay. In this last version of the ending, Shaw is still allowing both the cast and the audience a large degree of ambiguity.

*Pygmalion*'s success, both critically and commercially, marked a shift in the way in which the figure of the screenwriter was viewed in discussions of the British cinema. In the *Daily Mail* 'Show News' for 13<sup>th</sup> October 1938, the columnist wrote:

Not so long ago, famous authors refused to write for films at any price. And if they had written for films, it is all the Himalaya mountains to a molehill that movie-makers would not have known what to do with them.<sup>248</sup>

A separate article in the same issue listed the eminent playwrights (and, to a lesser extent, novelists) who were at the time working on screenplays for British and American studios, including James Bridie (working on *The Thief of Bagdad*), J.B. Priestley (an original story for Columbia Studios), Roland Pertwee (*The Spy in Black*), Arthur Wimperis (*Q Planes*), Miles Malleon (a biopic about Marie Lloyd for Anna Neagle), Douglas Furber (*Hadley Cross*) 'and spritely G.B. Shaw, doubling up on "The Devil's Disciple" and "Caesar and Cleopatra" after his success with "Pygmalion".'<sup>249</sup>

In fact, most of these writers had been working in the cinema long before *Pygmalion*: Roland Pertwee's first screenplay credit was in 1919, Arthur Wimperis, as we have already seen, was an important part of the Korda machine, J. B. Priestley had written two vehicles for Gracie Fields, *Sing As We Go* (UK, Basil Dean, 1934) and *Look Up and Laugh* (UK, Basil Dean, 1935), while Miles Malleon, now remembered mostly as a character actor, had been a screenwriter for Basil Dean since 1930. What had changed was not so much the presence of stage playwrights in the cinema, more the way in which they were regarded. *Pygmalion* marks the beginning of a period in which theatre writers are seen in reviews and publicity as making an important contribution to the British cinema.

### ***Major Barbara and Caesar and Cleopatra***

As if in acknowledgement of this movement, Malleon was one of four actor/playwrights to feature in the cast of the next Shaw/Pascal collaboration, *Major Barbara* (UK, Gabriel Pascal, 1941), together with Emlyn Williams, Robert Morley (1908-1992) and, in a small part, the Chinese/British author of *Lady Precious Stream*, S. I. Hsiung (1902-1991).<sup>250</sup>

The play *Major Barbara* (1905), like many of Shaw's works, is based on a moral paradox; Shaw sets up an opposition between the title character, the Salvation Army Major Barbara Undershaft, and her munitions millionaire father, Andrew, and suggests that the latter is the one doing more for society and helping the poor. Despite the title, the protagonist isn't Barbara but her fiancé, Adolphus Cusins, a Greek scholar who starts the play as a member of the Salvation Army, but ends it as Sir Andrew's heir. Shaw frequently dramatises the clash between the two value systems in antithetical dialogue:

UNDERSHAFT:	If I go to see you tomorrow in your Salvation Shelter, will you come the day after to see me in my cannon works?
BARBARA:	Take care. It may end in your giving up the cannons for the sake of the Salvation Army.
UNDERSHAFT:	Are you sure it will not end in your giving up the Salvation Army for the sake of the cannons?
BARBARA:	I will take my chance of that.
UNDERSHAFT:	And I will take my chance of the other. <sup>251</sup>

In preparing the screen adaptation, Shaw and Pascal used a similar method to that of *Pygmalion*. Shaw wrote versions of scenes that, in the play, take place offstage; a 'meet-cute' for Barbara and Adolphus to start the film, and the humiliating of Bill Walker, a violent habitué of the Salvation Shelter, at the hands of the Salvationist and ex-wrestler Todger Fairmile. Both of these scenes emphasise the same tension between

romance and its denial that had characterised the film version of *Pygmalion*; indeed, the screenplay's opening lines make an oblique comment on the commercial necessity of love interest; we see Cusins giving a poorly-attended open-air lecture on 'Five Stages of Greek Religion':

CUSINS:     *(reading with very distinct articulation but not looking at his audience)* The Ancient Greeks considered it unseemly to give public praise to women for their good looks, but apparently thought it did no harm to young men. Note that, unlike our own popular playwrights in England and the United States, the great Athenians scorned what we call love interest and regarded sex appeal as indecent.<sup>252</sup>

Similarly, the additional scene with Todger Fairmile emphasises the physical attractions both of him and his female companion, Mog Habbilam; she is described as a 'shapely lass', while he 'in the prime of his athletic youth, is not a figure to be passed by without stopping on an idle Sunday morning.'<sup>253</sup>

Shaw plays up the parallels between the opening scene of this film and that of *Pygmalion*; where the opening scene of that film had ended with Liza taking an unfamiliar taxi to her home in Lisson Grove, this new scene ends with Barbara (played by the same actress, Wendy Hiller) informing Cusins that 'We dont [*sic*] run to taxis in this part of the world. Most of us here have never been in one.'<sup>254</sup>

Shaw's greatest change to the original play is one that, unlike these two scenes, isn't retained in the finished film. Where the play had ended with Undershaft's trip to his factory, suggested by a single onstage cannon, the screenplay features an extensive tour. In the published version of the script, Shaw describes this in terms that emphasise the strengths of the younger medium:

This screen version of Major Barbara is not practicable for stage performance. The greater resources of the film, both financial and artistic, make it possible to take the spectators through the great Undershaft colony instead of putting them off with a spoken description; and the same is true of half a dozen other scenes for which there is neither time nor money in theatres as distinct from cinemas.<sup>255</sup>

(Notice, incidentally, the difference between the language here and that used in the 1941 published version of *Pygmalion*; where that allowed for the possibility of the additional scenes being played in ‘stages furnished with exceptionally elaborate machinery’, this is, unambiguously, ‘not practicable for stage performance.’)

Shaw’s ending for the screen version of *Major Barbara* shows him using the medium to expand one of his favourite theatrical techniques, the last-act discussion scene. Shaw had described this as Ibsen’s major contribution to dramaturgy,<sup>256</sup> replacing the three-act structure of the well-made play with a four-act structure, in which the dramatic climax is followed by a discussion of its themes. While this is limited as a reading of Ibsen (it applies to some plays, such as *A Doll’s House* and *An Enemy of the People*, better than it does to others), it provides a useful insight into Shaw’s own techniques – his own plays almost always end with a discussion scene. In *Major Barbara*, the screen version extends this over the last thirty pages of the published screenplay, taking in a tour of Undershaft’s factory and model community.

It is probable that Pascal would have edited and cut some of these scenes anyway. The circumstances of filming made further changes inevitable. As Dukore points out, the film began studio shooting on 17 June 1940, ‘a week after the Nazis invaded France, three days before they entered Paris, five days before the French government signed an armistice pact with them.’<sup>257</sup> In these circumstances, Undershaft, as a munitions manufacturer, became less the morally ambiguous figure that Shaw had written, more a symbol of hope. Most of Shaw’s final sequence was cut, including references to war dead, and we see footage of modern industrial production, shot in the extreme blacks and whites of the documentary movement. New dialogue was written for Robert Newton’s Bill Walker, portrayed as a wastrel in the original play and screenplay, but now redeemed with a job in Undershaft’s factory. The film ends with

Walker, Barbara and Cusins – worker, pacifist and intellectual – striding towards the camera in common cause, in the manner of a propaganda poster or David Low’s May 1940 cartoon ‘We’re All Behind you, Winston’.

While Shaw produced a film version of the text of *Major Barbara*, it never gained the ‘definitive’ quality of the *Pygmalion* script – the original playscript came back into print in 1960, perhaps indicating that the estate realised, as Shaw himself did, the unstageability of the film version. For the third Shaw/Pascal collaboration, *Caesar and Cleopatra* (UK, Gabriel Pascal, 1945), no screen version was published – as Dukore points out, Shaw wrote little new material for this film, with his script being more a reordering and edit of the original play, though he did write three new scenes, all bridging gaps between the play’s acts. This film was accompanied by a tie-in book, whose title – *Meeting at the Sphinx* – and cover image – a Prospero-like Shaw pulling back a theatre curtain to reveal the Egyptian scene – sum up the combination of spectacle and prestige that Pascal was aiming for.

The play *Caesar and Cleopatra* (1901) is, to some extent, Shaw’s response to Shakespeare’s portrayal of the two title characters – his preface to the play is provocatively titled ‘Better than Shakespear?’ [*sic*],<sup>258</sup> and the film evokes Laurence Olivier’s *Henry V*, particularly in its spectacle, and in the casting of several actors who had appeared in it– John Laurie, Valentine Dyall, Felix Aylmer – as well as Olivier’s wife, Vivien Leigh.

Like the previous Shaw/Pascal collaborations, *Caesar and Cleopatra* both affirms and denies the romantic and sexual aspects of the story. Shaw had emphasised, both in the play and his writings on it, that his Cleopatra is not Shakespeare’s ‘serpent of the Old Nile’ but a young girl, and an unusually childish one at that: ‘[t]he childishness I have ascribed to her, as far as it is childishness of character and not lack

of experience, is not a matter of years.’<sup>259</sup> The casting of Leigh, one of the principal sex symbols of her age, immediately changed the dynamic of the film, much as that of Leslie Howard had with *Pygmalion*.

*Caesar and Cleopatra* was, at the time, the most expensive British film ever made, made more so by a troubled production period (even the tie-in book acknowledges this, with a chapter entitled ‘Production Difficulties’) and was marketed as a national equivalent of the super-productions coming out of M.G.M. (another resonance emphasised by the presence of Vivien Leigh; the opening credits state that she appears by arrangement with David O. Selznick); ironically, it also often resembles the pictorial Shakespearean productions of Henry Irving that Shaw had hated as a critic. Like *Major Barbara*, the film suffers from Pascal’s pedestrian direction; its financial failure ended the Shaw/Pascal collaboration. However, the example of *Pygmalion* meant that British playwrights had a model to emulate in the adaptation of their own plays.

### **Noël Coward – the Second Wave of the Well-Made Play**

Noël Coward occupies a curious place within the history of the well-made play – both one of its best-known practitioners (along with Terence Rattigan, he is probably the author that most modern theatregoers have in mind when they hear the phrase), and an exception to many of its rules. To understand this, and to see the way in which it was reflected in his film work, it’s necessary to examine the way in which Coward changed the well-made play, creating a modification of the form which existed in parallel with its nineteenth- and early twentieth-century, incarnation.

Coward's reputation as a writer rests on two different, and, to a certain extent, contradictory skills. The first is his approach to dialogue. In a 1983 television documentary, this was analysed by one of the few post-war dramatists he admired, Harold Pinter, who described a meeting with Coward in the 'sixties:

'What he [Coward] liked was a sort of objectivity of the stage' said Pinter, who saw a shared desire 'not in expressing ourselves, but in expressing objectively and as lucidly as possible what was actually taking place in any given context.'<sup>260</sup>

Coward's pre-war plays share a journalistic quality; we are being allowed into unfamiliar social *milieux*, and the author's function is to show them to us, a process which Coward himself described as 'lifting the veil'<sup>261</sup> - the high society of *The Vortex* (1923), the haute bohemia, based on the household of Mrs. Astley Cooper, in *Hay Fever* (1924), the privileged disorganisation of the Mountbattens in *Hands Across the Sea*, part of *To-night at 8:30* (1936). (This may have been one reason why his post-war work was generally less successful, both critically and commercially; his social worlds were simply less interesting.) At the same time as striving for this 'objective' quality, Coward was also a writer who would draw attention to his own virtuosity. This marked an interesting change in the nature of the well-made play.

For Pinero and his contemporaries, the well-made play was an art that concealed art – John Russell Taylor describes the ideal of the 1890s as 'using as little artifice as possible and where it was not possible to avoid artifice (especially in the opening exposition) trying to conceal it as neatly as possible so as to avoid straining the audience's credulity.'<sup>262</sup>

Coward's own early attempt to write in the invisible Pinero style, *Easy Virtue* (1924), showed how unsuited he was to it. Coward's skill is to put the mechanics of his writing in plain sight, and this display becomes part of the aesthetic. As David



Edgar puts it, Coward's innovation is 'to convey meaning entirely by the manipulation of our expectations of what happens in a theatre.'<sup>263</sup>

Edgar goes on to clarify this concept, and makes a distinction between two kinds of effects. For instance, the interruption of the two lovers' final goodbye in Coward's *Still Life* (and therefore in *Brief Encounter*) is a theatrical effect, and one that was clearly planned by its author, but it is also an observation of something that happens in real life. It is therefore not purely an effect of the kind that Edgar is describing. By contrast, the effect produced by the silence of Elyot and Amanda in the last three pages of *Private Lives* (1929) is one which 'relies absolutely for its effect on its being in a play,'<sup>264</sup> as is the mathematical precision with which the three central characters of *Design for Living* (1932) are brought into contact over the course of the play. With Coward, the well-madeness is a visible quality, and one to which the audience's attention is drawn, as a central part of our experience of watching that play. In this respect, Coward's aesthetic is very like that of his near-contemporary Alfred Hitchcock, who came from a similar lower-middle-class suburban background, and whose use of cinematic techniques – the long takes of *Rope*, the single location of *Lifeboat* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1944), the ostentatiously restrained use of 3-D in *Dial M for Murder* (1954) – works as part of the meaning of the film.<sup>265</sup> Coward's display of technique is sometimes similar to that of a film director. In *Cavalcade* (1931), he even finds a theatrical equivalent to a close-up, following the dialogue between two lovers on the deck of a transatlantic liner:

EDITH takes her cloak which has been hanging over a rail, and they walk away. The cloak has been covering a life-belt, and when it is withdrawn the words "S. S. Titanic" can be seen in black letters on the white.

The lights fade into complete darkness, but the letters remain glowing [...]<sup>266</sup>

This authorial self-revelation was, of course, not entirely a new technique; for French farceurs such as Eugene Labiche (1815-1888) and Georges Feydeau (1862-1921), the audience's awareness of skill was a major part of the exercise. Coward's innovation was to apply this self-conscious style of writing to other forms, to light comedy and to the serious play. Coward's techniques were used by other writers – as we shall see, the climax of Terence Rattigan's *Flare Path* (1942) is partly dependent on our awareness of the author's technical skill – and this created a new version of the well-made play, more obviously 'authored' and virtuosic than its nineteenth-century form. Coward was to bring both this technique, and his more objective, 'journalistic' style of writing to his screen work.

Like Shaw, Coward was initially wary of the screen, and for similar reasons:

You may take it that I am not interested in writing scenarios at all. I want to write words, not stage directions. I don't want to cast any slur on scenario work, and I readily admit that it is a highly expert business. But as a dramatist, dialogue and its psychology are practically my sole concern.<sup>267</sup>

While several of Coward's plays were filmed, both in the silent era – *The Queen was in the Parlour* (UK, Graham Cutts, 1927), *Easy Virtue* (UK, Alfred Hitchcock, 1928), *The Vortex* (UK, Adrian Brunel, 1928) – and after the coming of sound – *Bitter Sweet* (Herbert Wilcox, 1933), *Cavalcade* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1933), *Design for Living* (US, Ernst Lubitsch, 1933) – the author himself was not involved, and, according to his autobiography, he felt that, *Cavalcade* apart, his work had been 'rewritten by incompetent hacks, vulgarised by incompetent directors and reduced to common fatuity'.<sup>268</sup> His first original screenplay – *In Which We Serve* – came about through an approach in July 1941 from Anthony Havelock-Allan and Filippo del Giudice, the producers of Two Cities Films, and Charles Thorpe from Columbia Pictures, who were interested in making a propaganda film. Once Coward had the subject (suggested by

a meeting with his friend Louis Mountbatten), he sought his collaborators from those working in the cinema:

I took myself to a viewing room and twice a day for two weeks I saw every British film that was available. [...] I found that just about every credit for cutting a film was David Lean, most of the photography was someone called Ronald Neame and the general production was Anthony Havelock-Allan.’<sup>269</sup>

These three men, with Lean promoted to co-director, were to form the nucleus of Coward’s artistic team for his two greatest film successes.

### ***In Which We Serve***

Coward’s first screenplay (and his only one not based on a stage original) combines techniques that were already familiar from his theatre work with a flashback structure that draws specifically on cinematic models.

In particular, the film juxtaposes scenes that show the same events across a class divide, in the manner of his 1931 play *Cavalcade*. Coward had used this technique since his earliest days as a writer; in a 1924 revue sketch, ‘Class’ he plays the same scene in ‘an extremely squalid room in the East End’<sup>270</sup> and a ‘beautifully furnished dining-room in Mayfair’.<sup>271</sup> In 1930, he’d written (and with Gertrude Lawrence, performed) a parody of his own *Private Lives*, in which ‘the characters are drawn from the poorer and less cultured sections of society.’<sup>272</sup>

This technique is most fully used in *Cavalcade*, in which two families living in the same London house, one above stairs, one below, experience key events in English history between 1899 and the play’s own present day – the relief of Mafeking, the sinking of the *Titanic*, the First World War. As H. Mark Glancy puts it, ‘decades of British history are seen in well-punctuated time segments’<sup>273</sup> Coward may have been influenced in this structure by Oscar Hammerstein and Jerome Kern’s *Showboat*

(1927), based on the novel by Edna Ferber, which uses a similar panoramic structure, with racial differences rather than the class ones of *Cavalcade*. (Coward and Kern knew each other, and the two men had considered a collaboration in 1924.)<sup>274</sup>

This fragmentary, pageant-style structure was widely imitated in many plays of the years following: George S. Kaufman and Moss Hart Americanised it in *Merrily We Roll Along* (1934), Diana Morgan refocused it on female characters in *A House in the Square* (1940), Thornton Wilder parodied it in *The Skin of Our Teeth* (1942), which depicts all of human history taking place within a single household. Coward himself wrote a working-class version in *This Happy Breed* (1942). *Cavalcade*'s film version also provided, as this thesis will illustrate in Chapter Seven, the template for many Hollywood films set in Britain.

*In Which We Serve* was explicitly modelled on *Cavalcade*, telling three parallel stories of an upper-middle, lower-middle, and working-class family, linked by the ship on which they serve. Coward's original script was more panoramic than the one finally used, starting in 1922 and ending with the sinking of Mountbatten's ship, the *Kelly* in 1941, and lasting, when Coward first read it aloud, for over three hours. As Kevin Brownlow tactfully puts it in his biography of David Lean: 'At this point, the memories of those involved diverge.'<sup>275</sup>

Anthony Havelock-Allan and Ronald Neame recalled being entrusted with the job of creating a framework for Coward's script. However, Lean's own account (backed up by Coward's diaries) indicates that Coward rewrote the script himself, creating a flashback structure, inspired by Lean's suggestion that Coward watch the recently-released *Citizen Kane* (US, Orson Welles, 1941). It's also worth pointing out that Coward had already used non-chronological storytelling in his stage work; the short

play *The Astonished Heart* (1935) is told in flashback, while *Post-Mortem* (1930) has an unusual ‘flash-forward’ structure.

The flashbacks are less integral to the film than those in *Citizen Kane*; as Alain Silver and James Ursini have pointed out, *In Which We Serve*’s use of flashbacks doesn’t actually make sense – characters frequently recall events that they didn’t see. (To take the most obvious example, Captain Kinross’ flashback covers three family Christmases, though he was only present at one.)<sup>276</sup> This may have simply been a mistake; however, it creates, perhaps accidentally, a sense of a collective consciousness. Where the flashbacks in *Citizen Kane* emphasise the differences in the way the title character is viewed, those in *In Which We Serve* bleed into each other, suggesting that each character feels, at root, the same way.

Like *Cavalcade*, the script refers to recognisable historical events, in this case from more recent history; Chamberlain’s announcement of the start of the war, the Dunkirk evacuation, the Altmark incident of 16/17 February 1940 and the Battle of Crete, in which we’re shown the ship sinking. The three families are linked through these historical events, through music, through shared modes of transport, and through parallel scenes – as mentioned above, we see all three families at Christmas dinner.

As in *Cavalcade*, Coward’s project is a conservative one; the different classes are shown as co-existing in, and because of, a rigid hierarchy. (Coward was only sympathetic to working-class characters within this kind of structure – he wrote after performing at an aircraft factory in 1942 that ‘I have no real rapport with the “workers”, in fact I actively detest them *en masse*.’)<sup>277</sup> Coward’s own position, as writer, co-director, and star parallels that of the Captain, commanding the film as Kinross does the ship. Coward’s theatrical technique frequently invokes the idea of command and control; this was especially true of *Cavalcade* which had used military-style discipline

in marshalling the play's many extras, who had been 'divided into units of twenty people, each with its own leader'<sup>278</sup> and each extra assigned a colour and a number. Indeed, Coward's first quarter-deck speech,<sup>279</sup> in which he speaks of the importance of running a happy, and therefore efficient, ship, is closer to a stage director's ideal than a naval officer's: while Laurence Olivier quoted it in one of his initial letters concerning the founding of the National Theatre,<sup>280</sup> a Petty Officer wrote to C.A. Lejeune that the quarter-deck speech 'has rightly earned the silent and mutinous derision of every mess-deck in the fleet.'<sup>281</sup>

As he had done in both *Cavalcade* and *This Happy Breed*, Coward structures the script round the speeches of its central character; Kinross gives four in the course of the film. These take on the quality of secular sermons – the analogy is made explicit in the third speech, in which Kinross berates a rating who has left his post under fire:

This man has only been in the Navy for six months, and he has only been in this ship for two months. Even so, I feel that in that time I should have been able to make it clear to him that I did not expect and would not tolerate such behaviour.

[...]

I feel that I should have been able to get at least that much of my creed across, and I have failed.<sup>282</sup>

The use of the word 'creed' makes the Captain's role clear. Kinross is the equivalent of a priest and serves the functions of one, leading prayers and officiating at a memorial service for the dead sailors. These moments are unique in Coward's *oeuvre*: though a supporter of the *status quo* in most of its forms, he was never a religious author, and was particularly antipathetic to Christianity, writing in his *Diaries* that it 'has caused more suffering, both mentally and physically, than any other religion in the history of mankind.'<sup>283</sup>

Coward alludes to audience memories of his stage successes – Blake is a descendant of Frank Gibbons in *This Happy Breed*, while Kinross and his flags officer trade clipped banter as if in *Private Lives*:

FLAGS: [V]ery pretty sky, sir. Somebody sent me a calendar rather like that last Christmas.  
CAPTAIN: Did it have a few squadrons of Dorniers in the upper right hand corner?  
FLAGS: (*grinning*) No, sir.  
CAPTAIN: That's where Art parts company with reality.<sup>284</sup>

This dialogue sequence, together with the documentary-style sequence that precedes it, also signals the film-makers' desire to distance the film from Coward's earlier work – this is a work of reality, rather than Art.

At other times, Coward deliberately absents himself from his own work, and acts as chronicler – large sections of Kinross' speeches were taken, sometimes almost verbatim, from the words of Coward's friend, Louis Mountbatten. During his period of research, Coward would sometimes draw directly on the words of those he met – one naval wife was alarmed to hear herself quoted in one of the film's most famous speeches:

Noel had drawn me out and right after dinner dashed upstairs and I guess he wrote it down. It was to the effect that a naval wife knew and accepted her husband's ship as his 'grey mistress' – a rival she could never conquer but one she came to love.<sup>285</sup>

*In Which We Serve* exemplifies the contradictions within Coward's work, the central tension between display and reserve. His own acting performance points up this tension – though very firmly the star of the film, in a role which mirrors his position as writer, producer and co-director, he is also seen to be restraining the manners and persona associated with 'Noël Coward'; he wrote of 'clasping my hands behind my back, doing anything rather than do a "Noël Coward" gesture [...] doing scenes over and over again to try and eliminate Noël Coward mannerisms.'<sup>286</sup> In this respect,

Coward's own work on *In Which We Serve* is an example of the quality which the film prizes above all others – restraint. Coward had written of this as one of the qualities which attracted him to the naval temperament – ‘the casual valiance, the undaunted heroism, the sadness without tears.’<sup>287</sup> In this he found a fitting collaborator in David Lean, who said in one of his last interviews that he was a very emotional man ‘but being English I take a lot of care to cover it up.’<sup>288</sup>

### ***Brief Encounter***

Coward's two other ‘original’ screenplays – *Brief Encounter* and *The Astonished Heart* (Antony Darnborough/Terence Fisher, 1950) – are both adaptations and extensions of short plays that were originally written as part of the sequence collectively staged as *To-night at 8:30* (1936).

*To-night at 8:30* is a series of nine short plays performed three to an evening and written by Coward as star vehicles for himself and Gertrude Lawrence. In his programme note, Coward wrote of the strengths of the short play as being able to ‘sustain a mood without technical creaking or overpadding.’<sup>289</sup> The discipline of the form caused him to write with an increased degree of subtext and backstory. Certain reviewers at the time picked up on this; Ivor Brown writing in the *Observer* that ‘the man who used to write very slight long plays, has now composed very full brief ones.’<sup>290</sup>

Seen together, the plays come across as a series of examinations of various kinds of heterosexual couple. They are also to some extent showcases for Coward and Lawrence's acting virtuosity: where his previous vehicle for the two of them, *Private Lives*, had drawn on and played with their public personae, *To-night at 8:30* was an



opportunity to see them *not* being ‘Noël and Gertie’, playing a series of characters that included a bickering music hall act (*‘Red Peppers’*), a henpecked husband and nagging wife (*Fumed Oak*), an infatuated psychiatrist and the object of his obsession (*The Astonished Heart*), an ill-mannered diplomatic couple (*Hands Across the Sea*), a pair of continental con-artists (*Ways and Means*) and, of course, the adulterous middle-class lovers of *Still Life*.

‘Adulterous’ may seem like an odd choice of word to those who only know the play through *Brief Encounter*. After all, the film is distinguished by the fact that it’s a love story in which the lovers don’t actually have sex. This is the most striking difference between *Still Life* and *Brief Encounter*, and it’s worth examining it in more detail.

*Still Life* is set in a single location - the refreshment room of Milford Junction Station - and takes place over five scenes. The chronology is made very clear in the stage directions; Scene I takes place on ‘an evening in April,’<sup>291</sup> Scene II in July, Scene III in October, Scene IV in December and Scene V in March. The relationship thus takes place over a little less than a year and roughly follows the rhythm of the seasons; the couple meets in spring, the relationship blossoms in summer, is consummated in autumn, starts to decay in winter and ends just before the next spring.

By contrast, the film takes place over seven weeks towards the end of the year – literally, a brief encounter. It’s possible to map the differences between the two timelines:

*Still Life*

*Brief Encounter*

Framing Sequence (Week 7)

Scene 1 – April

First meeting (Week 1)

	Second meeting (Week 2)
Scene 2 – July	Third meeting (Week 3)
	Fourth meeting (Week 4)
	Fifth meeting (Week 5)
Scene 3 – October	Sixth meeting (Week 6)
Scene 4- December	Continuation of sixth meeting (Week 6)
Scene 5 – March	Last meeting (Week 7)

The difference in timescale makes a radical difference between the two pieces: *Still Life* is the story of an affair, *Brief Encounter* of an infatuation.

It is in *Still Life*'s autumnal stage, the third and fourth scenes, where we find the most striking difference between play and film. Towards the end of the third scene, the male character, Alec, makes what is very clearly a sexual proposition:

I'm going now – back to Stephen's flat. I'll wait for you – if you don't come I shall know only that you weren't quite ready – that you needed a little longer to find your own dear heart. This is the address.<sup>292</sup>

Alec goes, leaving Laura alone. The scene's final stage direction makes clear both Laura's dilemma, and her final decision, using the well-made play's technique of implication of offstage action:

*There is the noise of the 5:43 – LAURA's train – steaming into the station. LAURA sits puffing her cigarette. Suddenly she gets up – gathers up her bag quickly, and moves towards the door. She pauses and comes back to the table as the whistle blows. The train starts, she puts the paper in her bag and goes quickly out as the lights fade.*<sup>293</sup>

The implication is obvious – Laura is 'quite ready' and is going to meet Alec at Stephen's flat. The next scene, two months later, shows Laura rushing in after the pair have been interrupted by Stephen. In the film, this is a pre-coital interruption – it marks the point where the couple might have slept together, but don't. In the original play,

it's a single interruption of an ongoing extra-marital affair. To put it at its most basic, as Peter Holland does in his essay 'A Class Act,' 'Alec and Laura have been making love in the flat every Thursday afternoon for the intervening three [*sic*] months.'<sup>294</sup>

As well as this major change, the film adapts the play in other ways. Coward and his collaborators (Lean, Neame and Havelock-Allan) expanded *Still Life* into *Brief Encounter* using a similar technique to that employed by Shaw in adapting *Pygmalion* – new scenes are inserted between rewritten versions of the original ones. Again, the nature of the collaboration is disputed, this time with three conflicting versions; Lean recalled that, after Coward had been told (by Lean) to use a flashback structure, he came back with 'what was essentially *Brief Encounter*.'<sup>295</sup> (If this is true, Coward may have again been influenced by his own example of *The Astonished Heart*.) By contrast, Havelock-Allan claims that Coward wasn't involved in writing the additional scenes, although he, Lean and Ronald Neame consulted him; 'We said "Could they go for a row in the lake? Could they go to the cinema?" Noël said "Only if they go to a bad film."' <sup>296</sup>

Neame's memory, both in interview with Brownlow and when speaking on a 1998 BBC documentary on Coward, is more complex than either of these accounts, and suggests that a number of different collaborative methods were used:

By now, we knew how to write Noël's dialogue. We went up to him one day with a scene from *Brief Encounter* that we'd written. We said 'Look, Noël, it should go something like this.' And we read him this little scene and he looked at us and said 'Which of my little darlings wrote this brilliant Coward dialogue?' and he used it just as it was, but then on other occasions, we'd say 'Noël, we need a scene that will tell this, this and this' and he'd say 'Get out your little pencils' and we would sit down and get out our pencils, and he'd walk up and down the room and out would pour dialogue. Brilliant, wonderful dialogue would just come out like that.<sup>297</sup>

These three versions of the genesis of the screenplay all problematise the concept of 'authorship'; Havelock-Allan and Neame suggest that, even if Coward

didn't write all of the dialogue or come up with all of the story, he was still its 'author', either through his writing dialogue from their treatments, or through their pastiche of his style, a skill they'd learnt through writing additional dialogue for the two other screen adaptations of Coward plays that Lean had directed, *This Happy Breed* (1944) and *Blithe Spirit* (1945). Havelock-Allan's account suggests a relationship similar to that of a Renaissance painter's studio in which the 'master' (an appropriate term – it was Coward's nickname in the theatre) would supervise apprentice's work, occasionally laying out a section of canvas, or repainting another's sketches, and taking responsibility for the overall stylistic unity.

Lean's version of events is supported by the two scripts that are kept at the BFI Library; one labelled the 'Second Script', and one 'Release Script', and both attributed solely to Coward.<sup>298</sup> If Lean's account is accurate, this Second Script appears to be the one that he referred to Coward as 'coming back with'. This script is annotated in several hands and pens, with one annotator, who used a pink pen, particularly prominent, suggesting that this may have been Lean himself.

The Second Script is, indeed, very close to the finished film, although it sometimes gives the impression of having been written quite quickly. The annotators point out some contradictions in the early pages; Dolly Messiter says both 'I'm always missing trains.'<sup>299</sup> and 'I've never missed a train in my life.'<sup>300</sup> and (to Laura) 'You look awfully well.'<sup>301</sup> and '[Y]ou look terribly peaky.'<sup>302</sup> It also lacks some scenes that are in the later scripts, Laura's first scene with her children is not in this version, nor are the cinema scene, or the boating scene, – at the point where the latter appears in the finished film, one of the annotators (not the pink pen user) has written 'Comedy Scene', which is underlined in pink.<sup>303</sup> (The question of who wrote the scenes that were added later is an open one, although it's striking that the boating scene is one of the

ones that Havelock-Allan mentioned as having been written by Neame and himself. It's clear that Coward was involved in the writing of these scenes, if only on the level of consultation, as they contain an in-joke that isn't in the Second Script; *Flames of Passion*, the 'bad film' that Alex and Laura see, shares its title with a 1922 film produced by Herbert Wilcox that was playing next door to a Manchester theatre that refused to display the title of Coward's *Easy Virtue*.)<sup>304</sup>

The additional scenes that are present develop the style of the original play. As Steve Waters has pointed out, *Still Life* is very unusual in the *oeuvre* of Coward, whose most successful plays are all set in private locations, whether the domestic interiors of *Hay Fever*, *Blithe Spirit* and *Present Laughter* or the hotel rooms of *Private Lives* and *Design for Living* – even the panoramic sweep of *Cavalcade* keeps returning to the drawing-room of the Marryots. *Still Life* is his only play to be set entirely in a public location. *Brief Encounter* builds on this; as Waters says, both play and film intensify 'the problem of emotional expression by forcing its adulterous lovers to leave the safety of their homes for marginal places such as the station café, the cinema or a shared flat.'<sup>305</sup> The only domestic locations that we see are Stephen's flat, where the couple fail to consummate their affair, and Laura's own home, itself made insecure by our (and Laura's) knowledge of events outside.

As well as desexualising the story, shortening its time frame, and adding action that is kept offstage, the Second Script's fourth major alteration to *Still Life* was to add a framing device and voice-over, positioning the film very much as Laura's point-of-view. As Melanie Williams points out, this brings the play closer to the preoccupations of David Lean, whose films in this period frequently centre on a female character, especially one faced with a romantic dilemma.<sup>306</sup> Where the flashback structure of *In Which We Serve* was a narrative convenience, the framing device here becomes central

to the meaning of the film. We see the events from Laura's perspective; in the play, we see neither of the pair's spouses, in the film, we see Laura's husband, Fred, but are left to imagine Alec's wife, the exotically-named Madeleine,<sup>307</sup> and to share Laura's idea of her. The only point where we see anything that isn't from Laura's point of view is the dialogue scene between Alec and Stephen, after the latter has interrupted the two lovers. This is oddly jarring, as the only moment where we see an outsider's perspective on the relationship. (The possible reading that it is Laura's paranoid fantasy is dispelled in a later scene, in which she gives an altogether different account of what she thought took place between the two men.) This stands in strong contrast to *Still Life*, in which the couple's affair is observed, and commented on, by the working-class characters Myrtle and Albert (the latter refers to the couple as 'Romeo and Juliet').<sup>308</sup> Stephen is also the only character whose dialogue style is that of Coward's own speech, and some of the more worldly members of the audience may have read him as gay – he is described as 'a thin, rather ascetic-looking man' who 'lightly flicks Laura's scarf off the chair and hands it to Alex', saying 'You know, Alec my dear, you have depths that I never even suspected.'<sup>309</sup>

As well as being seen through Laura's eyes, the story is framed through her aesthetic choices. We're shown cinematic representations of romance that stand in contrast with Alec and Laura's own situation; the Hollywood romanticism of *Love in a Mist*, and the Korda-esque title of *The Loves of Cardinal Richelieu*.<sup>310</sup> The play's Laura was described by Coward in his character biography<sup>311</sup> as 'unmusical', and this conception was clearly in place when he started writing the script; she reminds her husband of 'that time you insisted on taking me to that Symphony Concert at the Town Hall'.<sup>312</sup> This changes as the script goes on. Laura is shown to have very specific musical tastes; she is enchanted by a barrel-organ,<sup>313</sup> and fantasises going with Alec to

the Paris opera.<sup>314</sup> In their first long scene together, Alec and Laura watch a Ladies' Orchestra in the Kardomah, and share a subtext-heavy conversation:

ALEC: [Y]ou don't play the piano, I hope?  
LAURA: I was forced to as a child.  
ALEC: You haven't kept it up?  
LAURA: (*smiling*) No – my husband isn't musical at all.  
ALEC: Bless him!  
LAURA: For all you know, I might have a tremendous, burning professional talent.  
ALEC: (*shaking his head*) Oh dear, no.  
LAURA: Why are you so sure?  
ALEC: You're too sane – and uncomplicated.<sup>315</sup>

In particular, in the finished film, the distinctive use of Rachmaninov is positioned as a reflection of the music that Laura would choose herself – when Muir Mathieson and David Lean suggested that the film should have an original score, Coward said 'No, no, no. She listens to Rachmaninov on the radio, she borrows her books from the Boots library and she eats at the Kardomah.'<sup>316</sup>

Notice, incidentally, the extreme precision of Coward's social positioning here; the middlebrow Laura borrows books from Boots, rather than the more downmarket public library, and listens to Rachmaninov, but only on the radio. A similar note is struck in the scene where Laura's husband, Fred, is doing the *Times* crossword and asks for her help identifying a quotation from Keats - the missing word is 'romance' – she gives the answer, then says 'It'll be in *The Oxford Book of English Verse*.'<sup>317</sup> Again, Laura is firmly a middlebrow; she reads poetry, but only in anthologies.

The focussing on Laura places the film in the tradition of the 'woman's film'. The defining features of this genre were itemised by Molly Haskell; a focus on a female character at 'the center of the universe',<sup>318</sup> an opposition between marriage and romance, in which '[a]ll the excitement of life – the passion, the risk – occurs outside marriage rather than within it',<sup>319</sup> and, in many cases, the idea of sacrifice – the heroine

must sacrifice herself for her children, her children for their own welfare, marriage for her lover (or vice versa), her career for love (or vice versa).<sup>320</sup> *Brief Encounter* is very firmly a story of sacrifice, and this connects with the context in which it was made, and perhaps indicates why Coward and his collaborators made the story one of avoided adultery, rather than the consummated adultery of *Still Life*.

Where *Still Life* is a story of guilt, *Brief Encounter* is one of self-command. This may have simply been because of fear of censorship, but it becomes an important part of the meaning of the film, primarily because of the date. *Still Life* was a peace-time play, produced in 1936 and set the same year (Albert talks of going to see the film *Broadway Melody of 1936*.)<sup>321</sup> *Brief Encounter*, though set in 1939, is a war-time film, which, as Philip Hoare has written, ‘reflected problems faced by couples often separated for long periods during wartime.’<sup>322</sup> The Second Script suggests that, when he started writing it, Coward intended to update the action to the period when the film was made; the opening direction reads ‘The time is 5:25 on a winter’s afternoon. The black-out has been relaxed and the station is brightly lit.’<sup>323</sup> However, there are no further references to the war; at some point during the writing, Coward seems to have realised that the wartime resonance worked better as subtext.

War-time films set during the peace allude to their status in different ways – for instance, *Love on the Dole* (UK, John Baxter, 1941) makes clear that the story’s class struggles belong to the past by showing that one scene takes place on 7 September 1930, ten years to the day before the worst night of the Blitz. *Brief Encounter* is more subtle, but the characters’ leisured lives, and the food they eat, would, for the film’s first audience, have placed the film in an earlier period, and shown the qualities that were to be tested in the coming years. This is summed up in the film’s final image, with Laura returned to her husband, and her normal life, with an expression of resignation that can



be read as either heroic or tragic.<sup>324</sup> In its representation of civilian restraint, the film forms a diptych with its predecessor:

If *In Which We Serve* was [Coward's] tribute to the war efforts of the armed services, *Brief Encounter* was his homage to the phlegmatic qualities of the British which Noel perceived the war to have defended. It was a middle-class version of the world he had examined in *This Happy Breed*, and a rearguard action against encroaching change.<sup>325</sup>

### ***The Astonished Heart***

*The Astonished Heart* provides an awkward footnote to Coward's screenwriting career. Less successful than either of his other two films, it was poorly received at the time, and is rarely revived now. It makes an interesting contrast with *Brief Encounter*; based on another short play from the *To-night at 8:30* sequence, it demonstrates the wisdom of the decisions that Coward and Lean made with the earlier film, by showing what happened when weaker choices were made.

Where many of the *To-night at 8:30* plays are extended sketches, *The Astonished Heart*, like *Still Life*, is closer to being a concentrated play, depicting a process rather than a moment, and taking place over the course of a year. *Still Life* depicts an affair as viewed from the outside, with roughly equal parts for both parties, whereas *The Astonished Heart* is more one-sided, focussing on the state of mind of a single individual. Part of Coward's project may have been to provide himself with a showy acting part; he himself described the play as showing 'the decay of a psychiatrist's mind through a personal sexual obsession.'<sup>326</sup> (He later seemed dissatisfied with the play, arguing that its theme 'was too esoteric to appeal to a large public.')<sup>327</sup>

Like *Brief Encounter* (which, as suggested above, it may have influenced), the original play of *The Astonished Heart* uses a flashback structure, starting with its

closing scene. Coward uses a highly cinematic cut to introduce the flashback, linking the end of one scene with the start of the next:

BARBARA: (*suddenly*): How extraordinary – d’you see what I mean? It’s the same, exactly the same as a year ago – you were there, Tim, just where you are now, with a cocktail glass in your hand – you were there, Susan, only you had your glasses on and a piece of paper in your lap – don’t you remember – the first time she ever came into this room –?

*ERNEST opens the door and announces: MRS. VAIL as the lights fade.*

## SCENE II

*When the lights come up on the scene BARBARA, TIM, SUSAN and ERNEST are all in the same positions as the preceding scene. SUSAN is wearing glasses and has a packet of papers in her lap, her jumper is blue instead of grey. BARBARA is wearing a tea gown. TIM is in the same suit but wearing a different tie.<sup>328</sup>*

As with *Brief Encounter*, the play is adapted for the screen by the addition of scenes that depict offstage events – here, the developing affair between Christian and Leonora Vail. Coward also attempts to even out the balance between the two characters by giving Mrs. Vail a tragic backstory that isn’t in the play – a great love who died during the War (he is identified as being shot down on March 17<sup>th</sup> 1945; that is, less than a month before the German surrender).

On some occasions, Coward deliberately evokes memories of *Brief Encounter*, setting an important scene at a railway station and repeating the motif of having information withheld from the audience by the introduction of a train whistle. Christian’s long-suffering wife (played, like Laura, by Celia Johnson) is shown expressing her emotions through music, playing the piano at a moment of frustration. Coward had used this device as early as *The Vortex* (1923) his first major success as a playwright.

At other times, Coward emphasises the differences between this world and that of the earlier film; where *Brief Encounter* was a firmly middle-class story, this takes place in a more moneyed environment, where characters actually do go to the ballet and on foreign holidays, rather than fantasising about the Paris Opera. In one of the better-written additional scenes, Coward signals his characters' status by showing them as indifferent to one of the era's defining social shibboleths:

LEONORA: (*watching her pour out the tea*) You do that with tremendous authority. I always lose my head and put in the milk first or afterwards or whatever I oughtn't to do. Which should it be?

BARBARA: There are several schools of thought – personally I always leave it to the inspiration of the moment.<sup>329</sup>

In some respects, this was closer to Coward's own social *milieu* than the world of the earlier films; in others, it was very different. Coward was never an intellectual, and the character of Christian, a working psychoanalyst, is outside his skills as both a writer and actor.<sup>330</sup> Consequently, the film lacks the precision that Coward and Lean had brought to *Brief Encounter*, giving much of the dialogue a generalised, on-the-nose, character. Where the earlier film had been a study of restraint, here every emotion is expressed, leading to unintentionally comic lines like 'How can I ease your troubled mind when a handsome young man's burnt to death in a plane?'<sup>331</sup> The problem is compounded in the finished film by unconvincing lead performances by both Coward and Margaret Leighton and the excessive use of music – where *Brief Encounter* had used Rachmaninov to express subtext, Coward's own soaring score serves merely to underline the obvious.<sup>332</sup>

*The Astonished Heart* was not a successful film, either critically or commercially and, together with the failure of his musical *Ace of Clubs* (1950), marked the start of Coward's period of unfashionability which only ended with the National Theatre's revival of *Hay Fever* in 1964. Coward himself seems not to have thought

very highly of it – in his short story ‘Star Quality’ (1951), two characters go to the cinema and see ‘an exquisitely acted but rather tedious picture about a psychiatrist who commits suicide.’<sup>333</sup>

The films of Shaw and Coward, and particularly the successes of *Pygmalion* and *Brief Encounter*, marked a shift in the position of playwrights in the British cinema – for a period, the skills of well-made playwrights were married with those of experienced film-makers, leading to some of the most successful British films of the post-war period.

In 1947, the writer and producer Sydney Box wrote in an article in *The Penguin Film Review* of the increased importance of writers in the British cinema of the early 1940s:

During the years 1941/1945 a combination of circumstances, some of them fortuitous, resulted in experienced writers controlling an unprecedentedly large portion of the British industry. It was during that period that the British industry began to lead the world. Check the films - all of them made with the writer in his [*sic*] proper place:

*In Which We Serve*  
*This Happy Breed*  
*Brief Encounter*  
*Blithe Spirit*  
*Millions Like Us*  
*The Rake's Progress*  
*Forty-Ninth Parallel* [*sic*]  
*Colonel Blimp* [*sic*]  
*One of Our Aircraft is Missing*  
*Don't Take it To Heart!*  
*The Way to the Stars*  
*The Seventh Veil*  
*The Way Ahead*<sup>334</sup>

Box's list shows the influence that stage playwrights had on the wartime cinema; of the thirteen films he mentioned, eight were scripted, co-scripted, or based on works by writers from a theatrical background; four by Noël Coward, two – *Millions Like Us* (UK, Sidney Gilliat/Frank Launder, 1943) and *The Rake's Progress* (UK, Sidney

Gilliat, 1945) - by Frank Launder, and one each by Rodney Ackland - *49<sup>th</sup> Parallel* (UK, Michael Powell, 1941), Jeffrey Dell - *Don't Take It To Heart!* (UK, Jeffrey Dell, 1945) - and Terence Rattigan - *The Way to the Stars* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1945).<sup>335</sup>

Rattigan, a younger playwright than Shaw and Coward, and one less well-established when he began his screen career, makes an interesting contrast with the two of them, and the next chapter will examine how he adapted his technique for the younger medium.

## Chapter Four - Terence Rattigan

Terence Rattigan's screen career, while considerably longer than that of either Shaw or Coward, was less prestigious, and more erratic. His first experience of working in film came as a staff writer at Warner Brothers' British studios at Teddington, before his first stage success *French Without Tears* (1936). Accepting this job was a purely commercial decision on Rattigan's part, and he left the company as soon as he was able. (The future novelist Anthony Powell, who was one of Rattigan's colleagues at Teddington, describes him as wanting 'to escape from film hack-work as soon as possible, [and] settle down to the profession of dramatist.')<sup>336</sup> He returned to the cinema following theatrical success, not quite a 'screenwriter-as-star' in the mould of Shaw and Coward, but an important part of the publicity and profile of the films on which he worked. He also switched ideas between media: at least three of his plays - *The Winslow Boy* (1946), *The Sleeping Prince* (1953), and *Ross* (1960) - started as ideas for filmscripts.<sup>337</sup>

Rattigan's screenplays continue the preoccupations of his stage work; two of his wartime films – *English Without Tears* (UK, Harold French, 1944) and *The Way to the Stars* are re-examinations of subjects he'd already dealt with on stage, in *French Without Tears* and *Flare Path* (1941) respectively. They also make use of a motif that was central to Rattigan's stage writing, namely, the creation of meaning through the clashing of linguistic registers. This is worth examining in more detail, as a central technique of Rattigan's writing, and one of his most significant developments of the well-made play.

As explored and examined in Chapter One, the classic well-made play derives much of its storytelling power from the choreography of knowledge – different

characters possess different levels of information, and it is the clash between these that lead to set-pieces, such as the *quiproquo*. In *Rattigan*, the contrast between characters is generally less between their information as their sensibility – characters possess the same information, but use different language to describe it.

This technique is established early on in *Rattigan*'s career, particularly in *French Without Tears*. This play is explicitly about language, being set at a language school on the west coast of France. However, the play is less concerned with the contrast between two languages than with the many different varieties of English. Much comic play, for instance, is made of the way in which the character Rogers uses naval idioms:

ROGERS: Well, I must get upstairs. I want to get my room ship-shape.  
ALAN: And above board?  
ROGERS: (*turning savagely on ALAN*) Yes, and above board. Any objection?  
ALAN: No, no objection at all. Make it as above board as you like.<sup>338</sup>

Later in the play, the same character refers to his initial discomfort at the linguistic style of his fellow students, being 'suddenly plumped down in a house full of strange people, all talking either French, which I couldn't understand, or your own brand of English, which was almost as hard.'<sup>339</sup>

Linguistic distinctions reveal important plot points; the difference in intimacy between 'an early morning dipper' and 'a nine o'clock bather',<sup>340</sup> or whether the tutor's daughter is addressed as 'Jacqueline' or the more masculine 'Jack'.<sup>341</sup> Sex, the unspoken subtext of many *Rattigan* scripts, is revealed as a language of its own: Brian, the most sexually successful of the students, mentions that his girlfriend Chi-Chi (strongly implied, in another linguistic joke, to be a prostitute)<sup>342</sup> doesn't speak any English beyond 'I love you, Big Boy':

KIT: How do you manage to talk to her, then?  
BRIAN: Oh, we get along, old boy, we get along.<sup>343</sup>

In this world, words are interrogated for their precise meaning ('What do you mean by hanky-panky?')<sup>344</sup> or criticised for their negative connotations: Jacqueline takes offence at being called 'nice'.<sup>345</sup> Language is unreliable, so much so that it often means its opposite:

ROGERS: You mean that she isn't in love with this chap Kit What's-his-name, who wants to marry her?  
ALAN: The only reason I have for supposing she isn't is that she says she is. But that's good enough for me.<sup>346</sup>

In *Flare Path*, set in a residential hotel near an RAF airbase, the linguistic clash is between airman's banter and the theatrical argot of the visiting actor Peter Kyle. The protagonist, Patricia Graham, is caught between these two registers – married to a Flight Lieutenant, Teddy, but carrying on an affair with Peter. The contrast between the two men is represented by their mutual incomprehension, symbolised by a *quiproquo* that depends on Teddy's use of the military phrase 'I've had it', meaning 'I'm fed up with it':

TEDDY: As far as a bath went, I've had it.  
PETER: You had a bath?  
TEDDY: No. The water was cold.  
PETER: But you said you had it.  
TEDDY: I had it – meaning I didn't have it.  
PETER: How can you have had it when you didn't have it? I don't understand.  
PATRICIA: You're being very dense. It's Air Force slang.<sup>347</sup>

Patricia and Peter's theatrical language is used for dramatic irony, as when another RAF wife, Doris, comments 'Wonderful the way you stage people darling each other. To hear you sometimes, you'd think you were passionately in love.'<sup>348</sup> (In reality, they are.) Patricia's ambivalence is symbolised by her discomfort with both sets of usage, as when she takes exception to Doris' offhand description of a mission:



DORIS: Poor dearie. This is the first time you've been here for a do, isn't it?  
 PATRICIA: A do. Oh God, how I hate all the polite Air Force understatement. Isn't there a more dignified word for it than a do?<sup>349</sup>

As in *French Without Tears*, the clash of different Englishes is paralleled with a literal linguistic barrier – one *scène à faire* is a set-piece in which Doris, believing her Polish airman husband to have been killed, gets Peter to translate a letter written by him in French, a language she doesn't speak.

This scene, like the 'I've had it.' *quiproquo* quoted above, is one of a type that became less common in Rattigan's writing as his career went on, in that it's a moment that draws attention to its own virtuosity – as in a Coward play, part of the audience's enjoyment lies in the appreciation of the skill of the contrivance. It's made all the more conspicuous by the fact that Rattigan uses the translation device again, the second time as farce – Doris' husband, the Count, revealed to have survived after all, gives an account of his exploits in mixed Polish and broken English, which his colleagues translate and correct.

This is against Rattigan's method as it developed; in later plays and screenplays, he rarely shows his technique, preferring to hide the machinery of construction, and to avoid this kind of set piece. In *The Final Test* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1953), he puts an oblique account of his dramatic method into the mouth of Alexander Whitehead, who appears in early scenes to be a pompous, selfish verse playwright, but who is redeemed in the audience's eyes when he is revealed to be an admirer of both Chekhov and cricket, which he praises for its qualities of 'the art that conceals art' and – an important concept in Rattigan's writing for both stage and screen – 'the beautifully inconclusive'.<sup>350</sup>

This initial letter scene also uses another technique that's central to Rattigan's method – the reliance on the unspoken emotion. Again, this shows Rattigan's development of the techniques of the well-made play; where the classical well-made dramatist creates a pattern of reveals and revelations, Rattigan's emotional climaxes are often dependent on the unstated, perceived by the audience but not by other characters. In this scene, the effect is gained not just by the obvious emotional effect on the Countess, but also from the unspoken feelings of Peter, relating the Count's words to his own situation as he translates them. This is a key Rattigan skill – where playwrights like Coward and Somerset Maugham treated censorship as a challenge, priding themselves on what they could slip past the Lord Chamberlain, Rattigan coped with the British theatre's avoidance of plain speaking by making it into his theme. He defined this use of the unspoken as a key part of his 'sense of theatre,'<sup>351</sup> and, particularly in its application to comedy, part of his claim to 'a small element of pioneering and experiment.'<sup>352</sup>

Given Rattigan's preference for the unstated and the inconclusive, it is perhaps not surprising that he was sometimes uncomfortable writing for the cinema, and what he saw as the medium's tendency to privilege the explicit and overt. In a 1950 article entitled 'A Magnificent Pity for Camels,' he laid out his belief that the techniques of the conventional cinema, and particularly the inquisitive camera, were enemies of the dramatist's art:

An audience trained on the old technique of the omni-present camera and microphone cannot be expected to grasp anything that it does not see and/or hear. Inference is a process belonging only to the theatre and, in the cinema has no place at all.

And yet inference is the very life-blood of drama and the modern screenwriter should obey all the basic dramatic principles, if the dignity of the term 'screenplay' is to be fully deserved.<sup>353</sup>

Rattigan describes this ‘old technique’ which he was taught as a staff writer at Warner Brothers, including, for instance, the dictum that one should never show only one side of a telephone conversation.<sup>354</sup> Much of Rattigan’s work as a screenwriter is based on his attempt to modify these cinematic techniques in line with his own approach to dramaturgy, using the unstated and offscreen as dramatic devices. Some cases of this are more pointed than others – in his screenplay for *The Sound Barrier*, he breaks this telephone rule to deliberate dramatic effect, by introducing the important character of John Ridgefield as the unseen/unheard figure on the other end of a telephone conversation with his daughter, as part of the character’s build-up before his delayed entrance.<sup>355</sup> (The late appearance of an important character is a technique recommended by William Archer: ‘[a] great effect is sometimes attained by retarding the entrance of a single leading figure for a whole act, or even two, while he is so constantly talked about as to beget in the audience a vivid desire to make his personal acquaintance.’<sup>356</sup> Rattigan used this technique a great deal in his stage work – witness, for instance, *The Browning Version* [1948], in which Andrew Crocker-Harris only appears after we’ve heard three separate characters talking about him or *The Winslow Boy*, in which Robert Morton first appears towards the end of the Second Act.)

Rattigan’s screen career can thus be read as both a development of techniques he had already used in the theatre, and an ongoing attempt to reconcile the tension (as he saw it) between his own dramaturgical techniques, based on inference and concealment, and what he regarded as the unsympathetic, more explicit, qualities of the cinema. At the same time, his screen work continues to explore the preoccupations of his plays, with settings that echo them.

## **The Rattigasquith - *The Way to the Stars***

Rattigan's cinematic career was very much linked with that of the director Anthony Asquith, to the extent that Raymond Durgnat wrote that 'on the analogy of the Chesterbelloc [a combined version of G. K. Chesterton and Hilaire Belloc, created by George Bernard Shaw in a 1909 essay] it's fair to invent the Rattigasquith'.<sup>357</sup> The two men collaborated on ten films; of these, five were adaptations of Rattigan's own work, four from the stage - *French Without Tears* (1939), *While The Sun Shines* (1947), *The Winslow Boy* (1948) and *The Browning Version* (1951) - and one from his own television play - *The Final Test* (1953), as well as two adaptations, early on in their collaboration, of other writers' work - *Quiet Wedding* (1940), *Uncensored* (1942) - and three originals - *The Way to the Stars*, *The V.I.P.s* (1963), and *The Yellow Rolls Royce* (1965). (Asquith also directed *Flare Path* [1942] on stage.) Rattigan's screenplays for Asquith were often written in collaboration with Anatole de Grunwald, a former journalist whose work with Asquith had begun with *Pygmalion*.

Rattigan's most critically successful collaboration with Asquith came with a film that, while not strictly an adaptation of a stage play, can be seen as an alternative version of it. Although *The Way to the Stars* is about a completely different group of characters from *Flare Path*, it has a close thematic and environmental relationship with that play, to the extent that it's sometimes referred to, misleadingly, as an adaptation of it.<sup>358</sup> The film was an attempt to do for the Royal Air Force what *In Which We Serve* had done for the Navy and *The Way Ahead* (UK, Carol Reed, 1944) for the Army. It also belongs, together with Powell and Pressburger's *A Canterbury Tale* (UK, Michael Powell, 1944) and the Rattigan-scripted *Journey Together* (UK, John Boulting, 1945),

to a recognisable sub-genre of late wartime films designed to aid Anglo-American relations or, as Michael Powell himself put it ‘to make the Americans love us.’<sup>359</sup>

The Rattigan archive in the British Library holds two early versions of this script; an outline entitled *Rendezvous*, by Rattigan and American screenwriter Richard Sherman (who had, like Rattigan, served as an airman – both men are credited with their military ranks in the finished film) and a full script, titled *For Johnny*, and running to a baggy 201 pages. These show the different stages that the original idea went through in becoming the finished film, and the different emphases given to the elements of the story.

These two versions of the script, like the finished film, have an unusual structure, less a three-act play, and more a double-bill, with two separate stories linked by a number of characters and a location. Rattigan’s theatre work, especially after the war, often returned to this form, telling a pair of contrasting stories linked by time (*Playbill* [1948]), location (*Separate Tables* [1954]) or theme (*In Praise of Love* [1973]).

Partly because of this two-part structure, the title of *Rendezvous* is ambiguous. Like subsequent versions of the story, it actually deals with two different sets of meetings, that of the inexperienced R.A.F flyer Peter with his mentor, the more seasoned Dick (called David in later drafts), and the later encounter of the U.S.A.A.F with the unfamiliar environment of rural England. The scenario’s opening image emphasises the incongruity of the latter rendezvous, with a crossing-out that indicates Rattigan’s desire to create a certain kind of pastoral image:

English countryside on a clear, cold moonlit night in the ~~midwinter~~ of early spring of 1943 – very still, very lovely, very peaceful. We see a meadow – great trees, huddled livestock, haystacks, an ancient country church. It is a pastoral world and very quiet.

Then we see the huge bulk of a Flying Fortress standing at its dispersal point.

[...]

We go on – another fortress and another, and another, widely scattered.

We are at an American Air Force bomber station. Its name – Shepley.<sup>360</sup>

Where later versions of the script are told chronologically, *Rendezvous* uses a parallel structure, following its two storylines simultaneously. It begins, as the above opening suggests, with the American flyers already present in 1943, then flashes back to Peter's arrival in 1940, alternating the two stories, with Peter's initial awkwardness echoing that of the Americans. As in *Flare Path*, cultural differences are shown through linguistic ones; before the Americans become acclimatised, they are shown parodying 'English phraseology and accent [...] mixing R.A.F. slang and Mayfair and cockney accents all together.'<sup>361</sup> As the two groups become more integrated, they learn each other's language; Americans learn the English pronunciation of 'pursuit'<sup>362</sup> and R.A.F. officers learn that 'Heinies' are the same enemy as 'Jerry'.<sup>363</sup>

As well as these two groups, the outline shows the other nationalities that make up the force. When we see the flyers together, they are described as 'a highly international group [...] Poles, French, Canadians, some English, a lone American.'<sup>364</sup> In a passage that ironises the Anglo-American culture clash, we see the American flyer George addressing a Polish airman, who is also a concentration camp survivor:

George tries to explain what he means, for he doesn't mean to sound critical. "It's just that things are different here – the customs and things like that. And then they don't speak quite the language we do."  
"Yes" says the Pole critically "Yes, of course. It must be hard for you." He is not being satirical. He is genuinely sincere.<sup>365</sup>

This aspect of the outline doesn't survive into later versions – it's possible that it was felt to detract from the central culture clash between British and American flyers. The outline also differs from the later screenplay in that it is set almost entirely within

the airfield, with both more flying and more combat than is in the subsequent screenplay, and hardly any interaction with the townspeople, none of whom are characterised. The story is one of wisdom being passed from mentor to pupil, who then becomes a mentor – the outline ends with Peter repeating Dick’s words to the American flyer Bill:

“You don’t need me to tell you that things can get pretty tough in this racket. When they do, it isn’t a bad plan to remember that there are other people flying with you.”<sup>366</sup>

*For Johnny*, by contrast, moves the narrative away from the airfield. In this respect, it resembles *Flare Path* more than the finished film does, in that the focus is less on the airfield, and more on the village in which it is situated. It also shows the influence of *In Which We Serve* (and, through it, *Cavalcade*) as sequences are structured round significant events of the war. The screenplay opens on 4<sup>th</sup> September 1939, the day after Britain’s declaration of war, as Halfpenny Field is converted to an airbase, marked by a Chekhovian felling of trees in the field, and the manager of the local cinema (a recurring character who doesn’t survive into the finished film) observing gloomily that ‘I’m afraid we’re going to have a lot more carrying on in the back seats from now on, Sam.’<sup>367</sup>

This screenplay also develops the character of Dick, now renamed David, the career airman and also, in this screenplay, amateur poet, who contemplates the nature of the post-war world.

AMERICAN: Just one more thing, Lieutenant. This is a question that particularly interests my readers back home. What sort of world would you like to see after the war?

DAVID: Oh well – I’ve no idea. Personally, I should be grateful to see any sort of a world after the war.

AMERICAN: Yes, but what sort of job would you like to go back to?

DAVID: (*simply*) Flying.<sup>368</sup>

David, in this respect, is an ancestor of a character type that Rattigan was to return to later, with Freddie in the play *The Deep Blue Sea* (1952), and Johnny in *The Sound Barrier*, the airman who has had a good war and finds it hard to imagine anything else.

Like *Rendezvous*, the screenplay is structured round two stories of outsiders coming into an unfamiliar world; in the first half Peter, in the second the American troops, and particularly the gentlemanly flyer Johnny. The two stories, now told chronologically rather than through flashback, are linked by the characters of Peter and a new addition, the hotel-keeper, Miss Todd, whom David marries, and who becomes his widow.

Again, the stories of culture clash are signalled by the use of language, and contrasts of behaviour. In the first half, the R.A.F. banter is set against the speech of the villagers, as when the groundsman Tiny makes a speech at David and Miss Todd's wedding, describing marriage using aviation metaphors: '[M]ay your matrimonial take-off be straight and true - may your climb through the clouds be swift and controlled - may your navigation be sure and your air speed steady - and may all your engine troubles be little ones.'<sup>369</sup>

Similarly, in the second half, the culture clash between British and American airmen is shown through linguistic differences - each group imitates the slang of the other, and play is made of minor linguistic details, such as the confusion that is caused when American flyers at the Hotel ask for the 'check' rather than the 'bill'. The acculturation of the American flyers is shown to be complete when they pronounce 'Halfpenny Fields' correctly.

As well as his own techniques of linguistic difference, Rattigan uses the traditional tools of the well-made play in the use and reincorporation of the screenplay's



two central symbols – David’s lucky cigarette lighter, and his poem ‘For Johnny’. David’s lighter is introduced in his opening scene, and then becomes the way in which we learn of his death:

DAVID’S cigarette lighter is on the table by the stove. PETER picks it up and tries to get it to work. After some difficulty he does so. He lights his cigarette, stares at the lighter a second, then slips it into his pocket.<sup>370</sup>

The lighter is passed by Peter to Miss Todd, and becomes a symbol of her love – she passes it on to Johnny, the married American airman with whom she is silently in love. Later, it is taken by the cynical airman, Bill, who doesn’t recognise its significance. At the film’s very end, it becomes a symbol of reconciliation; Bill’s with Britain, Miss Todd’s with David’s death: ‘BILL takes out a cigarette and lights it with DAVID’s lighter. MISS TODD notices this but says nothing.’<sup>371</sup>

The other aspects of David’s life that survive him are his child (who provides the catalyst for the initial bonding between Johnny and Miss Todd) and his poem ‘For Johnny’, which gives this version of the script its title. The poem first appears in a scene between David and Miss Todd, then reappears after his death, when Peter finds it among his effects. Rattigan plays with the dramatic irony here; Miss Todd and the audience know the truth about the poem’s authorship while Peter doesn’t: ‘I suppose he must have copied it out of some book or other.’<sup>372</sup>

The poem is later found by Johnny, together with his companion Bingo. Miss Todd reveals the poem’s authorship to Johnny, in the same scene where she passes the lighter to him, establishing the connection between Johnny and herself, and between the two male characters:

You’re the only other person in the world besides myself that knows my husband wrote poetry. He was rather ashamed of it, you see. He didn’t even tell his own best friend, Peter. Why should I tell you?<sup>373</sup>

After Johnny's death, Bill discovers the poem, which is used to draw an explicit, almost supernatural connection between David and Johnny (their names, of course, are those of the Biblical exemplar of male friendship):

BILL:           It might have been written for him [Johnny].  
MISS TODD: I think it was.<sup>374</sup>

Rattigan's use and reuse of this poem shows both the limitations and the strengths of his dramaturgy. He didn't write the poem himself – it was written by the airman and poet John Pudney, and was first published in 1941. However, as Dan Rebellato astutely puts it, in Rattigan's writing 'we should not be looking to the dialogue for the most poetically-wrought elements of the play'.<sup>375</sup> Rattigan's poetic technique is found in the arrangement of incident, the reincorporation of dramatic elements and ideas, and the ways in which events parallel, and rhyme with, each other. In this case, it is epitomised in the ways that he incorporates the poem into a number of scenes, using it for a different purpose each time, underpinned by a network of knowledge and emotion that he has set up underneath the situation. Rattigan's was a dramaturgy of understatement and restraint – he needed someone else's writing to provide poetic dialogue,<sup>376</sup> but his skill lay in the context in which he placed it.

### **The Rattigasquith – the stage adaptations**

Rattigan's adaptations of his own stage work, whether for Asquith or other directors, are all 'opened out' to a greater or lesser extent – most have additional scenes, either dramatising material that the play keeps offstage (particularly so in the case of *The Winslow Boy*), or changing the locations of scenes from the play. Several of his screenplays start the action earlier than the play, and have endings that differ in effect

from the stage original, either slightly (in the case of *French Without Tears* and *The Winslow Boy*) or drastically (*The Browning Version*).

Rattigan's collaboration with Asquith, and the more substantial part of his film career, began with the film of *French Without Tears*. Rattigan is only credited onscreen for the original play, and not for the screenplay, which is attributed solely to Anatole de Grunwald and Ian Dalrymple, but Rattigan later gave interviews in which he recalled working with them on the script.<sup>377</sup> This was Asquith's first film after *Pygmalion*, and like that film, 'opens out' the play, although in a different way – very few scenes are added, but Rattigan's dialogue is reordered, and delivered in different locations, rather than the single one of the play. At times, the film seems to allude to Asquith's earlier success with *Pygmalion* - Diana, the *femme fatale*, is seen in the bath, and like Eliza, is carefully concealed by Asquith's camerawork.<sup>378</sup>

The majority of the scenes that are original to the screenplay take place at either the beginning or end of the film. Where the play begins with Diana already firmly located in the lives and libidos of the French learners, the film includes her arrival at the local station, where we are told that she was raised partly in the United States (a line presumably put in to cover the accent of American guest star Ellen Drew) and 'isn't like an English girl at all'. The point is emphasised when the language school's teacher mistakes a gymslip-wearing English schoolgirl for her; a reversal of the joke that ends the original play, in which Lord Haybrook, the new pupil who is expected to become Diana's latest target (thus taking the pressure off Alan) is revealed to be 'a bright young schoolboy, about fifteen years old'.<sup>379</sup>

The screenplay also adds a new ending; after the appearance of Lord Haybrook, the film adds a sequence of Alan and Diana getting married, which is immediately ironised by Brian, in the pews, reincorporating a line from earlier in the script, saying

that Diana has ‘given him the green light’, suggesting that she may not entirely be faithful. Geoffrey Wansell suggests that this line was added by Rattigan as a reaction against the closed marital ending forced on him by the studio.<sup>380</sup>

### ***The Winslow Boy***

Rattigan’s collaboration with Asquith continued after the war with three more adaptations from his own stage work – *While The Sun Shines*<sup>381</sup>, *The Winslow Boy*, and *The Browning Version*.

*The Winslow Boy* was perhaps an obvious choice for screen adaptation, given that it was originally conceived as a film. Rattigan had been asked by Anatole de Grunwald for an idea for a film about British justice, and suggested the 1908 Archer-Shee case, in which a young naval cadet had been accused of stealing a postal order. When De Grunwald was unimpressed with the idea, Rattigan retooled it for the stage.

The play *The Winslow Boy* is, apart from its other qualities, a technical exercise in stagecraft; told by De Grunwald and Asquith that he would never be able to tell the story without including an expensive courtroom scene, Rattigan solved the problem by writing the play as a dramatist might have done at the time of the events shown within it (Rattigan updates the action slightly to 1912, partly so that he can make the family daughter a suffragette). *The Winslow Boy* makes use of self-consciously old-fashioned techniques; the action never moves from the drawing-room of the middle-class Winslows, with significant offstage events in Osborn Naval College, the Houses of Parliament, and the law courts conveyed through a number of means, including an expository servant. At times, Rattigan’s self-imposed constraints drive him to ingenious solutions; faced with the problem of delaying the reveal of the verdict in the

final act, he has the father take the telephone off the hook to avoid the journalists who are besieging the house:

*The telephone rings. ARTHUR takes receiver off and puts it down on table.*

GRACE: Oh, no, dear. You can't do that.  
ARTHUR: Why not?  
GRACE: It annoys the exchange.  
ARTHUR: I prefer to annoy the exchange rather than have the exchange annoy me.<sup>382</sup>

As well as Edwardian techniques for the choreography of knowledge, Rattigan also uses an old-fashioned curtain line. Following a bravura scene in which the barrister Robert Morton interrogates the suspected Ronnie Winslow, driving him to tears with his cross-examination and accusations, Morton makes to leave:

SIR ROBERT: (*Carelessly.*). Well, send all this stuff round to my chamber tomorrow morning, will you?  
DESMOND: But – but will you need it now?  
SIR ROBERT: Oh, yes. The boy is plainly innocent. I accept the brief.

*He bows to ARTHUR and CATHERINE and walks languidly to the door, past the bewildered JOHN, to whom he gives a polite nod as he goes out. RONNIE continues to sob hysterically.*<sup>383</sup>

Rattigan himself was uncertain about the self-conscious nature of this moment, saying later that 'I thought you can't have so theatrical a curtain as that these days, but then I thought, well, of course, in 1912 you could. So I left it in.'<sup>384</sup> Morton features in this scene as a sort of detective, with a later scene in which he explains the clues that led him to this deduction. At other times, he is a surrogate for the dramatist himself, with the commercial playwright's awareness of what will get applause:

ARTHUR: I could say: This victory is not mine. It is the people who have triumphed - as they always will triumph - over despotism. How does that strike you, sir? A trifle pretentious, perhaps.  
SIR ROBERT: Perhaps, sir. I should say it, none the less. It will be very popular.<sup>385</sup>

The conservative, Establishment, figure of Morton also ends the play, in duologue with Catherine, the family's more radical, suffragette daughter. Rattigan, writing in the early years of the post-war Labour government, argues for a consensus across the political divide:

CATHERINE: How can you reconcile your support of Winslow against the Crown with your own political beliefs?  
SIR ROBERT: Very easily. No one party has a monopoly of concern for individual liberty. On that issue all parties are united.  
CATHERINE: I don't think so.  
SIR ROBERT: You don't?  
CATHERINE: No. Not all parties. Only some people from all parties.  
SIR ROBERT: That is a wise remark. We can only hope, then, that those same people will always prove enough people.<sup>386</sup>

The political division that Rattigan is illustrating here was one that he himself created for the play; the real-life Archer-Shee family were both more conservative and more prosperous than the solidly middle-class Winslows. Rattigan is here dramatising a tension that runs throughout his work, and in his own character, as a left-leaning but socially conservative dramatist, who enjoyed the company of the rich and powerful.<sup>387</sup>

Of all of Asquith's film versions of Rattigan's plays, *The Winslow Boy* is the one that departs most from its stage original, with Rattigan, and his co-writer, de Grunwald, adding the courtroom scenes that Asquith had previously argued as essential, and that Rattigan had ostentatiously avoided. Robert Morton, played in the finished film by a top-billed Robert Donat, becomes a far more important character, seen not just in the alien environment of the Winslows' drawing-room, but in his own territories of the courtroom, the House of Commons and the golf course, where he is depicted as an early adopter of the technique, newly named at the time of the film's writing, of 'gamesmanship'.<sup>388</sup>

The screenplay also starts a few months before the events of the play, opening with a sequence of Arthur Winslow returning from his last day at work, and Ronnie going to naval college, with a montage sequence that shows his gradual acclimatisation at the college. We also see more of the public reaction, including a scene in a music hall, where Stanley Holloway sings a verse about the case in a song called 'Wait and See' – this is an extrapolation of a single line in the original play, where Catherine says 'They're singing a verse about us at the Alhambra', and proceeds to quote it.<sup>389</sup>

At the same time, the screenplay retains many of the set piece scenes from the original play, including Morton's interrogation of Ronnie, with its by now famous curtain line. Curiously, Rattigan and de Grunwald omit the scene which acts as a payoff for this line, in which Morton explains to Catherine his reasons for deducing Ronnie's innocence from his interrogation, as well as the trap and the loophole that he sets in the course of the scene. In the play, this scene is like a miniature detective story, with the clues scattered through the scene and elucidated later by Morton – in the film it just becomes a set piece, stripped of its narrative function. In the stage original, the denouement scene is also an important marker in the relationship between Morton and Catherine – she correctly identifies some of his techniques, suggesting that, despite their political differences, they have a clear affinity.

This omission is doubly surprising, given that the relationship between these two characters becomes more important in the film, with a degree of romance added, as in *Pygmalion*. This is hinted at in the original play, particularly in a moment where Morton compliments Catherine on her hat, saying that for a suffragette to wear such a feminine adornment 'looks so awfully like trying to have the best of both worlds'<sup>390</sup>, a phrase which one can imagine being quite familiar to the left-leaning but high-living Rattigan. However, the screenplay makes it more explicit, especially in its final

moments, in which Rattigan makes use of one his favourite rhetorical devices, the antithesis:

SIR ROBERT: You will still pursue your feministic activities?  
CATHERINE: Oh yes.  
SIR ROBERT: A pity. It's a lost cause.  
CATHERINE: Do you really think so, Sir Robert? How little you know women. Good-bye. I doubt that we shall meet again.  
SIR ROBERT: Oh. Do you really think so, Miss Winslow? How little you know men.

Rattigan's frequent use of this device was something of a mannerism, and in his later plays became a stylistic tic.<sup>391</sup> To some extent, Rattigan's fondness for the antithesis is related to his preoccupation with linguistic clash – where Shaw uses antithesis as a way of illuminating a moral paradox, Rattigan uses it to show the differences between the speakers, who may be using the same words, but mean radically different things by them – a prime example comes in his television play *Heart to Heart* (UK, TVM, Alvin Rakoff, 1962) in an exchange between an unhappily married couple:

PEGGY: Oh, darling. I *am* the most blessed of wives, aren't I?  
DAVID: I think so. But then I also think I'm the most blessed of husbands.

*He kisses her in return, but in a way that shows clearly the form in which his conception of marital blessedness differs from hers.*

In the case of *The Winslow Boy*, the antithesis suggests both the affinity and the difference between the two characters, with Morton's (political) ignorance of women balanced by Catherine's (emotional) ignorance of men. David Mamet retains this exchange in his 1999 screen adaptation of the play, which is otherwise closer to the play than is Rattigan and de Grunwald's own version.<sup>392</sup>



In general, *The Winslow Boy* is a slightly awkward film; Rattigan's very success in expressing the material in theatrical terms means that the film is a compromise, neither a satisfactory adaptation of the play, nor the screenplay that Rattigan might have written in the first place. C.A. Lejeune said something to the same effect at the time of its release:

'The Winslow Boy', in the theatre, triumphed by embracing its limits: the same 'Winslow Boy' transferred to the cinema, loses something by flouting them. Mr Rattigan and Anthony Asquith, the director, have deliberately chosen the theatrical rather than the documentary approach to their subject: and it is in the extra scenes, the attempts to amplify, still in theatrical terms, what has already been said completely in the theatre that the film principally fails.<sup>393</sup>

Lejeune's phrasing here is interesting, and it's not entirely clear what she means by 'the documentary approach' that she believes the filmmakers could have chosen. However, it's hard to disagree that *The Winslow Boy* in its attempt, like Catherine's hat, to 'have it both ways', never entirely succeeds as either a version of the play, like *The Browning Version*, nor as a reimagining in another medium, like *The Way to the Stars*.

### ***The Browning Version***

*The Browning Version* is a short play, running about an hour, which makes up half of the double-bill *Playbill*. (The second half, *Harlequinade*, is a light comedy, written to be performed by the same cast and linked by the suggestion that they're taking place at the same time. The title alludes to the tradition in nineteenth-century pantomime whereby the central characters would turn into their equivalent characters in the *commedia dell'arte* - Harlequin, Columbine etc. – for a short afterpiece. This play has never been as popular as its companion, and the title indicates Rattigan's own view of its insubstantial nature.). The two plays were originally going to be joined by

two more, which would be performed by the same cast on alternate nights, suggesting that Rattigan (and John Gielgud, for whom the project was originally conceived) were planning something on the lines of Coward's *Tonight at 8:30*.

*The Browning Version* is the first of a series of plays that Rattigan wrote after the Second World War showing the negative effects of the repressed emotion that he, and other writers such as Coward, had praised so much during the conflict. The central figure, Andrew Crocker-Harris, is a formerly brilliant classical scholar who is retiring early from his job as a teacher at a public school, ground down by failure as a teacher and a loveless marriage. The play alludes explicitly to Aeschylus' *Agamemnon* and, at the other end of the cultural spectrum, to James Hilton's *Good-bye Mr. Chips*, with Crocker-Harris, like Mr Chipping a brilliant but socially awkward classicist who met his wife on a walking-tour, a more realistic, cynical version of that novel's central character.

The title refers, as it might in a Scribe or Sardou play, to a physical object – a translation of the *Agamemnon* by Robert Browning – but also to an idea. On a literal level, the book is given to Crocker-Harris by the schoolboy Taplow, a gesture which prompts him to cry, in his only genuine display of emotion in the play. When Crocker-Harris' wife, Millie, reveals that she'd previously caught Taplow imitating him, and that the book was an attempt at appeasement, this is her cruellest blow, the domestic equivalent of Clytemnestra's murder of her husband.

However, the title also has a symbolic application. When he hands the book over, Taplow says that 'it's not much good'.<sup>394</sup> This contrasts with Crocker-Harris' memory of his own translation of the same play;

ANDREW: When I was a very young man, only two years older than you are now, Taplow, I wrote, for my own pleasure, a translation of the *Agamemnon* – a very free translation – I remember – in rhyming couplets. [...]. The play had so excited and moved me

that I wished to communicate, however imperfectly, some of that emotion to others. When I had finished it, I remember, I thought it very beautiful – almost more beautiful than the original.

TAPLOW: Was it ever published, sir?

ANDREW: No. Yesterday I was looking for the manuscript when I was packing my papers. I fear it is lost - like so many other things. Lost for good.

TAPLOW: Hard luck, sir.<sup>395</sup>

The Browning version (of the *Agamemnon*) is thus contrasted with the Crocker-Harris version – the latter is a superior, more hopeful version, but one which no longer survives. *The Browning Version*, as a title, refers not just to a book, but to a whole life – Crocker-Harris' life as it is.

Given the length of the original play, Rattigan's screenplay for *The Browning Version* inevitably adds some new material – roughly the first twenty minutes and the last five of the film. The opening scenes use the character of Mr. Gilbert, the young teacher who will be Crocker-Harris' replacement, as a source of exposition (also eliminating the wife by whom he is accompanied in the play), and show a scene, of Taplow in Crocker-Harris' classroom, that is described in the play. The opening sequence also plays up the 'two cultures' aspect of the original play – Frank Hunter, the young chemistry teacher who is having an affair with Millie, is described by the headmaster as 'like many scientists, a little narrow-minded'.

Certain scenes retain the dialogue from the play, but take place in a different location, sometimes to good effect: as Tom Ryall says 'it could be argued that the scene in which Crocker-Harris learns about his nickname – 'the Himmler of the Lower Fifth' – and confesses his failure to Gilbert is most appropriately filmed in the empty classroom in which he has spent his career'<sup>396</sup>, while the Headmaster's breaking the news that Crocker-Harris won't be getting a pension, and the subsequent confrontation

between the Crocker-Harrises, both gain from being set in a public location, at the annual cricket match.

The screenplay's two greatest additions to the play are both changes that soften the tragic nature of the original. The play ends with Crocker-Harris, after confronting his failure as both schoolmaster and husband, making a small gesture of defiance; where he had previously acquiesced to the headmaster's demand that he give his farewell speech before Fletcher, the younger, more popular games master, he finally announces, in a phone call to the unseen headmaster, that he will claim his right to make the final speech. The moment is deliberately underplayed – Crocker-Harris adds, in a line that carries a slight authorial wink, that 'I am of opinion that occasionally an anti-climax can be surprisingly effective.'<sup>397</sup>

This, followed by the Crocker-Harrises sitting down to tea, marks the end of the play; in the film, the line is spoken direct to the headmaster just before the final speech day, in which Crocker-Harris departs from his prepared speech to give a heartfelt apology for his failure as a schoolteacher, winning him an unexpected ovation from the assembled pupils. (The headmaster is shown attempting and failing to stop the cheers, a reference back to a previous line about Fletcher.)

This ending has rarely been admired: C. A. Lejeune argued that the play had 'by far the nobler and more dramatic ending'<sup>398</sup>. It is arguable that the medium, as well as the longer form, demands a more conclusive ending than the one-act play – while this additional scene has never gained the stage currency of Shaw's additional scenes for *Pygmalion*, it did form the basis for an equivalent scene in Mike Figgis' 1994 updated remake, with a screenplay by Ronald Harwood. It is also striking that when Rattigan died in 1977, this was the scene that the ITV news showed as an example of

his work – a bravura moment from a writer who, at least in his postwar work, generally avoided them.<sup>399</sup>

Although this is the dramatic climax of the screenplay, there is another scene to go. Previously, after Crocker-Harris' confrontation scenes at the cricket match, the screenplay showed him finding his own juvenile translation of the *Agamemnon* (kept, a little improbably, in his classroom). This, the Crocker-Harris version, is referenced in a pointed exchange with his wife:

MILLIE:       When did you do that?  
ANDREW:      Before our marriage. It is unfinished.  
MILLIE:       (*Smiles*). Our marriage?  
ANDREW:      No. The translation.

Taplow finds the translation on Crocker-Harris' desk, takes it away and reads it. In the final scene, he returns it, saying that 'It was really exciting. Like a real play. A modern play.' As he leaves, and Crocker-Harris breaks protocol by telling Taplow of his promotion, the background music swells, and Crocker-Harris is seen clasping the manuscript, with the implication that its completion has given him something to live for.

This ending, with the return of the Crocker-Harris version, both of the *Agamemnon*, and of his earlier life, is even harder to take than the final speech and, unlike it, is absent from even the remake. Being generous, both changes can be seen as following a principle that Rattigan argued in another context, that a tragic ending that works in a short play can seem merely sentimental in a full length work.<sup>400</sup>

### **Rattigan without Asquith**

As well as his long-running collaboration with Asquith, Rattigan wrote screenplays for other directors, including three with Harold French, who had directed

*French Without Tears* on stage. The Rattigan/French collaborations – *The Day Will Dawn* (UK, Harold French, 1942), *English Without Tears*, and *The Man Who Loved Redheads* (UK, Harold French, 1955) – are stylistically similar to the Asquith collaboration, and share some of their personnel, with Anatole de Grunwald co-writing the first two.

Certain projects were conceived by the Rattigan/Asquith/De Grunwald team, but ending up being made by other directors. A consortium of the three men plus Bill Linnit bought the screen rights to Graham Greene's novel *Brighton Rock* in 1939, before selling them on to the Boulting Brothers. Rattigan wrote an initial treatment for the film which survives among his papers.

Greene's novel had already been adapted for the stage by Frank Harvey, and much of the structure of that adaptation survived into Rattigan's treatment. Greene's novel itself used certain theatrical techniques; particularly the way in which information is conveyed by physical objects; Kolley Kibber's card, a seaside photographer's snap and, most strikingly, the record made by the gang leader Pinkie Brown in a record-your-own-voice booth in which he reveals his true contempt for Rose, the woman he had married in order to silence her evidence. This is an Archer-esque 'finger-post', although Greene deftly keeps the reveal outside the novel, which ends with Rose, still believing that Pinky loved her, going off to play the record, leading to the devastating final line: 'She walked rapidly in the June sunlight towards the worst horror of all.'<sup>401</sup>

Rattigan's most notable contribution to the screenplay was his suggestion of a softer ending, in which the Rose plays the record, which sticks, leading to Pinkie's repetition of the words 'I love you'. This ending, with a camera focussing on a crucifix on the wall, suggestion that the scratch was caused by divine intervention, has long been the most controversial part of the film, with even Roy Boulting later disowning it,

and claiming that it was forced on the filmmakers by a censor.<sup>402</sup> Steve Chibnall has demonstrated, in his book on the film, that this is not backed up by the production documents, and quotes Greene himself pointing out that the scratch can be accounted for naturalistically, by an earlier scene in which Pinkie attempts to destroy the record.<sup>403</sup>

### ***The Sound Barrier***

Rattigan returned to the subject of aviation, this time in a post-war context, in *The Sound Barrier*. This project had been brought to Rattigan by Alexander Korda and David Lean and, according to Rattigan's biographer Geoffrey Wansell, the dramatist was initially uncomfortable with it, seeing it (in a phrase that tells us a lot about his own view of his dramatic strengths) as 'a film of ideas rather than of character.'<sup>404</sup> The film deals with the attempts to break the barrier by an aviation engineer named John Ridgefield, a fictionalised version of Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, whose son, also named Geoffrey, had died in a test flight. (The screenplay has a complex relationship with the true story; the real-life de Havilland and his bereavement are mentioned in the dialogue, though Ridgefield is clearly based on him.) The biography of de Havilland's son is here divided between two characters, both of whom are killed while flying; Ridgefield's son, Chris, a reluctant flyer who crashes on his first attempt to fly solo, and Tony, a test pilot married to Ridgefield's daughter Susan, killed while trying to break the eponymous barrier. The father-in-law/son-in-law relationship between Ridgefield and Tony creates parallels with other works; Ridgefield has echoes of Shakespeare's Prospero (the shooting script refers to him showing off the jet engine 'with the air of a conjuror')<sup>405</sup> and Shaw's Undershaft. Indeed, at times, the script has

the tone of a Shavian play of ideas, with Susan and Ridgefield portrayed as mouthpieces for their clashing ideologies; she the pragmatist, he the over-reacher.

The correspondence between Rattigan and Lean while the screenplay was being revised suggests a relationship between the two men that echoes that of the characters, Rattigan's Susan-like restraint clashing with the director's more grandiose vision. In a letter dated 16/4/51, Lean suggests that a place be found for a quotation or paraphrase of a passage in Frederick Hoyle's *Nature of the Universe*, a book which he had sent to Rattigan on 2/2/51.<sup>406</sup> Rattigan replied the next day:

Your quotation from Hoyle is certainly arresting but highly metaphysical for poor Annie of the ninepennies. If I can get someone to express the idea in words of one syllable I will, but actually the notion that the addition of a third dimension to motion will make for universal peace is so highly arguable that I feel it would take about the length of our present script to expand it.<sup>407</sup>

(Notice, incidentally, the commercial dramatist's habit of identifying an archetypal audience member – 'poor Annie of the ninepennies' is a cinematic cousin of the theatregoer 'Aunt Edna', whom Rattigan describes in the Introduction to Volume Two of his Collected Plays, written the year after this, as 'a nice respectable, middle-class, middle-aged maiden lady with time on her hands and money to help her spend it.')

The shooting script, dated June 22<sup>nd</sup> 1951, maintains, and gets much of its dynamic from, the tension between the two styles and attitudes. The airmen, particularly the lead characters Tony and Philip, are clearly kin to those seen in *Flare Path* and *The Way to the Stars*, and have a similar preoccupation with language:

SUSAN: Will you try not to use 'piece of cake' talk for a moment?<sup>409</sup>  
[...)  
TONY: This is wizard. Absolutely wizard!  
PHILIP: (to SUSAN) You haven't broadened his vocabulary, I see.<sup>410</sup>



Like David in *The Way to the Stars* or Freddie in the play *The Deep Blue Sea*, which Rattigan was writing at the same time as this screenplay, Philip and Tony are men who live to fly. We first see the former in his Spitfire as he returns on the day of the landings in Sicily; ‘PHILIP suddenly throws back his head and laughs from sheer exhilaration.’<sup>411</sup>

By contrast, John Ridgefield, the industrialist who seeks to break the sound barrier (played in the finished film by Ralph Richardson), is a character far more typical of later Lean – an over-reacher in the manner of Colonel Henderson in *The Bridge on the River Kwai* (UK, David Lean, 1957) or Lawrence in *Lawrence of Arabia* (UK, David Lean, 1962). The script is explicit about the classical models for the character; the plane with which he seeks to break the barrier is called the Prometheus:

TONY: Prometheus? Who was he?  
JOHN: One of the Greek Gods. He stole fire from heaven.  
TONY: Oh yes, I remember. He came to a sticky end, didn't he?  
~~JOHN~~-SUSAN: He did.  
JOHN But the world got fire.<sup>412</sup>

This passage shows the differing approaches of the two men – the classical reference and grandiose themes are very typical of Lean, whereas Rattigan achieves his effects through smaller methods – the deliberate inadequacy of ‘sticky end,’ or the subtle dialogue tweak of giving ‘He did’ to Susan, establishing the tension between father and daughter.

The differing styles of writer and director are also apparent in the treatment of the subplot concerning Chris, Susan’s brother, whom John is trying to train as a flyer. (Rattigan’s writing, particularly after the war, often returns to the theme of father/son tensions. The relationship here echoes that of the characters in the play *Who Is Sylvia?* [1950] and its subsequent film version *The Man Who Loved Redheads* [UK, Harold French, 1955], even down to casting the same actor – Denholm Elliott – as the son.)

Rattigan shows Chris' discomfort through dialogue, as he discusses the fact that he has yet to fly solo:

TONY: How many [hours] dual have you done?  
CHRIS: (with faint shame) Rather a lot. Fourteen.  
TONY: (encouragingly) Oh well, that's not bad. I remember we had one chap who did twenty before we passed him.  
CHRIS: I don't suppose his name was Ridgefield, though.<sup>413</sup>

Chris' death, and subsequent burial in a pretty country churchyard where 'the sun is shining and birds are singing,'<sup>414</sup> are explicitly tear-jerking in a way that is far more characteristic of Lean than Rattigan. This was commented on even before the film was made; Edward Bowyer, one of the technical experts asked to read the script, wrote to Lean that 'I find one or two of the scenes blatant in their attach on the emotions – particularly that at the graveside after Christopher's death, but you and Terry are better judges of that kind of thing than I am.'<sup>415</sup>

In the end, the film is ambivalent about Ridgefield's overreaching; the barrier is broken but at the cost of two major characters. In the final scene, a Shavian clash of ideals between father and daughter, Susan expresses the negative view in an uncharacteristically (for Rattigan) on-the-nose speech:

You want me to think of you as a man with a vision. That vision has already killed my husband and my brother – and while I'm able it's not going to kill my son. There are evil visions as well as good ones, you know, father. If you don't believe that, just remember a certain vision that ended recently in a bunker in Berlin – That's why I'm taking my baby away.<sup>416</sup>

A hint of Lean's attitude to the symbolism of the story is given by the way in which the barrier is finally breached – the pilot is shown reversing controls as the plane is diving, accelerating rather than braking. In real life, this wouldn't work; Chuck Yeager, the American test pilot who actually did break the barrier, is quoted by Tom Wolfe as saying that 'Anyone who reversed the controls going transonic would be dead.'<sup>417</sup> Lean and Rattigan clearly knew that this scene is inaccurate; a letter to Lean

from Sir Geoffrey de Havilland, dated 10/7/51, and now in the Rattigan archive, states diplomatically ‘I suggest that reversing the controls would not necessarily have the effect described.’<sup>418</sup> For Lean, the symbolic value of the gesture, accelerating rather than retreating in a moment of crisis, is more valuable than its scientific accuracy.

Lean and Rattigan never collaborated again; a cooling of the relationship between the men may be inferred from the fact that, during the publicity period for *Lawrence of Arabia*, Lean emphasised the fact that Robert Bolt’s screenplay had ‘nothing at all to do with the Terence Rattigan conception of Lawrence in his play, *Ross*.’<sup>419</sup> Many of Rattigan’s subsequent screenplays are adaptations of his stage and television work; though his return to original screenwriting with *The V.I.P.s* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1963) and *The Yellow Rolls-Royce* (UK, Anthony Asquith, 1964) reunited him with Asquith, neither were as successful as their earlier collaborations – Wansell says of the latter project that ‘Rattigan had no particular emotional commitment to it, but it represented a convenient way of making a large sum of money quickly.’<sup>420</sup>, while John Russell Taylor observed that there was nothing in either film ‘which seemed to need his talents or show them distinctively at work.’<sup>421</sup> The cynical attitude shown in Rattigan’s later screen work can be summed up by the fact that he wrote the screenplay for *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (UK, Herbert Ross, 1969), a musical adaptation of a novel he’d earlier parodied in *The Browning Version*; by 1969, he was willing to go along with Hilton’s sentimentalisation.<sup>422</sup>

Rattigan’s film career is an interesting illustration of the importance of collaboration, especially with a sympathetic director, and of a writer who had developed a particular set of skills in the theatre finding ways of applying them to a related but different medium. As such, it provides a useful comparison and contrast with the career of the writer who will form the basis of the rest of this thesis, R. C. Sherriff.

## **Chapter Five - R.C. Sherriff: Introduction.**

The focus of the rest of this thesis will be a case study of a single playwright/screenwriter and his work; R. C. Sherriff (1896-1975). Four of Sherriff's most successful screenplays will be examined; *The Invisible Man* (US, James Whale, 1933), *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (US, Sam Wood, 1939), *The Four Feathers* (UK, Zoltan Korda, 1939), and *The Dam Busters* (UK, Michael Anderson, 1955). Each of these was an adaptation of an existing fictional or (in the case of *The Dam Busters*) historical work, and each fits into an existing established genre or cycle; respectively, the Universal horror film, the Hollywood 'British' film, the British colonial film, and the post-war British WW2 film. Each of the following chapters will examine how each screenplay adapts to the characteristics of the genre, and how Sherriff adapts both the source material and his own preoccupations, so that the films, although adapted from a wide variety of material (mostly from authors whose social and political views were very different from Sherriff's), are still recognisably the work of a single author, reflecting the preoccupations and attitudes of his own work.

### **R.C. Sherriff and the Art of Adaptation**

In writing about Sherriff, it's often necessary to clear away a number of misconceptions, both those which have arisen through other commentators and those spread by Sherriff himself.

The received view of R. C. Sherriff is a fairly consistent one: a chronicler of the male public school class in peace and war, stiff upper-lipped, snobbish and always on the side of the status quo. For instance, his imdb page states that he 'wrote several classic movie scripts, invariably with strong patriotic sentiments.'<sup>423</sup> John Ramsden, in

his book on *The Dam Busters*, comments on the generally male, cloistered environments of his writing, saying that ‘his own life was mainly spent in the male company of school, army, rowing and cricket clubs, and in the war service of 1914-1918 which he regarded as his life’s most fulfilling moment.’<sup>424</sup>

This conventional view is encapsulated in Studs Terkel’s description of the first film version of *Journey’s End* (US, James Whale, 1930):

Lieutenant Osborne was an avuncular, pipe-smoking schoolmaster, wise and philosophical, who had obviously attended the same proper schools as Stanhope: institutions on whose playing fields, the Duke of Wellington informed us, wars were won. There was Second Lieutenant Raleigh, young, innocent, tragically heroic, the kid brother of Stanhope’s sweetheart back home. There was Second Lieutenant Hibbert, of indeterminate class, something of a coward. And there was [...] Trotter, speaking cockney talk. (How in the world did he ever get to be a British officer?)<sup>425</sup>

Sherriff’s perceived (and, to some extent, actual) preoccupation with the public school officer class is striking given that he wasn’t himself a member of that class – his pre-literary employment was as Loss Adjuster for an Insurance firm, and he spent most of his life in the solidly middle-class suburb of Esher. He also didn’t attend a public school, a fact that he wrote about in 1968:

When my war play *Journey’s End* was first performed, some people said there was too much of the English public schools about it. Some thought it glorified them without good reason; others that it discredited them unfairly. It depended on the way they thought about those schools.

For my own part I had no ax [*sic*] to grind one way or the other. I didn’t go to a public school myself. I was at my small hometown grammar school, and in those days the gulf between a local school and a public school was so wide that the boys lived practically in different worlds. I hardly ever met a public school boy until I joined the Army. As a Junior Officer, I lived among them. Almost every young officer was a public school boy, and if I had cut them out of *Journey’s End*, there wouldn’t have been a play at all.<sup>426</sup>

Later on in the same essay, Sherriff writes of the way in which his educational background prevented him from getting a commission in 1914; he only got one later ‘because the prodigious loss of officers in France had forced the authorities to lower

their sights and accept young men from outside the exclusive circle of the public schools.<sup>427</sup> When he writes about the officer class or, as in *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, the public school system, his viewpoint is that of the outsider, as much as it is when he writes about the working class.

It's also worth noting that Sherriff, although he left the service as a well-respected junior officer, was never a military hero. His active service in France lasted just under a year, from September 1916 to August 1917, after which he was invalided out following the Battle of Passchaendaele. The statement, sometimes found in biographical sketches,<sup>428</sup> that he was awarded the Military Cross is a mistake, possibly arising out of a confusion between Sherriff and his *Journey's End* creation, Stanhope, who is one of a series of idealised hero-figures (Harry Faversham in *The Four Feathers*, Horatio Nelson in *That Hamilton Woman* [US, Alexander Korda, 1941], Guy Gibson in *The Dam Busters*) who run through his work.

The distance between Sherriff's writing persona and his actual background makes an interesting point about the nature of theatrical culture in the interwar years. The Royal Court revolution of the 1950s was partly about the elevation of the idea of the playwright as an individual voice; Dan Rebellato has described this as 'the professionalisation of the playwright.'<sup>429</sup> The theatre of the 1920s and 1930s placed less emphasis on the writer as individual, so that it's not unusual to find writers for whom the form of the well-made play acts as a kind of mask, allowing women to adopt male or ambiguous pseudonyms (Gordon Daviot, Clemence Dane),<sup>430</sup> male homosexuals to write heterosexual romances (Noël Coward, W. Somerset Maugham, Terence Rattigan), and writers like Sherriff and Coward to write of a class from which they hadn't come. Even Terence Rattigan who was, after William Douglas-Home (1912-1992), the most genuinely patrician playwright of this era, came from a lower

social class than he appeared to; he went to Harrow and Oxford, but both were on scholarships.<sup>431</sup> (This wasn't in itself a sign of poverty – all bright boys were encouraged to apply for scholarships as a mark of prestige – but Rattigan's family were unusual in that they actually accepted the financial reward.)<sup>432</sup>

The idea that a playwright's life and work are inseparable, and that the latter inevitably tells one something about the former, is a post-war one, and alien to the pre-war theatre's emphasis on technique. (George Bernard Shaw was a striking exception to this, with a public persona that was central to the reception of his plays, both in the theatre and in published form. Shaw had of course established this persona as a critic and polemicist long before he became a successful playwright.)

This ambiguous relationship between writer and work is especially true of Sherriff, who always treated his own life with a certain degree of dramatic licence, both in interviews and particularly in his autobiography, *No Leading Lady* (1968). Sherriff's biographer, Roland Wales, comments on this:

Quite why he should have had such disregard for the truth is not clear, but throughout his life Sherriff was a very private individual (becoming more so as time went on), and it may have suited him to construct a particular persona, to keep people at arm's length from the real Sherriff. He was also a natural storyteller, so must have been sorely tempted to embellish more mundane accounts, if only to please his audience.<sup>433</sup>

Sherriff himself gives an example of this tendency in *No Leading Lady*, when he describes being interviewed by the American press after arriving in New York with the *Journey's End* company:

The story the reporters had got hold of was not exactly true, but there wasn't any point in watering it down by telling them about the string of earlier plays I'd written for the boat club that had got me nowhere. [...] So I felt justified in brightening it up by adding a bit of dramatic licence. It wasn't cheating, because everything I told them actually happened. I simply cut the dull stuff and linked the interesting episodes together just as I would if I were condensing a long rambling story into a play for the stage.<sup>434</sup>

In this respect, Sherriff's freewheeling attitude towards facts is connected with his central skill as a playwright and screenwriter; that of adaptation. In writing of Sherriff and adaptation, one is using the word in three ways;

- 1) his adaptation of his own biography and persona in his work, particularly the way in which he wrote primarily about a social class and *milieu* from which he did not come,
- 2) on the most literal level, the fact that almost his entire career as a screenwriter was as an adaptor, with all of his completed screen work being based on either existing works of fiction, or on history.
- 3) his adaptation of his own skills, training himself in the techniques of the playwright through reading and practice, and later adapting to different cinematic genres and cycles.

As argued above, the first level was partly a feature of the theatre for which he was writing. Similarly, the second level is largely a reflection of the nature of the British (and, to a lesser extent, American) cinema during the period in which Sherriff was writing, in which prestige films tended to be based on pre-existing properties. Sherriff, as the writer of a single, immensely successful play, was in a position somewhere less prominent than that of the playwrights outlined in the previous two chapters – not so successful that he could base a screen career on adapting his own work, but also not so anonymous that he could work as a journeyman. The majority of his screen work was within the prestige traditions in both Britain and Hollywood, adapting works which already had a certain amount of cachet. This also reflects the ways in which playwrights were often used within the film industry – as writers skilled in structure, who could give dramatic shape to another writer's work.



Sherriff's approach to screen adaptation shows the influence of his mentor, William Archer, who writes in *Play-Making* on the subject of adapting novels for the stage. Archer argues that in most cases 'the best way to do this is to put the book aside in constructing the play, treat it as a mere suggestion, which might have come from history or from a newspaper, and only when the scheme of the play is thoroughly worked out, revert to the book to see what fragments or longer passages of dialogue may be transferable to the stage.'<sup>435</sup> This process aligns with how Sherriff treated adaptation throughout his career, reworking the structure of the original novels (as in the case of *The Invisible Man*), adding a throughline to an episodic narrative (*Goodbye, Mr. Chips*) or selecting only part of a longer work to adapt (*The Dam Busters*). Archer goes on to say that '[s]ometimes, when the particular action of a novel is unmanageable for dramatic purposes, it is possible to take the leading characters and place them in an entirely different action,'<sup>436</sup> which describes what Sherriff did for much of the screenplay of *The Four Feathers*.

The third level, the way in which Sherriff adapted his own skills to the media and subgenres in which he worked, was part of a process that continued throughout his working life, and which began with the plays written before *Journey's End*. In order to understand this, it is necessary to look at these apprenticeship plays.

### **The Apprenticeship of a Dramatist**

Sherriff's literary career began around the time of his discharge from the army in 1917, and his return to his job as Loss Adjuster for the Sun Insurance Company. His first plays were written for the amateur stage, initially as fund-raisers for his old school, Kingston Grammar School, and the Kingston Rowing Club.

In *No Leading Lady*, Sherriff claims that he ‘had never written a play, or indeed read one’ until 1921, when he went to Samuel French’s offices in London in search of a one-act play to stage.<sup>437</sup> Not finding anything suitable, he wrote a comic sketch entitled *An ‘Itch in the Proceedings* (1921), set on a motor coach, and written to include as many members of the club as possible. The circumstances of the piece’s writing helped to teach Sherriff two important lessons, the value of writing for specific actors, and of rewrites; ‘It was better to start with half a play than a whole one, for new lines at every rehearsal kept it fresh and interesting.’<sup>438</sup> Sherriff completely rewrote the play’s ending – the original typescript ends with the driver informing the passengers that the bus isn’t going anywhere, because of ‘an ‘itch in the proceedings’.<sup>439</sup> Sherriff revised this sequence (in the process rendering the play’s title meaningless) for a more effective one in which the conductor who collects the fares is revealed as a conman.

The success of this play led Sherriff to embark on a self-education as playwright, which included a close study of William Archer’s *Play-Making*, which he says he learnt by heart, visiting West End theatres once a month, every payday, and reading every new play he could find in the *Times* library.<sup>440</sup> He later describes J. M. Barrie as an especial inspiration, the playwright who ‘mattered most’.<sup>441</sup> Barrie’s plays, like Sherriff’s, are nostalgic, preoccupied with childhood, and entirely asexual. They also often have a three-act ‘journey and return’ pattern: one of Barrie’s editors describes his most common structure as ‘a first act or opening section more or less ‘realistic’ in nature or domestic in setting, to which the play eventually returns after a middle act or phase of fantasy.’<sup>442</sup> Sherriff uses this structure for his early plays *Profit and Loss* (1923) and *The Feudal System* (1925) and, later, for films like *The Four Feathers* and, doubled for the two protagonists, *The Dam Busters*.

In *No Leading Lady*, and in interviews, Sherriff portrays himself as a dilettante, an insurance clerk and rowing teacher who became a writer more or less by accident thanks to the immense success of *Journey's End*. This is disingenuous; he sent all of his apprentice plays after *An 'Itch in the Proceedings* to the literary agent Curtis Brown, and their replies tell a narrative of increased acceptance:

*The Woods of Meadowside* (1922): 'managers would avoid one act plays that had thirteen characters in the cast, which would make the salary list heavy.'<sup>443</sup>

*Profit and Loss* (1923) 'In spite of some excellent characterisation and some really good dialogue, we do not think that the play is strong enough for the West End, though we think it might go very well in the provinces.'<sup>444</sup>

*Cornlow-in the-Downs* (1923) 'The play has interested us considerably and, beautifully cast and produced, we think it has quite a good chance of success. We have offered it to one or two managements but up to the present without any satisfactory results.'<sup>445</sup>

*The Feudal System* (1925) 'We have now considered very carefully your new play 'The Feudal System'. We like this play and think that it has a very good chance of success.'<sup>446</sup>

These plays, and the two that followed them, *Mr. Birdie's Finger* (1926), later rewritten and professionally staged as *Badger's Green* (1930), and *Journey's End*, came out of this period of conscious self-training, in which he taught himself the 'rules' of playwriting, in the same way that he was later to learn the rules of the various cinematic genres in which he worked. Wales quotes a 1925 interview in the *Surrey Comet* which shows the author's dedication to understanding his craft:

This much may be said with certainty, that even if [Sherriff's] ordinary vocation leads him into different paths, the theatre is his chosen route, and to that end he studies constantly, reads voraciously, thinks more than a little, and eventually produces something which is well worth acting, and in which it is the delight of his brother members of the Kingston Rowing club to appear.<sup>447</sup>

Sherriff's apprentice plays, those written up to *Journey's End*, show the effects of his reading, and the techniques that he had learnt from William Archer. *The Woods of Meadowside*, the first play he wrote after reading Archer, is the work of a writer experimenting with his material, and not yet completely in control of it. His writing

habits are hinted at in one exchange between the dyspeptic Colonel Pepper, and the Reverend Cuthbert Muffitt, who is described as ‘a dowdy unprepossessing young man with no apparent feature to recommend him,’<sup>448</sup> and who was played by Sherriff himself:<sup>449</sup>

COLONEL: The only difference between a sane man and a madman is that  
a sane man knows he’s mad and a madman doesn’t.

*(During this speech CUTHBERT produces his note book, and commences  
rather ostentatiously to write.)*

COLONEL: What’s the matter?

CUTHBERT: Whenever anyone says anything remarkably clever I always  
make a note of it.

*(COLONEL beams and draws himself up.)*

CUTHBERT: It’s the first entry I’ve got after your name.<sup>450</sup>

Sherriff may have shared Cuthbert’s habit; certain lines read like one-liners inserted without regard to their character, as when Muffitt first encounters three race-course thugs and expresses surprise that they’re not at the pub:

TOM: I’m a teetotaller! *(sic)*

CUTHBERT: You’re a what?

TOM: I’m a teetotaller!

CUTHBERT: Then I must congratulate you on your clever disguise.<sup>451</sup>

The joke is far too snappy for Cuthbert; an older Sherriff would have given it to another character. However, the typescript also shows Sherriff’s realisation of the importance in choosing the right word for a punchline; he originally wrote ‘make-up’, but crossed it out and wrote in ‘disguise’.

There is also a *quiproquo*, when Colonel Pepper gets the idea that Sam, who’s actually a racecourse pickpocket in disguise, played cricket for Oxford:

COLONEL: By Jove! I didn’t realise that we had got a blue with us today –  
what did you make at Lord’s this year, Thundersley?

SAM: Not much, Gov’ ner; it was a hot day and everyone had their  
overcoats buttoned up.<sup>452</sup>

Learning from Ibsen and his imitators, Sherriff understood how small physical features could contribute to the play's symbolism. One of the racecourse thieves, Percy, is from an educated, well-heeled background, brought down by a weakness for gambling. We're told that '[h]is clothes are very old, but neat and clean; and it is obvious that the man has striven pathetically to keep a good appearance,'<sup>453</sup> and that he wears spats, which Sherriff uses as a symbol for social respectability:

SAM: Colonel got plenty of money. eh?

CUTHBERT: Oh, he's awfully rich – at least, he wears spats almost every day.

PERCY: (*Shaking his head reflectively at his own shoddy feet.*) Ah! Many a man today wears spats to hide his broken boot laces.<sup>454</sup>

At the same time, the play shows that Sherriff had not entirely mastered his technique. For instance, there is a moment in which Cuthbert is forced to play along with the three criminals, and soliloquises on his situation:

CUTHBERT: Oh, miserable wretch that I am! What have I done that I am placed in this terrible predicament? I am forced to lie – forced at the point of a revolver–

(*He pulls himself together.*)

Ah, but I mustn't behave like a coward – I must show what I am made of – I must be wily – and wait my time to bring these villians [*sic*] to justice!<sup>455</sup>

Nothing actually comes of the threat contained in this speech; at this stage in his career, Sherriff hadn't realised that every hint dropped in a play must be followed up, avoiding what Archer called 'the misleading finger-post.'<sup>456</sup>

*Profit and Loss*, Sherriff's next play, shows him starting to master this technique. The play starts in a working-class house, where the protagonist's daughter, Betty Jottings is being courted by Tom Martin, 'an awkward, ordinary-looking young man of about 19', who works as a milkman:

BETTY: You don't like your job, do you, Tom?

TOM: I dunno, Betty, I reckon any job's what a man likes to make it 'imself – you can make it a kind of game if you like, you 'ave to *invent* things to make a dull job more interesting.<sup>457</sup>

In the Second Act, Betty, now wealthy thanks to her father's wartime dealings, has got engaged to Gerald, who had served as an officer during the war:

JOTTINGS: Well, Gerald, I reckon you did'nt [*sic*] 'arf get something to manage when you got Betty. I can't manage 'er – you'll find it's the biggest job you've ever undertook.

GERALD: Oh, I don't know, Sir – I think it'll be alright. As my old batman in France used to say – any job's what a man likes to make it himself, you can make it a kind of a game if you like.  
<sup>458</sup>

Sherriff has learnt that a set-up must be paid off, and achieves it here with a skilful use of dramatic irony, as Jottings (and the audience) realises the significance of Gerald's line before than he does. Unfortunately, he then proceeds to spoil the effect. A Pinero or Granville Barker would have left it at that, having given us the information that Tom Martin was Gerald's batman; Sherriff, still not quite assured in his technique, reiterates it over the next half-page of dialogue.

The scene in which Gerald proposes to Betty similarly shows the imperfect extent to which Sherriff had learnt the tactics of the well-made playwright. While Gerald is proposing to Betty onstage, her brother Dick is doing the same thing offstage to the similarly well-born Norah:

DICK: And the ones who've finished first can tap on the door, or go and look at the Gold fish until the others have finished.

GERALD: That's the idea. And, look here. Tap *three* times if successful, *twice* if not.<sup>459</sup>

Initially, Betty turns Gerald down, on the grounds of their differing social origins, but is persuaded when Dick signals the outcome of his courtship of Norah:

(*There is a pause, then there is a knock at the dining room door, then another knock, and then, after a short pause, a third and louder one.*)

BETTY: What's that?

GERALD: That's a signal from Dick, to say that he's engaged to Norah.

BETTY: Are you serious, Gerald?

GERALD: Honest injun – Now, Betty, won't you? – a double wedding'll come so much cheaper.  
 BETTY: (*quietly*) All right, Gerald, if you really want me – but I wouldn't if I were you.  
 GERALD: You're not me, thank Goodness.<sup>460</sup>

Here, Sherriff establishes the *scène à faire* effectively, neatly sidestepping the problem of repetition by keeping one couple offstage, and playing with the audience's perception – that 'short pause' is the sign of a playwright enjoying his power. However, the necessities of the plot force him to make Betty change her mind for the flimsiest of reasons, undermining all of her protestations of the previous dialogue. As Archer puts it '[t]he difference between a live play and a dead one is that in the former the characters control the plot, while in the latter the plot controls the characters.'<sup>461</sup>

In *Profit and Loss*, cigars are used as a symbol of gentility as spats had been in *The Woods of Meadowside*. In the first act, Jottings, a working-class character who has received a promotion, buys a box of cigars with his new salary and gives one to his friend Potter, who 'cuts a large chunk out of the wrong end.'<sup>462</sup> At the end of the act, Potter, who describes himself as 'an old friend 'oo knew yer when you smoked a clay pipe upside down,'<sup>463</sup> warns Jottings of the perils of ambition, before exiting with him:

JOTTINGS: Why, Potter, your cigar's out!  
 POTTER: I like it better when it's out, thanks.  
 JOTTINGS: Well, I'm –  
 (*The curtain falls.*)

In the Second Act, Jottings (who, in the meantime, has become rich through wartime profiteering) loses his money through a bad investment and the act ends with him calling an estate agent about returning to his previous home in Paradise Street. Again, Sherriff ends the Act with a symbolic use of smoking:

(*He puts down the receiver, and, walking to the table, takes a cigar from the box. He looks thoughtfully at the cigar for a moment, the [sic] he puts it back, and producing a well worn pipe from his pocket, puts it in his mouth.*

*As he lights it, and puffs the smoke clouds in the air, the curtain falls.')*<sup>464</sup>

The play ends with Jottings returned to his natural *milieu*, albeit one that's now considerably more comfortable thanks to his children's good marriages, and the friendship of the soon-to-be-knighted Potter:

POTTER:        (*handing his friend a cigar*) Bill, ole pal, we've 'ad our differences of opinion, and we ain't always seen eye to eye, but old friends is *always* old friends, eh? - Bill?

                  (*Sir William says nothing, but stands with his cigar in his mouth.*)

POTTER:        (*striking a match*) Want a light?

JOTTINGS:     (*with a twinkle in his eye*) No thanks, I like it better when it's out.

                  (*They walk together towards the door. The curtain falls.*)<sup>465</sup>

One technique of the well-made play that Sherriff had not learnt at this stage was that of the late point of attack. *Profit and Loss* suffers from a redundant first act – the central change in circumstance (Jottings' new-found wealth and social position) occurs between the first and second acts. Arguably, Sherriff didn't master this technique until *Journey's End*.

Sherriff's early plays also provide an insight into his methods and preoccupations, especially concerning politics. All are concerned, to a greater or lesser extent, with class, and with threats to the social order, and all end either with a character who had threatened to disrupt the *status quo* deciding not to, or with an outsider being absorbed into the system – what he was to refer to in the *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* screenplay as 'the English pattern.'

The early plays, from *Profit and Loss* onwards, often express class determinism, a belief that people should stay in the social conditions into which they're born. *Cornlow-in-the Downs* takes this to extremes; the eponymous village is a proto-Brigadoon which has remained in a state of arrested development, under the control of the Burnley family, since the eighteenth century:



Two hundred years ago, the first Burnley discovered that the Village people were absolutely happy and contented with what they had. He decided they couldn't be any happier, and that new ideas and new inventions would only make them unsettled and distracted. He kept them as they were, and so did the Burnleys who followed him.<sup>466</sup>

The totalitarian implications of this paradise are made even more alarming by the revelation that the village's authority figures, the clergy and the military, don't even practise what they preach. This device means that Sherriff never actually shows us what this anti-technological paradise looks like, enabling him to set the play's second and third acts in the Vicar's (fairly conventional) drawing room. The Vicar's dialogue, with Maraway, an outsider businessman, gives more expression to the play's political ideas:

MARAWAY: But surely some of your people have developed on their own – have none of them invented things? - I should have thought that any community of men, left alone, would develop *[sic]* in many ways?

VICAR: (*decisively*) They hav'nt *[sic]*. You see, no great minds existed in this Village two hundred years ago. You can't get rats out of mice, Mr. Maraway.<sup>467</sup>

By this point, in the first Act, Maraway has been in the village for a month, and discovered that the Vicar's wife, Mary, is a woman to whom he was engaged twenty-five years previously, who left him because he spent too much time working at his business. We have also discovered that the Vicar's son, Leslie, is studying at Cambridge (like the Amish, the Burnleys allow their adolescents a time away before they return), and is developing a desire to get away from the village. Maraway announces his intention of offering Leslie a job, and marrying Daphne, daughter (and spitting image) of his lost love. Initially Leslie is attracted by Maraway's ruthlessness, especially in dealing with a rival firm:

MARAWAY: It's been run by two men – clever men, once, but they've got old, and old men get muddled, Leslie – it's wobbling. It only wants a push now – a push from *me* – and it'll crash – and Maraway and Co. will stand alone.

LESLIE:        (*shrill with admiration*) You don't mean to say you're going to  
                 – *ruin* those chaps?<sup>468</sup>

In the end, neither scheme comes to anything; Leslie decides that it takes more courage to remain in Cornlow than to leave it, and Daphne becomes repulsed by Maraway's way of doing business.

Politically, *Cornlow-in-the Downs* edges towards Fascism, in its belief in a social hierarchy based on the idea of inherent (and inherited) intelligence, and a mythologisation of the past. *The Feudal System*, Sherriff's next play, is more nuanced, and deals with a theme that reappears in his draft screenplays for *The Four Feathers*, the responsibilities of the landed gentry to their estates. The first scene ends with the suicide of the landowner Peter Grenville because of debt and the inevitable loss of the country estate, Merehayes. Grenville's butler, Jonson, raises his late employer's son, Derek, in working-class surroundings in Streatham. Through astute dealing in property, and extreme self-sacrifice, Jonson makes enough money to buy back the estate, which he gives to Derek, on condition that he never reveal the name of his benefactor to anyone. Jonson and his wife return to their old places in service where, it is implied, they will be much happier. The overall view of the play is a conservative one, with the implication (contained here in an elaborate stage direction) that social stratification is to the benefit of all:

*In the servant's hall, by rights, there should hang the portraits of the Jonsons who have served the Grenville family. The bond between Master and Servant has grown steadily through the generations, until now it would be difficult to tell which would be the more helpless: a Grenville without a Jonson to serve him, or a Jonson without a Grenville to serve.*<sup>469</sup>

However, the play is not entirely uncritical of the class system – Derek is shown as having gained more from his upbringing by Jonson than he would have done from a more traditional aristocratic education ('I know that he's missing a lot by not going to

Winchester, but Winchester can't do as much for a Grenville as a Jonson can.')<sup>470</sup>

Jonson is also shown as encouraging Derek to maintain the commercial changes - bungalows, a mill, a working orchard- that have been made to Merehayes by its interim owner, a *nouveau riche* businessman named Squidge. The future, it appears, lies in the gentry acquiring some of the entrepreneurial qualities of the capitalist class that threatened to replace them.

The play is also ambiguous in its portrayal of the love story between Derek and Bessie, Jonson's niece (like Derek, she is an orphan), who is described as having 'glossed over the Cockney accent of her voice in the way that girls have who serve in high-class Dressmaking Businesses.'<sup>471</sup> Again, Jonson is the voice of social stability:

It's wicked for two people of different classes to get married. If two people of the same class marry, the children know who they are, why they're born. It's when a baby comes into this world with a father pulling him up into the House of Lords, and the mother dragging him into the Scullery, that's where the trouble begins. A thorough-bred Navvy's a better thing than a cross-bred Duke.<sup>472</sup>

At first sight, the play appears to endorse this view, with Derek leaving Bessie for Laura Homesby, a girl of his own class, whom he knew when they were both teenagers (as in several of his early plays, Sherriff associates romantic happiness with a return to childhood). However, the final moments of the play add a note of regret, and a skilful use of props, as Derek, newly returned to Merehayes, opens his birthday presents from Bessie; an imitation ebony cane 'the kind that Miss Jonson has seen young man in Streatham use'<sup>473</sup> and a set of monogrammed handkerchiefs:

*(Derek is alone. He stands by the table, takes one of Bessie's handkerchiefs from the box and looks at it with lowered head. The wind moans through the elms, and dies away.*

*The curtain falls.)*<sup>474</sup>

*The Feudal System* shows the effects of Sherriff's wide reading, and rather old-fashioned theatrical tastes. The plot echoes J.M. Barrie's *The Admirable Crichton*

(1902) in its suggestion that the servant class are both more capable and more conservative than their employers, and Harley Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* (1905), in the working out of financial irregularities revealed in the opening scene. There are also echoes of Chekhov's *The Cherry Orchard* in Squidge's Lopahkin-like modernisation of Merehayes (which even has an orchard), although Sherriff's ending is more conciliatory than Chekhov's.<sup>475</sup> Sherriff was at this stage of his career still in the position of an apprentice, learning the techniques of the well-made play through imitation and synthesis.

Sherriff's final apprentice play *Mr. Birdie's Finger* (1926) is again a story of threatened (but ultimately averted) social change. The play is set in the Hampshire village of Tinker's Dell, where a business conglomerate, the Modern Village Syndicate, is proposing to create a garden suburb. The syndicate is represented by the appropriately named Winter, like Maraway and Squidge a spokesman for modernity and pragmatism - 'I shall make hundreds of people happy by giving them quiet country homes; consequently, I am prepared to make three men unhappy in doing so.'<sup>476</sup> The 'three men' are the village's authority figures; the eponymous Mr. Birdie, Major Flosson and Doctor Manderley, whose son, Dickie, is the spokesman for the *status quo*:

Three men run this village; Father, Major Flosson, and Mr. Birdie. Three fine old men who have been beaten in life. They all started with good chances – but these were just men who stood back and let others go first – do you see what I mean? [...] Here are three old Englishmen, nearly driven out of the world by people who can push harder. They've recovered their self-respect here; they are proud to find they are of use in the world after all.<sup>477</sup>

The elders come up with a plan to make Winter miss his train to a crucial business meeting by asking him to join the village cricket team, after Birdie, a spin bowler, injures the finger of the title. The third act is structured round this offstage cricket match, as Winter joins the team, and wins the game, causing him to abandon his

plan for modernization. Like Cornlow, Tinker's Dell returns unambiguously and happily to the *status quo*.

The play is unashamedly paternalistic; the three men are represented as knowing what's best for the village, whatever the rest of the locals think – the suggestion that the local tradespeople would benefit from Winter's plans is represented as immaterial.<sup>478</sup> Where *Cornlow-in-the-Downs* had portrayed the battle between continuity and change in terms almost of fantasy, *Mr. Birdie's Finger* is a more low-key treatment of the same theme; Sherriff signals the nature of the village by devoting much of the opening scene to characters dealing with a dispute over which local dignitary is going to start the egg and spoon race. The social attitudes which both plays display seem less flexible than those of *The Feudal System* – while that play allows that Squidge's alterations may have been economically necessary, Maraway and Winter are presented as out-and-out threats to a preferred way of life. While Maraway returns home, Winter is absorbed into the village, with cricket acting both as the device that spoils his scheme, and the source of his acceptance in the village.

By the time he came to write *Journey's End*, Sherriff was in full control of his dramatic technique. Sherriff delays the entrance of his principal character, showing us Stanhope initially through an expository dialogue between two minor characters, Hardy and Osborne;

HARDY:     How is the dear young boy? Drinking like a fish, as usual?  
OSBORNE:   Why do you say that?  
HARDY:     Well, damn it, it's just the natural thing to ask about  
                  Stanhope.<sup>479</sup>

As he had done with Jottings' cigars, Sherriff repeats the reference to Stanhope's drinking several times. He uses it symbolically, in a discussion about the dug-out practice of earwig racing:

HARDY: Oh, you each have an earwig, and star 'em in a line. On the word 'Go' you dig your earwig in the ribs and steer him with a match across the table. I won ten francs last night – had a *splendid* earwig. I'll give you a tip.

OSBORNE: Yes?

HARDY: Promise not to let it go any further?

OSBORNE: Yes.

HARDY: Well, if you want to get the best pace out of an earwig, dip it in whisky – makes 'em go like hell!<sup>480</sup>

It also serves as a source of dramatic irony, demonstrating the naivete of Stanhope's old schoolfriend, the hero-worshipping Raleigh, whose association with old-fashioned virtues is signaled by his name:

OSBORNE: You know, Raleigh, you mustn't expect to find him – quite the same.

RALEIGH: Oh?

OSBORNE: You see, he's been out here a long time. It – it tells on a man – rather badly –

RALEIGH: (*thinking*) Yes, of course, I suppose it does.

OSBORNE: You may find he's – he's a bit quick-tempered.

RALEIGH: (*laughing*) Oh, I know old Dennis's temper! I remember once at school he caught some chaps in a study with a bottle of whisky. Lord! The roof nearly blew off. He gave them a dozen each with a cricket stump.<sup>481</sup>

Sherriff emphasises the quotidian; the play begins with Hardy mending a sock, and the characters spend a lot of time discussing food. The play gains much of its power from the disjunction between the size of the events offstage, and the way in which the characters react to them:

HARDY: They simply blew us to bits yesterday. Minnies – enormous ones; about twenty. Three bang in the trench. [...]

OSBORNE: Do much damage?

HARDY: Awful. A dugout got blown to bits and came down in the men's tea. They were frightfully annoyed.

OSBORNE: I know. There's nothing worse than dirt in your tea.<sup>482</sup>

Sherriff also shows his increased craftsmanship in the use made of props, specifically a letter written by Raleigh to his sister, which prompts the second act climax, as Stanhope insists on reading it before the letter is sealed. Sherriff wrong-

foots his audience, leading them to expect a negative account of Stanhope's condition, and then having the letter be almost entirely complimentary.<sup>483</sup>

As well as using the techniques that Sherriff had learned in his apprentice plays, *Journey's End* carries on with some of their preoccupations, for instance, the symbolism associated with sport (cricket appears in all the apprentice plays but one – in *Cornlow-in-the-Downs*, the characters play croquet instead) and, going along with that, childhood.

Despite Sherriff's own educational background, *Journey's End* is very much rooted in public school values, particularly the association of sport with virtue – Raleigh's hero-worship of Stanhope is partly because of the fact that he was 'skipper of rugger at Barford, and kept wicket for the eleven.'<sup>484</sup> Sport is used as a metaphor for warfare (and vice versa), in a way that owes something to Henry Newbolt's poem 'Vital Lampada': (This poem, often referred to by the name of its chorus 'Play Up, Play Up and Play the Game', is quoted in *Badger's Green*.)<sup>485</sup>

RALEIGH: I suppose you've *got* to talk quietly when you're so near the German front line – only about seventy yards, isn't it?  
OSBORNE: Yes. About the breadth of a rugger field.  
RALEIGH: It's funny to think of it like that.  
OSBORNE: I always measure distances like that out here. Keeps them in proportion.<sup>486</sup>

In *Journey's End*, sport is part of the world that the soldiers have left behind, and to which their thoughts keep returning. Childhood and schooldays are referred to constantly; Osborne is a schoolmaster in civilian life, Trotter quotes Hilaire Belloc and has a discussion with Osborne about Lewis Carroll:

TROTTER: What's the title?  
OSBORNE: (*showing him the cover*) Ever read it?  
TROTTER: (*leaning over and reading the cover*) *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* – why that's a kid's book!  
OSBORNE: Yes.  
TROTTER: You aren't *reading* it?

OSBORNE: Yes.  
TROTTER: What – a *kid's* book.  
OSBORNE: Haven't you read it?  
TROTTER: (*scornfully*) No!  
OSBORNE: You ought to.<sup>487</sup>

The critic Robert Douglas-Fairhurst has argued that *Alice* is present throughout the play, referenced not just in the dialogue and underground setting, but subliminally, in the need for a lot of pepper in soup, in the list of items found in the German soldier's pockets, which echoes Osborne's quoting of the Walrus' lines on 'shoes, and ships, and sealing wax,' and in Raleigh's revelation that his hometown is Lyndhurst, which had been revealed, shortly before the play was written, to be the home of Alice Hargreaves, Carroll's real-life inspiration.<sup>488</sup> The implication, as Douglas-Fairhurst says, is that 'not all underground adventures have a happy ending.'

As we will see, the use of sport as a metaphor for warfare reappears in Sherriff's screenplays, particularly those set in the military, like *The Four Feathers* and *The Dam Busters*. In *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, the continuity of the school is emphasised by the way in which a cricket match carries on despite a Zeppelin raid; as the boys fill in a crater, Chips declares that 'The match is due to begin at 2:30. It always *has* begun at 2:30, for fifty years. We can't allow an ill-mannered act of war to disorganise our programme.'<sup>489</sup>

*Journey's End* shows the craftsmanship that Sherriff had learned through his study and writing of plays. He was never to achieve such a great success on stage again – however, the techniques he had learnt and demonstrated were those that were to sustain him through his career as a screenwriter.



## R. C. Sherriff – Career Chronology

An additional factor in Sherriff's own career is that the majority of his early screenplays were written for American studios rather than British. (The statement, found in his imdb entry, that he worked on the British film *The Toilers* [UK, Tom Watts, 1919] is a mistake.)<sup>490</sup> This provided another element in his self-education, and may have contributed to the workmanlike way in which he approached his writing.

Sherriff's screen career began thanks to James Whale, who directed *Journey's End* both on stage and in the 1930 film version. Following the success of the film, Whale had remained in Hollywood, where he had directed *Frankenstein* (US, James Whale, 1931) for Universal. Whale was slated to direct the film adaptation of *The Road Back*, the sequel to *All Quiet on the Western Front*, and suggested Sherriff as screenwriter. The film was postponed (Whale eventually made it in 1937, with a much altered script),<sup>491</sup> but Sherriff's screenplay was enough to earn him a contract to write screenplays for three films – *The Invisible Man*, *A Trip to Mars* (a science-fiction story, abandoned when the studio bought the rights to the *Flash Gordon* comic strip) and *One More River* (US, James Whale, 1934), an adaptation of John Galsworthy's novel *Over the River*. The latter is rarely seen today, and is unusual within Sherriff's work, as dealing explicitly with sexuality, and specifically the suggested sado-masochistic leanings of the heroine's ex-husband. Sherriff re-organises the structure (in particular taking out a sub-plot), but retains much of the novelist/playwright's original dialogue, occasionally even adding to the sexual innuendo.

Even more surprising is *Dracula's Daughter*, an unused screenplay for a sequel to the studio's 1931 film, to be directed by Whale. This is in two parts, an origin story for the count, in which he is portrayed as a sadistic aristocrat, in the manner of Gilles

de Rais,<sup>492</sup> kidnapping peasant girls for the pleasures of his guests, and a modern-day story in which a male American tourist becomes enslaved by the Count's daughter with, again, strong hints of sado-masochism. Even in this untypical setting, Sherriff's preoccupations come through: at one point, two of the female vampire's sexual slaves are described in a way that compares their present state with the past:

MAN

Well –you saw those two fellows who just went over to her? One's Jack Turner, the polo player, the other's Bobby Mackintosh; two of the finest chaps you could ever meet – until...

GIRL

Until what?

MAN

Until they got mixed up with her. Look at 'em now – Like a couple of anaemic rabbits.<sup>493</sup>

It is very typical of Sherriff that he should identify a male character's virtue with the fact that he played polo.

This script would clearly never have passed the newly-instigated Breen office, and it's possible that it was never intended to. (James Curtis, Whale's biographer, suggests that the director encouraged Sherriff to produce an unfilmable script so that he could get out of the project to direct *Show Boat* [US, James Whale, 1936].)<sup>494</sup> Whatever the case, this script and *One More River* suggest a wider range for Sherriff than his better-known films do, and make the reader consider whether the American and British film industries always made the best use of his talents. (*Dracula's Daughter* was directed by Lambert Hillyer in 1936, with a script that used little of the Whale/Sherriff material.)<sup>495</sup>

Sherriff left Universal in 1936, following the departure of Carl Laemmle, and began contracts with both M.G.M. and Alexander Korda. He also continued writing plays and, increasingly, novels during this period. Roland Wales suggests that his stage

writing during this period shows the effects of his screen experience – *Windfall* (1933) contains a montage-like sequence of short scenes within a trial,<sup>496</sup> and *St. Helena* (1934) a scene where two conversations take place simultaneously, encouraging the audience to perform a sort of cross-cutting.<sup>497</sup> The M.G.M. and Korda contracts both led to more unproduced scripts than produced, although the finished films included *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* and *The Four Feathers*, which premiered within a month of each other in 1939.

Like many British filmmakers, particularly those past service age, Sherriff spent much of the war in the United States, where he worked on films promoting British interests; for Alexander Korda - *That Hamilton Woman/Lady Hamilton*, for MGM - a single scene of *Mrs Miniver* (US, William Wyler, 1942) and for 20th Century Fox - *This Above All* (US, Anatole Litvak, 1942). He returned to Britain in 1944.

The last years of the war and those immediately following were clearly a frustrating period, with his collaboration with Korda yielding little in terms of completed films. *Quartet* (UK, Ken Annakin/Arthur Crabtree/Harold French/Ralph Smart, 1948) for Sydney Box, is an adaptation of four of Somerset Maugham's short stories, all of which are softened in their screen adaptations, two by addition, two by subtraction – *The Kite* and *The Colonel's Lady* add happy endings to Maugham's stories, while *The Facts of Life* and *The Alien Corn* omit contentious elements, sexual in the first instance, racial in the second. While the screenplay for this film was published, in an edition that also included the original stories,<sup>498</sup> Sherriff's own typescript has not survived, so it's hard to say how much of the revision was his work – Sydney Box's own diaries suggest, for instance, that the ludicrous happy ending of *The Colonel's Lady* (the Colonel discovers that the mysterious lover described in his wife's best-selling book of poetry is actually his younger self) was Box's idea rather than Sherriff's.<sup>499</sup>

Sherriff's final period of productivity in the cinema came in the 1950s, and was preceded by two stage successes; *Miss Mabel* (1949) and *Home at Seven* (1950). These were followed by two aviation-themed films; *The Night My Number Came Up* (UK, Leslie Norman, 1955) and probably his greatest achievement as a screenwriter, *The Dam Busters*. The immense success of the latter led to a period of consistent activity where he worked on many screenplays, including an unused screenplay for *Dunkirk* (UK, Leslie Norman, 1958). None of these were filmed and *The Dam Busters* remained his last filmed screenplay until his death in 1975.

Sherriff's screen career shows the way in which a self-taught dramatist applied the principles that had been learned from his stage work, while engaging with the younger medium as he did so. This thesis will examine how he achieved this in four of his most significant screenplays.

## Chapter Six - R.C.Sherriff; *The Invisible Man* and the Well-Made Screenplay

Sherriff's account of the making of *The Invisible Man* (in *No Leading Lady*) depicts him as an innocent abroad, bringing British pragmatism and common-sense into the rarified world of Hollywood screenwriting. He describes looking through the pile of draft scripts that already existed for the project:

One writer took the scene to Tsarist Russia at the time of the Revolution and turned the hero into a sort of invisible Scarlet Pimpernel. Another made him into a man from Mars who threatened to flood the world with invisible Martians, and all of them envisaged him as a figure of indescribable peril for the world, threatening to use his unique invisibility to reform it or destroy it, as he felt inclined.

One thing stood out clearly on every page I read. The charm and the humour and the fascination that had established the original Wells story as a classic had been utterly destroyed, and there wasn't a word in all that massive pile of scripts that I could use without throwing aside my own respect for a story that had enraptured me since boyhood.<sup>500</sup>

He goes on to recount how he returned to Wells' original novel, finding a copy in a Chinese market in San Francisco, and adapting it 'chapter by chapter'.<sup>501</sup>

Sherriff is here both romanticising his own involvement (the decision to revert to Wells' novel had already been taken before he was involved,<sup>502</sup> and he remained in Britain throughout the writing, as he later admitted),<sup>503</sup> and understating the extent to which the finished screenplay expands and revises Wells' novel. To see this, it's necessary to look at the screenplay's structure in some detail.

Like all of Sherriff's early screenplays, *The Invisible Man* is divided into sequences, designated in this case by the letters A-H, and each structured like a miniature theatrical Act, often with a curtain line. This table indicates the length of each sequence, the action it covers, and whether this derives from Wells' novel (and, if so, which chapters):

A – Griffin’s arrival at the inn.	(11 pages)	Chapters 1 and 2.
B – Cranley, Flora and Kemp.	(4 ½ pages)	
Griffin’s reveal and escape.	(17 ½ pages)	Chapter 7.
C – Cranley and Kemp.	(5 pages)	
D – Encounter of Griffin and Kemp	(6 pages)	Chapters 17-19.
Reactions of the villagers.	(1 page).	Chapter 18.
Griffin and Kemp.	(6 pages)	Chapters 17-19
Kemp and Griffin return to Iping	(8 pages)	Chapters 11 and 12.
E - Griffin’s escape	(34 pages)	
F – Griffin’s murder of Kemp.	(20 pages)	
G – Police capture of Griffin.	(12 pages)	
H – Griffin’s deathbed.	(4 pages)	Chapter 28.

As the above breakdown suggests, Sherriff’s description of his screenplay as a ‘chapter by chapter’ adaptation is very far from the truth, especially in the latter half. This thesis will be examining how Sherriff adapted Wells’ novel into the three-act structure of a well-made play. Sherriff’s screenplay is based on a pattern of concealment and revelation, as Griffin is gradually revealed in the first act (Sequence A and B), reverts to partial clothed visibility in the second (Sequences C to F), and is invisible throughout the third (Sequences G and H), only returning to full visibility in the film’s final moments. The gradual process of revelation that forms part of the skill of the well-made playwright is here given literal form, with the pattern of increasingly dramatic revelations and concealments of Griffin’s invisibility. (‘Revelation’ is a paradoxical term in this case; the more that Griffin is revealed, the less we can see of him.)

Sherriff is closest to Wells for the film's first act, Sequences A and B. This is partly because the novel itself is already structured like a well-made play at this point – it has a very late point of attack, with Griffin already invisible. As this thesis will be arguing later, the 1931 film versions of *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* that had established the Universal Horror film as a genre both restructured their source novels to make them more like well-made plays, using stage versions as their basis. The way that Wells' novel was written made this unnecessary here – the result is that *The Invisible Man* is one of the very few films that begins after the inciting incident has taken place.<sup>504</sup>

Sequence B includes one of Sherriff's major changes, as he introduces the characters of Dr. Kemp, Dr. Cranley, and his daughter Flora, Griffin's colleague/rival, mentor, and fiancée respectively. (Neither Flora nor her father are in the novel.) Sherriff uses these three characters as the sources of exposition for Griffin's back-story, and creates a romantic triangle of Griffin, Kemp and Flora, following a trope of the Universal Horror film. Flora's name links her with the natural world, in opposition to the monstrous Griffin; Whale picks up on this by having the character surrounded by flowers much of the time that she's onscreen.

The film's second act – Sequences C to F – focuses on a revenge plot using the character of Kemp, who, in the novel, serves mostly as a narrative device, the person to whom Griffin tells his back-story, but whom Sherriff turns into the central antagonist. The difference between the character's representation in novel and film can be gauged from the way he is first described in each; Wells calls him 'a tall and slender young man, with flaxen hair and a moustache almost white',<sup>505</sup> while Sherriff says that 'He is good-looking, but there is an unpleasant harshness about him.'<sup>506</sup>

Sherriff eliminates the character of the tramp Thomas Marvel, who briefly becomes Griffin's helper, and Sequence C – the start of the second act – picks up the

story at Wells' Chapter 17, with the confrontation between Griffin and Kemp. Sherriff's restructuring here improves on one of the novel's weaker moments. In Wells, the encounter between Griffin and Kemp is a coincidence; Kemp is neither a colleague or a romantic rival, but an old acquaintance whose house Griffin comes across by accident. Wells himself acknowledges the contrived nature of the plotting at this point; 'But it's odd I should blunder into *your* house to get my bandaging. My first stroke of luck!'<sup>507</sup>

Griffin and Kemp return to Iping, in a sequence that is loosely based on Wells' Chapters 11 and 12, with Kemp performing the part that is taken in the book by Marvel. In this sequence, Kemp takes the role that this thesis will define later as an assistant/minion, and is described by Sherriff in terms that recall Dracula's Renfield; 'he carries out his orders as if under hypnotic influence.'<sup>508</sup> This sequence shifts from dark comedy to murder as Griffin kills the Police Inspector who has questioned his existence:

A hoarse, brutal voice breathes over the helpless Inspector.

INVISIBLE MAN

A hoax is it? -- all a hoax -- all -- a -- hoax!

The last three words are timed to the rise of a heavy stool-- that hovers -- and crashes into the Inspector's face on the last word -- 'hoax'.<sup>509</sup>

The choice of weapon is suggested by a passage in the novel, where Griffin assaults a theatrical costumier with a stool, in order to steal the clothes that make up his disguise.<sup>510</sup> However, the placing of the murder, roughly halfway through the film, is a significant change on Sherriff's part, and one which considerably alters the structure of the story; Wells' Griffin only commits murder towards the end of the novel. This moment in the screenplay marks what Gustav Freytag calls the 'climax' and modern screenwriters refer to as the 'midpoint'.<sup>511</sup> From this point onwards, our view of the



character changes substantially. Sherriff was clearly aware of the strength of this moment, and the possibility that he might have to make this murder more ambiguous – a scene in which Griffin tells Kemp that he ‘Killed a stupid little policeman. Smashed his head in.’<sup>512</sup> is accompanied by a note to ‘shoot so as to be able to cut this if necessary.’

The next major sequence – the *scène à faire* between Griffin and Flora - is almost all Sherriff’s original invention (as is the character of Flora herself), and shows the extent of his deepening of Griffin’s character. As the science historian Philip Ball writes, Wells’ Griffin is a fairly unsympathetic character all through the novel, which makes it less a Faustian parable and more ‘the lynching of a common criminal, betrayed by sneezes, sore feet and his digestive tract.’<sup>513</sup> The addition of Flora gives Griffin a quality of humanity that he lacks in the novel, and adds an external focus for his internal struggle:

Slowly the Invisible Man draws back; he seems to relax and soften – his eyes are thoughtfully upon the window. Kemp’s words have sent something back into the mind of the Invisible Man; they awaken a forgotten memory. He looks down at Cranley and Flora as they come slowly up the steps to the door, as if they are two biological specimens to be analysed. He speaks very softly in a wakened surprise.

INVISIBLE MAN

Why, yes – of course – Flora.

(he repeats the words softly as if it vaguely pleases him)<sup>514</sup>

As often in Sherriff’s writing, the condition of romantic love is associated with childhood; Griffin is described as seeming like ‘just a big, confused boy, apologising for some trivial graze that has disfigured him.’<sup>515</sup> Flora becomes a major part of Griffin’s motivation for his initial experiments: ‘I was so pitifully poor – I had nothing to offer you, Flora. I was just a poor, struggling student.’<sup>516</sup> Sherriff plays up the disjunction between voice and visuals to emphasise the duality of Griffin’s nature:

For one moment the girl's nerve almost breaks; she struggles for control – and to aid her struggle comes a voice – not of the Invisible Man – but of her lover of happier days. A strong voice, but soft and very tender, the voice of a man of culture --- of humanity and charm. A voice that brings infinite pathos.

INVISIBLE MAN  
Flora - my darling –

E-79 INT. BEDROOM. MED. CLOSE ON

The Invisible Man – a repulsive, unearthly figure by the table, as it slowly and gropingly advances towards the girl. Timidly, almost [*sic*] he stretches forward his gloved hands.

CAMERA PANS TO INCLUDE flora [*sic*] – as she fights down the shudder that comes to her, and gently places her hands in his.

FLORA  
Thank God you are home, Jack.<sup>517</sup>

The ambiguous nature of the character is signified not just by the tension between voice and appearance, but also by the switch in pronouns - the Invisible Man is 'it' when first seen by Flora, but 'he' when stretching forward to her.

The death of Kemp ends the film's second act. Sequences G and H, which deal with Griffin's pursuit, capture and death, are mostly Sherriff's original work, including the repetition of the line 'I meddled with things that man must leave alone.'<sup>518</sup> which he had introduced in sequence B. Sherriff adapts Wells for the film's final image; the main action of the novel ends with Griffin returning to visibility in the open air. Sherriff changes the location to a hospital bed (possibly to avoid having to show Griffin as naked), an alteration which shifts the tone, adding a serenity that is very similar to the closing moments of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (US, Reuben Mamoulian, 1931), suggesting that Sherriff had studied earlier horror films before writing his own:

The bed – the dented pillow – and tucked in clothes. Very slowly – from the emptiness – begins to gather a thin grey mist. Gradually it takes form – a human head and shoulders – as transparent as glass – that slowly gathers a thin opaqueness, that drapes and hardens into shadows and substance – until there lies upon the pillow a human face. A strong, handsome face – dark, and very peaceful in death.

## THE PICTURE FADES.<sup>519</sup>

Although Sherriff alters the plot of the novel, details of the writing show that he had read it very closely. Showing the same attention to detail that had characterised his earlier study of William Archer and J.M. Barrie, he here creates scenes and moments from individual lines of the novel.

For instance, the sequence of Griffin's unveiling, leading to the famous line 'How can I handcuff a bloomin' shirt?'<sup>520</sup> (uttered by a policeman, one of Sherriff's many choric working-class characters) is followed by a series of single-shot gags, in the manner of a George Méliès trick-film.<sup>521</sup>

### INT. SALOON. MED. SHOT.

Of the bar as people are thrown back and glasses are swept from the bar with a crash.

### EXT. INN. MED. LONG SHOT.

A crowd of gaping sightseers, standing by. The door of the Inn flies open. No one moves for a moment – then the whole crowd collapses outwards as the Invisible Man strikes a passage between them. There are cries of terror.

### EXT. STREET.

A woman with a pram. The pram suddenly flies sideways and collapses in the road.

### EXT. ROAD.

An ancient villager, whose hat suddenly shoots off his head into a pond.

### SHOT OF...

A stone rising from the ground – and a window crashing.<sup>522</sup>

Almost all of these moments are based on individual lines from the original novel: the novel's Griffin describes how he 'avoided a perambulator',<sup>523</sup> how he 'experienced a wild impulse to jest, to startle people, to clap them on the back, *fling people's hats away*, and generally revel in my extraordinary advantage' (my italics).<sup>524</sup> He also throws stones at Thomas Marvel,<sup>525</sup> and is the subject of a news story that includes the line 'Windows smashed.'<sup>526</sup> The scene of the sightseers collapsing

outward as Griffin passes through them has no obvious parallel in the novel, but shows a specifically visual imagination – it’s predictive of a shot in *Foreign Correspondent* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1940), in which a character’s escape through a crowd is shown by the movements of a series of umbrellas.

Similarly, Sequence E starts with a brief scene in which Cranley buys a newspaper with the headline ‘Invisible Man slays policeman’, accompanied by two more of Sherriff’s working-class choric characters, their physical types designated like a music hall double act:

Two men – a big man and a little man – exchanging opinions.

BIG MAN

Nasty business, this.

LITTLE MAN

It’s a conjuring trick; that’s what it is. I saw a feller make a peanut disappear once.<sup>527</sup>

This is followed by Griffin’s account of his limitations as an invisible man, which includes some of the best-known dialogue in the film:

There are one or two things you must understand, Kemp. I must always remain in hiding for an hour after meals. [...] The food is visible inside me until it is digested.<sup>528</sup>

If I work in the rain – the water can be seen on my head and shoulders. In a fog you can see me like a bubble. In smoky cities the soot settles on me until you can see a dark outline. You must always be near at hand to wipe off my feet. Even dirt between [*sic*] my fingernails would give me away.

It is difficult at first to walk downstairs. We are so accustomed to watching our feet. But they’re trivial difficulties – we shall find ways of doing everything.<sup>529</sup>

In both of these scenes, Sherriff is synthesizing elements from different sections of the novel – the novel’s Griffin is likewise dismissed as a conjuring trick in Iping,<sup>530</sup> the reference to food goes back to Griffin’s first encounter with Thomas Marvel, who spots that he’s been eating bread and cheese,<sup>531</sup> while the other examples are from

Griffin's exposition to Kemp; Griffin is given away by his dirty feet when a crowd detects 'their outline sketched in splashes of mud',<sup>532</sup> and speaks of his 'unexpected difficulty'<sup>533</sup> in going downstairs. (Notice, incidentally, Sherriff's small mistake in the line 'dirt between my fingernails'; he means 'beneath'.)

The exchange between the big and little man emphasises Sherriff's desire to preserve what he perceived as Wells' central quality, a combination of the fantastic and mundane. In *No Leading Lady* he writes of the quality that he saw as missing from earlier versions of the script:

His secret was a simple one. To give reality to a fantastic story, he knew that it had to be told through the eyes of ordinary, plain-spoken people. If you tried to fasten extraordinary people to extraordinary events the whole thing fell to pieces, and that's what the writers of that massive pile of screenplays had done.<sup>534</sup>

*The Invisible Man* was one of a series of novels and short stories that Wells referred to as 'scientific romances' in which his declared aim was 'to *domesticate* [Wells' italics] the impossible hypothesis.'<sup>535</sup> Joseph Conrad's much-quoted reference to him as the 'Realist of the Fantastic'<sup>536</sup> was prompted by this book. Griffin is one of many Wells characters who seek power, only to find that the source of that power brings its own problems. This power is not necessarily scientific or technological – in his short stories it's often cultural, as in 'The Country of the Blind' (1904) or through something close to magic, as in 'The Man Who Could Work Miracles' (1898). As Philip Ball points out, 'Wells's plot rests on the contrast between the grandiosity of Griffin's dreams and the banal realities that hinder him.'<sup>537</sup>

Sherriff, who had made his name with a play that contrasted the horrors and banalities of trench warfare, was in his element here. He continually foregrounds the everyday, even more than Wells had done. For instance, Wells' Griffin arrives at an empty pub, the Coach and Horses, where his first encounter is with the landlady, Mrs.

Hall. The Lion's Head, where Sherriff's Griffin arrives, is far busier, playing up the contrast between Griffin's state and the everyday world:

High CAMERA shooting down on the people in the Inn. A striking contrast to the bitter loneliness of the world outside. An automatic piano is playing joyfully in a corner, and the saloon is crowded with men, possibly a giggly woman. Tobacco smoke, talk and laughter fill the air. We hold on this long enough to get a general impression of the atmosphere of the Inn.<sup>538</sup>

The very first spoken line – 'Did you hear about Mrs. Mason's little Willy?' sets up a world of Donald McGill-esque *double entendre*. (Mason is a name that Sherriff frequently gives to working-class characters; it is also the name of the cook in *Journey's End*, and an unseen squaddie in an early draft of *The Four Feathers*.)<sup>539</sup> The effect of this is to create a greater contrast between the convivial setting and Griffin's bandaged isolation.

At other times, the film's dialogue shows Sherriff's stage training. In the novel, Griffin's megalomania is introduced in dialogue with Kemp:

'And it is killing we must do, Kemp.'  
'It is killing we must do,' repeated Kemp. 'I'm listening to your plan, Griffin, but I'm not agreeing, mind. *Why* killing?'  
'Not wanton killing, but a judicious slaying. The point is: They know there is an Invisible Man – as well as we know there is an Invisible Man – and that Invisible Man, Kemp, must now establish a Reign of Terror. Yes, no doubt it's startling, but I mean it. A Reign of Terror.'<sup>540</sup>

Sherriff turns this into carefully understated, antithetical speech, tailoring the rhythms to those of inhalation and exhalation:

We'll begin with a reign of terror – a few murders – here and there – murders of great men – and little men – to show we make no distinction; we may even wreck a train or two – [...] Just these fingers – round a signal man's throat – that's all.'<sup>541</sup>

At other times, Griffin sounds like Stanhope in *Journey's End*, as in the controlled threat as he tells Kemp how he's going to kill him:

I'll get out and take the hand brake off, and give you a little shove to help you on. You'll run gently down – and through the railings. Then you'll have a big

thrill for a hundred yards or so – till you hit a boulder. Then you'll do a somersault and probably break your arms – and then a grand finish up with a broken neck.<sup>542</sup>

In *Journey's End*, Stanhope had used similar language to threaten and shame the neuralgic Hibbert:

I'll give you half a minute to think. You either stay here and try and be a man – or you try to get out of that door – to desert. If you do that, there's going to be an accident. D'you understand? I'm fiddling with my revolver, d'you see? – cleaning it – and it's going off by accident. It often happens here. It's going off, and it's going to shoot you right between the eyes.<sup>543</sup>

Both speeches use the future tense as a way of creating menace, but where Stanhope's vocabulary is spare and functional, Griffin's includes a glee that's expressed in a childish, exuberant choice of words – 'shove' rather than 'push', 'big thrill'.

### **The Question of Genre, and the Nature of Film**

As well as using methods that he had developed in the theatre, *The Invisible Man* shows Sherriff discovering the techniques of writing for the screen, and specifically of writing a Universal Horror film. It is possible to read Griffin as a symbol of the cinema itself, and the recently-arrived sound cinema in particular.

Universal was one of the smaller Hollywood Studios; with Columbia and United Artists, it made up the 'little three' as opposed to the 'big five' of Warner Brothers, Fox, RKO, Paramount and MGM. Following the success of *Dracula* (US, Tod Browning, 1931) and *Frankenstein*, the studio had become associated with the horror film, a term that was partly defined by those two films. (Kim Newman dates the first use of the phrase in its modern sense to that year, in between the releases of the two films.)<sup>544</sup>

Both of the 1931 films were based on theatrical adaptations, *Dracula* by Hamilton Deane (1924, revised for the United States by John Balderston 1927), *Frankenstein* by Peggy Webling (1927). These adaptations both restructure their source novels in terms of the well-made play, using a small number of locations, and starting the action late in the stories, so that Deane and Balderston's *Dracula* begins with the Count already in England, and Webling's *Frankenstein* just before the animation of the Creature.

In fact, the opening premise of Webling's play is remarkably similar to that of *Journey's End*; both start with a young man (Raleigh/Victor Moritz) visiting an old schoolfriend (Stanhope/Frankenstein), only to find him much changed, with a guilty secret. While this may be a case of direct influence (it's possible that Sherriff saw Webling's play), it's just as likely to be the effect of both writers using the same Ibsenite rules of playmaking; bringing in an outsider with a connection to the lead character helps with exposition, and makes for a strong opening, giving the audience an identification figure.

The 1931 films *Dracula* and *Frankenstein* use a similar set of characters; a romantic triangle of a young woman (Lucy/Elizabeth), a young man (Harker/Victor), and a sinister, older man (Dracula/Frankenstein). The closing credits for the later film signify the centrality of the romantic triangle, billing Colin Clive (Frankenstein), Mae Clarke (Elizabeth) and John Boles (Victor Moritz) above Boris Karloff as the Monster. The triangular structure was replicated in later Universal horrors such as *Murders in the Rue Morgue* (US, Robert Florey, 1931) and *The Mummy* (US, Karl Freund, 1932) and, as mentioned above, Sherriff echoes it again in the Kemp/Flora/Griffin triangle in *The Invisible Man*.



In both 1931 films, this central triangle is accompanied by two other male roles, a wise man, defined in later scholarship as a savant<sup>545</sup> (van Helsing/Waldman) and an assistant/minion to the older male (Renfield/Fritz). *Frankenstein* helps establish the archetypal nature of the roles by casting actors who had filled equivalent functions in *Dracula*; Edward van Sloan plays both van Helsing and Waldman, Dwight Frye is Renfield and Fritz. Again, Sherriff follows this pattern, with his use of Cranley as savant and Kemp functioning as both rival and minion (and, briefly, as savant).

Universal Horror films, including *The Invisible Man*, are usually set in the present day; in the case of *Frankenstein*, this marks a shift from Webling's play, which takes place at '[t]he end of the Eighteenth Century'.<sup>546</sup> This temporal familiarity is offset by a geographical otherness, as they tend towards foreign, usually European, locations. This contrasts with the way horror films were framed at other studios – Paramount's *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (US, Reuben Mamoulian, 1931) is distant in both geography and time, a London Victorian Gothic, complete with all the production values and sophisticated sexuality associated with that studio; Warner Brothers' *Mystery of the Wax Museum* (US, Michael Curtiz, 1932) is a modern-day New York thriller, set in the wise-cracking world of the studio's musicals and gangster films.<sup>547</sup>

Like these two genres (but unlike, say, the epic and the Western), the horror film was a genre defined with the coming of sound. Some commentators have written on the importance to the genre of offscreen noises, and of hearing the screams of the victims.<sup>548</sup> Robert Spadoni has argued that early sound horror films create a sense of unease by recreating the discomfort that audiences had experienced a few years previously when watching early talkies, of a sense of a disconnect between the sound and the body from which it was coming.<sup>549</sup>

This disconnect is very clear in the case of an invisible man; indeed, it's arguable that invisibility needed the coming of sound to become a popular cinematic theme. While it forms the basis of a number of short early 'trick films' – *L'auberge ensorcelée/The Bewitched Inn* (France, Georges Méliès, 1897), *Invisibility* (UK, Lewion Fitzhamon/Cecil Hepworth, 1909) – invisibility is rare in the longer films made after the First World War, and it's not hard to see why; in a silent film, an invisible man rapidly ceases to exist.

Sherriff plays up the effect of introducing Griffin's voice in situations where the audience hadn't realised he was in the room, particularly in the sequence of Kemp's death, where the audience is placed in the same situation as Kemp, unaware of Griffin's presence until we hear him. Sherriff also incorporates devices that emphasise disembodied sound – radios, telephones, and, in the opening scene, an automatic piano.

This tension between the visual and aural is echoed by the ambiguity of Griffin's existence – he's simultaneously present and absent. Sherriff emphasizes this in Griffin's first encounter with Kemp by showing him smoking a cigarette:

The rocking chair as Kemp sees. A cigarette lifts out of box – match is extended in mid-air, cigarette is lighted and smoke comes forth – all as if the Invisible Man were smoking. Then, the voice comes again:

INVISIBLE MAN

You always were a dirty little coward, Kemp.<sup>550</sup>

The smoking has several effects – for one thing, it gives a sense of the character's breath, which works against his incorporeality. Davina Quinlivan has written on the representation of breath in cinema, defining breathing as an activity that 'calls into question the boundaries between visibility and invisibility and, especially, the relationship between sound and visibility.'<sup>551</sup> While Quinlivan is primarily concerned with the sound of breathing, here, the cigarette smoke makes Griffin's breath

*visible*, and reminds the watcher of this ‘subtle dimension of our bodies that can be seen to be both inside and outside of our bodies (as we inhale and exhale), whilst the borders of the skin remain intact.’<sup>552</sup> Quinlivan quotes Barbara Creed’s view, in *The Monstrous Feminine*, that horror films emphasise the permeability of the human body, in their focus on wounded or otherwise mutilated bodies, and argues that the representation of breath is another form of this. In *The Invisible Man*, cigarette smoke reminds us of Griffin’s vulnerable body, even as we can’t see it. It’s also possible that, to the original audience, it linked him with the smoke-filled cone of light that came from the cinema’s projector, and therefore with the medium itself. In the same way that this cone of light serves as a link between the spectators’ bodies and the images onscreen, making up the third part of the triad that defines the medium, the cigarette-smoking Griffin is a liminal figure, existing between the visible and invisible.<sup>553</sup>

(The choice of a cigarette is also significant - in the novel, Griffin smokes a pipe<sup>554</sup> and cigars.<sup>555</sup> The cigarette, especially when combined with the dressing gown that we see later, give the character a loucheness that he doesn’t possess in the novel, like a disembodied Noël Coward.)

Sherriff was to play with this tension between the seen and unseen in later screenplays; this thesis will later be examining this with reference to *The Four Feathers*, in which Harry Faversham’s loss of British imperial identity is accompanied by a feigned loss of speech (see Chapter Eight), and *The Dam Busters*, which uses Guy Gibson’s dog, Nigger (speechless by definition), to carry much of the film’s emotional burden (Chapter Nine).

The sequence in which Griffin lights the cigarette is also one of many in this film that serve partly to show off the special effects. To some extent, all films that show impossible feats are partly about the power of the film-makers, and work by

encouraging us to marvel at their skill as we do at that of the characters, with Griffin (in this case) standing as the film-makers' surrogate.

David Thomson has suggested that theatre practitioners working for the first time in the cinema tend to react playfully to the technical capacities of the medium,<sup>556</sup> and Sherriff certainly does this; he wrote that 'The idea was a delightful one to play with on the screen with its possibilities of camera trickery.'<sup>557</sup> and breaks off to offer a suggestion to the director:

(Note; I suggest that trick photography be employed here as far as possible with the aid of invisible wire frames manipulated by the marionette method. Exact details depend on the extent to which these methods – or other methods – can be employed.)<sup>558</sup>

He also occasionally suggests camera angles, as in the 'High Camera' mentioned above in the introductory shot of the Inn. This was more common in screenplays written in the 1930s – Basil Wright, writing in 1938, says that 'it should be remembered that camera-movements are nearly always to be found indicated in the script.'<sup>559</sup> (The rise of auteurism, and the sense that a director should be responsible for the creative choices of a film, have meant that the specification of camera angles is now rare, if not forbidden.)

Sherriff also makes two philosophical changes that bring the film more into line with other Universal Horror films. In sequence B, Kemp (here taking on the function of savant rather than rival) condemns Griffin's experiments, saying that he 'meddled in things that man must leave alone.'<sup>560</sup> This theme, with its suggestion that science must draw limits, for fear of usurping the divine prerogative (although God is not mentioned in the above line, the concept is clearly implied by opposition to 'man') is not in the original novel; indeed, it's very strongly antithetical to Wells' thinking. The model here is the film of *Frankenstein*, which opens with Edward van Sloan (who plays Dr. Waldman, though at this point he's not in character) stepping before a theatrical curtain

to introduce ‘the story of Frankenstein, a man of science, who sought to create a man after his own image – without reckoning upon God.’<sup>561</sup>

Sequence C includes another departure from the novel, as Cranley and Kemp discuss the possibility that Griffin has been driven mad by his experiments. Where Wells shows Griffin being driven to the edge primarily by the condition of invisibility, the screenplay invents a drug, Monocane, which provides a simple biological reason. (The drug is described as deriving from a flower grown in India, which connects it with fears of the Eastern Other, which Sherriff also manipulates in *The Four Feathers*.) This follows in the path defined by the film of *Frankenstein*. Where Mary Shelley’s novel depicts the Creature’s murders as a consequence of the way he is treated (as Percy Shelley wrote in a review of his wife’s work ‘Treat a person ill and he will become wicked.’),<sup>562</sup> the film’s screenwriters change a social cause to a biological one, giving the monster the brain of a murderer.<sup>563</sup>

Sherriff later claimed that Griffin’s insanity was his idea, and that Wells (whom he’d met shortly after *Journey’s End*) had given it his blessing, only disagreeing with the cause:

He agreed with me entirely that an invisible lunatic would make people sit up in the cinema more quickly than a sane man, but he countered with a suggestion more profound than mine. He suggested that the condition of invisibility should be the factor that drives the man insane. Obviously it was better from an artistic point of view, but I did not think it practical for the screen. It would take too long to show the gradual process of developing insanity, and as the man was invisible beneath his face bandages, we should not have his features to help us show his gradual deterioration.<sup>564</sup>

If Wells did actually say this to Sherriff, he was being a little disingenuous; the novel includes the suggestions that Griffin’s mind was affected by both strychnine, which Kemp describes as ‘the palaeolithic in a bottle’,<sup>565</sup> and ‘the sickly, drowsy influence of the drugs that decolourise blood.’<sup>566</sup> However, the screenplay is far more

emphatic than the novel in making Griffin's insanity biological rather than social, in line with the overall philosophy of the Universal Horror film.

In general, the screenplay for *The Invisible Man* is a remarkably assured piece of work, showing the extent to which Sherriff was able to use his skills as a well-made playwright in the younger medium. It's a testament to the effectiveness of Sherriff's screenplay that hardly any changes were made in the finished film; Sherriff wrote himself that "'The Invisible Man' was 'shot' almost word for word and scene for scene in the form in which I wrote it."<sup>567</sup> The few changes include cutting some of the later police conference scenes (Sherriff writes that Whale 'found they dragged a bit'),<sup>568</sup> and the addition of some ad libs by Rains while invisible - most notably quoting 'We Do Our Part', the slogan of Roosevelt's National Recovery Administration, as he smashes a window.

Indeed, the respect that Whale and his cast had for Sherriff's work may be measured from the fact that they even left in his mistakes – the line in which Griffin refers to 'dirt between my fingernails' instead of 'beneath' is retained in the finished film. In one line that he does change, Whale even adds an unscripted in-joke for Sherriff's benefit - when Kemp phones Cranley, we discover that the latter's phone number is 'Esher 1021', which was, at the time, Sherriff's own number.<sup>569</sup>

## Chapter Seven - R. C. Sherriff: The English Pattern and The Hollywood 'British' Film

The theme of 'Britishness' (more precisely, 'Englishness') and what this means in terms of change and continuity, is one that runs through Sherriff's early plays, and that he frequently returns to in his screen work, particularly the scripts written just before and during the Second World War. Sherriff's most thorough examination of this theme is found in the screenplays he wrote for the American studios of Universal and Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. In his book *When Hollywood Loved Britain; The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945*, H. Mark Glancy identifies a genre of films made by American studios, set in Britain or based on a British literary work, made with a significant number of British personnel and, most importantly, expressing a very specific attitude to Britishness:

Most of the films take a tourist's view towards the country. The characters tend to be aged and venerable aristocrats, young officers and gentlemen and their comical cockney servants. The settings are often grand manor houses, idyllic villages that have not been touched by the modern age, and a London marked by Big Ben, St Paul's Cathedral, Tower Bridge and heavy fog.<sup>570</sup>

Glancy argues that the commercial success of these films was partly dependent on their popularity in foreign markets (Britain itself, but also the colonies), so the films express a generally positive attitude towards the country, and one consistent with the attitudes that Sherriff had already expressed. At the same time, the films, especially those written by American writers, appeal to the ambivalent attitudes that many American filmgoers had towards Britain, depicting it as the mother country, but also as part of the past which the United States had outgrown. Hollywood 'British' films often play on this ambivalence, so that a film like *Mutiny on the Bounty* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1935) succeeds, particularly through the casting of Clark Gable, in making Fletcher

Christian appear both as a British hero and a Yankee rebel. 'Thus, the film not only offers an American audience the opportunity to have its faith in the New World confirmed, but also manages to celebrate British accomplishments and traditions.'<sup>571</sup>

Glancy describes *Cavalcade* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1933), based on Noël Coward's play, as 'probably the most imitated of all "British" films.'<sup>572</sup> The film version influenced the Hollywood 'British' film in its structure, in its milieu, in its cast, several of whom (Clive Brook, Diana Wynyard) went on to become mainstays of British Hollywood, and in its focus on a maternal figure, in this case Lady Jane Marryot, who starts the film as the mother of two young boys and ends it having lost them both, one on the *Titanic*, one in the First World War. Glancy sees this emphasis on British motherhood as appealing to American feelings about Britain, seen, literally in this case, as the 'mother country.'

In the cinema, the *Cavalcade* structure became a common template for Hollywood 'British' films, especially those made just before and during World War Two, when an emphasis on continuity was important. In the case of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, the structure was already embedded in the original novel; James Hilton (1900-1954) even uses many of Coward's specific historical events (both Coward's play and Hilton's novel feature a character sailing on the *Titanic*). In *Mrs. Miniver* and *Forever and a Day*, both explicitly made as wartime propaganda, the structure is part of the films' message, emphasizing continuity in a turbulent world. It's not a coincidence that R.C. Sherriff worked on all three of the last films mentioned: his Hollywood work was almost all on films either set in Britain or based on British literary properties.



## Case Study – *Goodbye Mr. Chips*

James Hilton's *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* (1934) is a short novel (126 widely-spaced pages in its first edition) about Mr. Chipping, a classics master at a minor public school, Brookfield. The novel uses *Cavalcade*'s pageant-like structure (Hilton even refers to it as a 'pageant')<sup>573</sup> structured around major events in British history, though Hilton takes a longer period than Coward, starting in 1878 and going up to the novel's present day, and tells the story in flashback, starting with Chipping as an elderly, eccentric retired schoolmaster, described by one character as 'a typical bachelor, if ever there was one.'<sup>574</sup>

This description is inaccurate; as we discover, Chipping was briefly married to a much younger woman, who died after a marriage of three years. Chipping's wife, Katherine, is a late Victorian 'New Woman', who rides a bicycle and entertains radical ideas about politics, and is given the symbolically significant maiden name of Bridges. She is portrayed as the character who leads Chipping to the characteristics necessary to make him a popular schoolmaster; 'her young idealism worked upon his maturity to produce an amalgam very gentle and wise.'<sup>575</sup> She encourages the school to welcome a soccer team drawn from an East London mission, on the grounds that '[y]ears hence, boys of that sort will be coming here – a few of them, at any rate'<sup>576</sup> and, in one easy-to-miss passage, even appears to be tolerant of boarding-school homosexuality.<sup>577</sup> The Chipping/Katherine love story plays a surprisingly small part in the novel – Katherine only features in three of its eighteen chapters, and dies before the half-way point.

The novel is surprising in other ways; its treatment of the First World War is unjingoistic, with Chips memorialising a German master who dies on the Western Front in the same terms that he uses for those on his own side. It also makes very little

mention of sports and corporal punishment, both staples of the boarding school novel since at least *Tom Brown's Schooldays* (1857); Hilton was indifferent towards the former and opposed to the latter. (The novel is fairly coy about the question of whether Chips administers corporal punishment to the pupils in his care; he's never actually described doing so, and Hilton prefers imprecise references to 'punishment' and 'severity'.)<sup>578</sup>

Sherriff became interested in *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* soon after its publication – he and James Hilton were discussing the possibility of his writing a stage version as early as December 1934, and by January 1935 he was writing to Hilton that he had 'some general ideas for the structure'<sup>579</sup> and proposing 'to draft provisional scenes and send them to you to browse upon and work upon',<sup>580</sup> with the intention of staging the play in October of that year.

By March 1935, Sherriff was making an 'effort to get permission to do the film script of MR. CHIPS.'<sup>581</sup> When Alexander Korda asked him to write three scripts under contract, Sherriff mentioned *Mr. Chips* as a possibility, and was received enthusiastically, with Korda considering the title as a vehicle for Charles Laughton, who had recently returned from the United States.

Around the same time, Sherriff's agent visited M.G.M, who had bought the screen rights shortly after the novel's publication, and where it was being developed by the studio's *wunderkind* producer Irving G. Thalberg. This resulted in Sherriff being asked to write the screenplay. Hilton was supportive, writing to Sherriff that 'I told him [Thalberg] I could not imagine anyone who could do it better.'<sup>582</sup>

Sherriff sent off his first version of the script on 18<sup>th</sup> February. This features two major innovations that were to hold the structure together, and that were to be retained through the different drafts. Firstly, Sherriff greatly extends the importance of

the scenes with Katherine, which now occupy the screenplay's entire second act. Secondly, as he explained to Hilton, he connected the school's history, *Cavalcade*-style, with that of a specific family:

I have done one or two little things which are not actually in the book. One of these is to use three generations of the Colley family as a link. I have made the first Colley become a Governor of the School and a wealthy man; the second Colley comes to the school suffering from too much pocket money, and the third Colley is helped by Chips because the family is left unprovided for by war tragedies. This thread is not in the original, but I know that if you dislike it very much you will say so at once.<sup>583</sup>

Sherriff's playing up of the theme of continuity is very much in keeping with the views shown in his earlier work – the Colleys are like the Grenvilles of *The Feudal System*, with Chips acting like Jonson to keep them in their proper position. More surprisingly, he expressed regret at losing one of the novel's more explicitly political moments:

One of my favourite incidents was the visit of the boys from the Mission School, inspired by Katherine, but I could not see how I could use this without departing too much from the main theme and lengthening the picture. Such a scene cannot be sketched in casually, and is almost the subject for another picture altogether.<sup>584</sup>

This first draft was the subject of notes by Thalberg and Hilton, who described the script as 'magnificent' and the Colley theme as 'a delightful improvisation.'<sup>585</sup> Hilton expressed only two reservations, both quite revealing. One was concerning Chips' line after his wife's death – 'My wife is dead, my son is dead and I wish I were dead myself.' – which he described as 'too strong and deliberate a plea for sympathy.'<sup>586</sup> Sherriff, who always disliked lines that were too direct in their emotionalism, agreed entirely: 'your own comment confirms my second thought that no words here could have the same value as silence'.<sup>587</sup> Hilton's second point, concerning the representation of corporal punishment, was more substantial, and tells us about both his and Sherriff's attitudes to authority.

In contrast to Hilton's evasiveness on the subject, Sherriff had included 'an actual scene of thrashing a boy',<sup>588</sup> which Hilton thought unwise, especially if Charles Laughton was to play the part, given the audience's memory of him as the sadistic Captain Bligh. Sherriff's response showed something of his view of authority and discipline:

I agree, too, concerning the caning scenes although I would be loath to lose them altogether. We want to avoid the suggestion of Chips being too mild, and that is perfectly shown in your book by the occasional impish reference to chastisements of the past. Could these incidents not be contrived entirely as comedy? I quite agree there is not much comedy in caning from the point of view of the recipient, but I think it could be contrived without too much suggestion that pain is being inflicted.<sup>589</sup>

Hilton would almost certainly have disliked this idea; he wrote in 1939 about the sentimentalizing tendency that invests memories of schooldays with a halo 'so that a beating, bitterly resented at the time becomes, in retrospect, a rather jolly business. (Most of the "jolly" words for corporal punishment – "spank," "whack;," etc., were, I suspect invented by sentimentalists of over forty.)'<sup>590</sup> Perhaps fortunately, Sherriff didn't follow his idea through, although corporal punishment remained an important theme in later versions.

### **Sherriff's Revised Screenplay**

Sherriff's revised draft of the script is dated April 1936 and is in line with Irving G. Thalberg's view of the story, as quoted by Glancy. Thalberg described the story as that of a man 'who started his career as a failure and was bound to mediocrity. He never really improved, but he met a woman who turned his mediocrity into success.'<sup>591</sup>

Like the novel, the screenplay begins more or less in the present day (we're told it's Autumn 1933), then flashes back to Chipping's first day, here moved back to 1870.

A direction makes clear the difference between the much-loved Chipping we see at the start of the film, and the younger man:

But in striking contrast with the greetings received by the old Mr. Chips in the previous scene, the boys pass in stony silence, turn and stare curiously at the young man as he walks down the path towards the Headmaster's house.<sup>592</sup>

The story thus becomes a kind of *bildungsroman*, the account of how the Chipping of 1933, who has been successfully integrated into the system, grew out of that of 1870. The latter is shown as ambitious, intending to move to another school 'in about three years'<sup>593</sup> but academically undistinguished. Where Hilton just says that Chipping is 'just as respectable, but no more brilliant, than Brookfield itself',<sup>594</sup> Sherriff tells us specifically that he has a third-class degree.<sup>595</sup> The young Chipping is also a martinet, giving a boy 200 lines and being criticised in terms that frame the punishment as a failure of masculinity:

1<sup>st</sup> BOY

He's just a spiteful old woman. Anybody can hold his own that way.  
(he nods towards the pile of sheets upon the floor)

Marston never gave lines all the time he was here.

2<sup>nd</sup> BOY

Marston was a man.

1<sup>st</sup> BOY

You needn't worry. This fellow won't last a year. He'll end up at the edges and turn into a curate and drown himself in weak tea.<sup>596</sup>

Twenty-eight years later, Chipping's situation has not greatly improved. Sherriff shows him, now aged 48, on the sidelines at a school football match (as often in Sherriff, sport is the symbol of a well-run society):

Although he is shouting encouragement with the rest of the crowd, he does not ~~allow~~ let himself go as the others do. There is something a little stiff and self-conscious in his manner. All the time he is on guard against appearing ridiculous, and this gives him a sense of detachment and loneliness.<sup>597</sup>

As in the novel, the central factor in changing him to a successful schoolmaster is his relationship with Katherine; Sherriff makes this explicit in a dialogue exchange in the frame story:

MARSHAM

Well, anyway, sir – you found the secret of success in the end! There's no doubt about that!

Mr. Chipping is aroused from his memories.

MR CHIPPING

Eh? The secret? Yes. In the end. But I didn't find it by myself, Marsham. It was given to me – by someone else.<sup>598</sup>

The sequence in which Chipping meets and falls in love with Katherine is close to Hilton's original: Chipping, on a walking tour, mistakes Katherine and her companion for damsels in distress and attempts to rescue them, injuring himself in the process. As the two of them carry him off, Sherriff emphasises the character's unfamiliarity with women:

It is an extraordinary experience for Mr. Chipping to find himself with his arms around the shoulders of two very attractive girls. He is torn between all kinds of conflicting emotions as his young rescuers skillfully and firmly help him down the dangerous, rock-strewn mountainside.<sup>599</sup>

Sherriff, perhaps sharing his character's fear of the 'New Woman', assures us that '[a]lthough startlingly modern for the last prim days of the old century, she is perfectly natural, and there is nothing freakish or masculine about her.'<sup>600</sup> As in the novel, the bicycle is used as a symbol of Katherine's modernity, leading to dialogue that comes as close as Sherriff ever does to sexual innuendo:

CHIPPING

I didn't know that ladies rode those awful things. What happens to your dress?

KATHERINE

My dear man, they breed female bicycles now. Didn't you know that?<sup>601</sup>

Later on, it's suggested that Chipping will join Katherine in her cycling, with another line that carries a mild sexual charge:

Two bicyclists swing around the corner and surge by them in a cloud of dust. Katherine looks up at Mr. Chipping and points after the receding apparatus.

KATHERINE

I'll teach you to do that now.

CHIPPING

Never! – never!

KATHERINE

I shall!

CHIPPING

Anything but that!

KATHERINE

You'll have to do worse things than that if you marry me!<sup>602</sup>

The change in Chipping's character that comes with his marriage is symbolised by the change in how he's addressed. In the original novel, Katherine takes a nickname – 'Chips' - that already exists within the school and turns it into a term of endearment. In the film, it's the other way round; Katherine comes up with the nickname, and it passes from her round the school.<sup>603</sup> This change has become so much part of the story that some commentators don't realise that it's Sherriff's innovation; Glancy writes in his synopsis of the novel that Katherine changes his nickname.<sup>604</sup>

We see the effect of Katherine on Mr. Chipping; she advises him to lose 'this old fashioned schoolmaster idea of treating boys like boxes of dynamite that explode if you play with them'<sup>605</sup> and he decides against administering a caning to a recalcitrant pupil named Morgan, who declares that 'I believe it's that wife of his. She's... sort of... warmed him up and made him human...'<sup>606</sup> (The boy later reappears in adult life as the Chairman of the School's Governors.)

After the death of Katherine (as in the novel, she dies in childbirth, on the first of April), the screenplay returns to the pageant structure, emphasizing the continuity over the years:

The school dress of the boys has changed with the years. Top hats have given place to straw hats with the school colours upon them; loose grey coats and soft flannel collars have taken the place of the tight black jacket and broad Eton collar of the past. But there is no change in the boys themselves. Dark and fair, big and small – they file past in the ageless procession.<sup>607</sup>

In a sequence set in 1910, the new headmaster, Ralston, suggests that Chipping should retire. As in the novel, we're told that he's not a particularly successful teacher: 'your boys don't learn even what they're supposed to learn. None of them last year got through the Lower Certificate.'<sup>608</sup> The speech in which Chips answers this sets out very clearly the screenplay's view of education and social class:

Certificates! What good has a certificate ever done a boy when he comes against life out there! The School's been run like a factory for turning out money-made machine-made snobs! *I* know the world's changing! I've seen the old traditions of family dying! All that matters today is a fat bank account – that's all! Financiers! - Company Promoters! - Pill manufacturers! – that's what the parents of the new boys are! You've raised the fees, and the real boys that belong to Brookfield are frozen out! Latin! – Greek! - Algebra! - what do they matter! Give a boy a sense of proportion and a sense of humour and he'll stand up against anything! I'm not going to resign and you can do what you like about it!<sup>609</sup>

In the novel, only the last line is actually spoken, the rest is Sherriff's version of what Hilton writes as interior monologue. Sherriff also makes some changes to the political emphasis of the passage; where Hilton criticizes Ralston's cash nexus for not widening class traditions 'to form a genuine inclusive democracy of duke and dustman',<sup>610</sup> Sherriff criticises the businessmen who are occupying the school at the expense of 'the real boys that belong at Brookfield'. As in Sherriff's early plays, the view is class-deterministic, with some of the dislike of commerce that was shown in both *Profit and Loss* and *Cornlow-in-the Downs*.

The idea that there is a specific kind of person who belongs (and therefore a kind of person who doesn't belong) at a public school reappears later in the film; after the second Colley is killed fighting with the Coldstream Guards in France (like Stanhope, he received the Military Cross before his death),<sup>611</sup> his Canadian widow comes to visit Chips, who insists that the couple's young son must come to Brookfield:



There are too many outsiders coming to the School nowadays – war profiteers’ sons – boys who know nothing about Brookfield except its name. If Brookfield is to be a great school it must have the kind of boys who made it great... God knows we shall need them...<sup>612</sup>

In the end, Ralston’s plutocracy proves less powerful than Chips’ aristocracy, as various powerful former pupils rally in his defence. Corporal punishment, which as we have seen was the subject of disagreement between Sherriff and Hilton, becomes a symbol of continuity: ‘Chips! He told Chips to clear out! But Chips has been here hundreds of years! He used to cane my father!’<sup>613</sup> Two of Chips’ former pupils (including the eldest Colley) use it as a point of bonding; part of their nostalgia for Chips is that ‘he thrashed us both for stealing cherries.’<sup>614</sup>

Corporal punishment also plays an important part in the film’s treatment of the First World War. At this point, Chips has retired but, because of the shortage of teachers, is Acting Head. He is confronted with Burton, a pupil who plays practical jokes on the masters, and who, like Chips’ early pupils, associates the Masters’ failing with a lack of masculinity:

I do it because the whole crowd of Masters are a lot of weak-kneed old women! They’re not in the army because they’re not fit to be or too old or too frightened! And they get it back on us by being tupenny tyrants!<sup>615</sup>

Chips beats Burton and then makes a speech which has no equivalent in the original novel, and which sums up the screenplay’s view of corporal punishment as part of the social system:

It didn’t amuse me to do that, Burton. Very soon now, you’ll be an officer in France. You’ll need discipline from your men, and to get that you must know what discipline means. You despise the Masters here because they’re not young enough or strong enough to fight. You might like to know that every one of them has done his best to join the army. We take no man unless he has done that. Can you imagine the humiliation when a boy despises them for not doing things beyond their power? Remember that I’m one of them. I’m headmaster because every man fit to be headmaster is fighting in France: I’m a war-time fluke: a temporary officer risen from the ranks – but I’m going to keep Brookfield together until the war’s over – you understand?<sup>616</sup>

The analogy drawn here between school and the military is complex: Chips equates himself with ‘an officer risen from the ranks’ but also reminds us that his pupils will go on to be officers, and that corporal punishment is one of the ways in which they acquire the necessary qualities to do so.<sup>617</sup>

The screenplay ends as it began, in 1933, with the youngest Colley boy at Brookfield, visiting Chips without realising who he is. (This is a revision of chapter 17 of the book, in which the schoolboy has no previous connection with Chipping. Sherriff’s device of using the Colley family as a connecting thread through the story leads him at this point to a somewhat improbable situation – surely the youngest Colley would at least have heard of the family benefactor?) Chips sums up his time at the school in a final speech:

But I’m satisfied with Brookfield. Its roots are right down in things that have stood the test of time, and change and war. No matter how politics twist and turn, I believe that Brookfield will always fit into the English pattern – so long as it keeps its dignity and sense of humour.<sup>618</sup>

The first two sentences are paraphrased from the novel,<sup>619</sup> the third is Sherriff’s own, and shows the major philosophical difference between Sherriff and Hilton in their view of the public school. Hilton’s novel is elegiac in tone; when he and Sherriff were discussing a stage adaptation, he argued that it should open late in the year because ‘the mood of the play is autumnal, and fits in better with people’s prevailing humours at that time of year.’<sup>620</sup> From its title onwards, the novel positions Chips, albeit regretfully, as someone who belongs in the past. Hilton was explicit about this in his sequel/essay *To You, Mr. Chips*, written just before the Second World War:

The public-schools *do* create snobbery, or at any rate the illusion of superiority; you cannot train a ruling-class without such an illusion. My point is that the English illusion has proved, on the whole, humaner and more enduring, even by its victims than the current European illusions that are challenging and supplanting it [...] Time will bring regrets, if any. For

myself, I do not object to being called a sentimentalist because I acknowledge the passing of a great age with something warmer than a sneer.<sup>621</sup>

The difference between the two men is encapsulated in their phraseology: Hilton writes of 'the English illusion', Sherriff of 'the English pattern'.<sup>622</sup>

Sherriff's screenplay was considerably rewritten between this revised version and the finished film. He was to describe his experiences with the *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* screenplay as 'the most awful time' and himself as 'completely heartbroken with what happened'.<sup>623</sup> A degree of apprehension can already be found in a letter written to Hilton shortly after the completion of the revised script:

I do hope that if you feel the script is now in a sound condition you will fight hard to keep it in its present form. I know from experience what a danger there is when there are so many people in a studio all anxious to show their originality. Once someone is allowed to get their teeth into a script all the rest fall upon it like a lot of vultures and rend it into fragments.<sup>624</sup>

Sherriff's fears here turned out to be justified; the script went through a series of revisions, one of which was sent to him in 1938. In July of that year, Sherriff wrote to Victor Saville:

I have now read through the whole script of 'CHIPS' and am afraid that you were under a misapprehension when you said that after the death of Katherine my original script had been retained. I wish you would put the two scripts side by side and examine them page by page to see how completely different they are.

[...]

It is awful to find in the second half of the script that at least three fine scenes have been removed entirely to make room for a scene of the boys complaining about rissoles made of horse-meat.

If the script continues as it is, I know you will support my wish to have my name removed from it.<sup>625</sup>

In a later letter to Hilton, Sherriff writes that he had himself performed the comparison exercise with the two scripts and 'discovered that exactly 92% of mine had been completely removed or mutilated beyond recognition!'<sup>626</sup>

The finished film was closer to Sherriff's original script than this 1938 version. though it still has the episodic, uneven feeling of many M.G.M. films of this period. The horse-meat rissoles have been cut, and the film does bear Sherriff's name on its credits, together with those of Claudine West and Eric Maschwitz, both British writers resident in the United States, and both associated particularly with M.G.M.'s 'British' and prestige films. However, several major changes are made to Sherriff's original screenplay, such as the relocation of the walking tour where Chips meets Katherine from the Lake District to Austria. The most significant change is in the status of the school; where Brookfield in Hilton's novel and Sherriff's original script is a minor public school, the film establishes it from the beginning as one of the principal schools in the country, with the young Duke of Dorset as a new pupil, and Francis Drake as an alumnus. The story becomes far more celebratory than that which either Hilton or Sherriff originally conceived, with Chips portrayed less as the failure that Thalberg had envisaged, more a shining example. This theme was especially commented on by American reviews, such as that by Howard Barnes in the *Herald Tribune*:

The film is much more than the record of a teacher's quietly exciting career in a British public school. In a profoundly stirring manner it embodies an entire tradition of education so that the continuity of learning becomes as strong a theme as the personal narrative.<sup>627</sup>

British reviewers were generally less sure about this aspect of the film, with the *Times* reviewer regretting the loss of the political aspect that had gone with the Mission school sequence,<sup>628</sup> and C.A. Lejeune questioning, in *The Schoolmaster and Women Teachers' Chronicle*, whether 'a man such as this Mr. Chips would have been retained at even the most minor public schools for ten years, let alone fifty.'<sup>629</sup>

Sherriff was reluctant to see the finished film, and was only persuaded to do so after Hilton had written to assure him that 'it is so substantially from your own script.'<sup>630</sup> He remained sceptical about certain elements:

I still have my lurking regrets about ‘Chips’. I still think that the insertion of the Duke of Dorset as a little boy at the beginning, and several other ‘improvements’ of that nature, did not increase the sincerity of the picture, but there is no doubt that America loves it, and perhaps I was trying to apply too English an interpretation. When you love a story as much as I love Chips, then perhaps you get too sensitive.<sup>631</sup>

Ironically, given Sherriff’s dislike of the finished film, *Mr. Chips* was one of his most successful screenplays, earning him and his collaborators an Oscar nomination. One British reviewer referred to him as ‘probably the most important writer that Britain has given to the screen.’<sup>632</sup>

### ***Mrs. Miniver***

Where *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* was a prewar film, though one with an eye towards the coming conflict, *Mrs. Miniver* was explicitly a wartime propaganda film, made with the intention of building American sympathy with the British war effort. The film was based on a 1939 collection of *Times* columns, credited to ‘Jan Struther’, the pen-name of Joyce Anstruther (1901-1953). The columns tell brief vignettes in the life of Mrs. Miniver, an upper middle-class woman living in London with her architect husband and two of their three children (the eldest, Vincent, is away at Eton). The columns are quietly observational in tone, often based round an illuminating simile or metaphor applied to a familiar feature of modern life: dislikeable spouses of good friends are like the b-sides of gramophone records, stories that you save to tell your spouse at the end of the day are ‘a pocketful of pebbles.’<sup>633</sup> The *milieu* is usually urban, very unlike the small-town atmosphere of the film, though the action sometimes switches to the family’s Kent cottage, ‘the Starlings’. Sherriff wrote three drafts of an opening scene for the film, each one illustrating the iconic Britishness of the principal character in a

different way, and each showing a different approach to the technical demands of an opening.

Sherriff's first attempt, written at some point in late October 1940 (the script is dated 16/10/40 on the outside and 21/10/40 inside), is partly inspired by Struther's column 'On the River',<sup>634</sup> and gives us a sort of origin story for the Starlings, though set in his own Thames Valley *milieu* rather than Kent (it is possible that this version of the screenplay is partly autobiographical; the language used is very similar to Sherriff's account, in *No Leading Lady*, of finding his own home, Rosebriars.)<sup>635</sup>

FADE IN  
A MEADOW IN THE UPPER VALLEY OF THE THAMES.

It is a fine summer day. Birds are nesting, lambs are playing in the fields, but they jump with fright at the sound of a sudden sharp explosion. THE CAMERA MOVES to the river bank. A motor launch is moored there and Mr. Miniver, hot, rather irritable and very greasy is trying unsuccessfully to start the engine. His family surround him and give him copious advice.<sup>636</sup>

Mr. and Mrs. Miniver go in search of petrol and discover an abandoned building, attended by the mystical Mr. Kendall, who informs them that it is for sale:

The history of Bridgeby is written in the mellowed bricks of this beautiful old house. The Abbots of Reading had their summer residence here, and the remains of it may be seen in the adjoining field. The battle of Bridgeby was fought on the Downs within sight of the house, and King Charles II is supposed to have hidden here for two days after the Battle of Wooster [*sic*]. This fascinating house contains secret hiding places, hidden panels, and every other fitment to fascinate the lover of antiquity.

[...]

To possess one's own plot of rural England? Isn't that the dream of every man?

(he peers intently at Mr. Miniver as if boring into his very soul)<sup>637</sup>

This first version is emphatically rural, mystical, and focused on Mr. Miniver rather than his wife. In contrast, Sherriff's second attempt, dated 24/10/40, is far more

urban and domestic, starting with Mrs. Miniver in Harrods on Christmas Eve 1938, the last one before the war:

Harrods', the big West End department store, is crowded with Christmas shoppers. Busiest of all is the floor devoted to the more popular kind of Christmas gift, children's toys, indoor games, tobacco jars and every sort of present for moderate purses.<sup>638</sup>

Sherriff drew on two of the original columns; 'Christmas Shopping'<sup>639</sup> and 'A Pocketful of Pebbles',<sup>640</sup> in which Mrs. Miniver clashes with an officious upper-class lady. Mrs. Miniver is introduced as a customer, observing a harassed shop girl being harangued by 'an indignant disagreeable old woman'<sup>641</sup> who is returning a squeaky rubber bone. Mrs. Miniver buys the used toy to save the shop-girl from further abuse, then more dog toys, finally buying a small dog to justify her earlier purchases. This is what modern screenwriters refer to as a 'Save the Cat' scene – a scene introducing the protagonist with an action that makes him/her sympathetic.<sup>642</sup> Mrs. Miniver is thus established as a good Samaritan and (we must hope) a dog-lover.

Mrs. Miniver returns to her home, after watching a group of children, including her own, presenting a play in a small assembly hall. Sherriff adds a note that provides a neat definition of the representation of Britishness: '(Note: The type of the play to be worked out later. It can either be a pantomime, an act from Shakespeare, or possibly a series of tableaux.)'<sup>643</sup> The three theatrical signifiers of Britishness to an American audience are low culture (pantomime), high culture (Shakespeare) or what appears to be a pageant. Mrs. Miniver's husband, Clem, is initially reluctant to accept the dog, but is won round, just in time for Christmas.

Sherriff's third version of the opening scene, dated 6/11/40 and referred to this time as a 'prologue', takes a different approach from either earlier version, and is far shorter, 5 pages long as opposed to the 30 of the first version and the 26 of the second.

After the open-air setting of the first draft, and the urban rush of the second, the third puts us in the middle of wartime Britain:

We FADE IN to a place of eerie shadow and silhouette – and we hear the noise of a woman reading aloud. She sits with her back to the wall in a narrow space between two bunks that are tightly built against the sides of a dugout. Her face is not clearly seen at any time in this prologue, for the light is small, and will soon be shaded.

In the bunks lie two children; a boy of about eight, and a girl of eleven. Their heads are very near to the woman as she reads. Their eyes are closed. They seem to be asleep. In a quiet voice, with lowered head, she reads to the end of the chapter.<sup>644</sup>

The book is Lewis Carroll's *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, which Sherriff had already used in *Journey's End*. In that play it is a class signifier; the ability to read and enjoy the book, even in adult life, is one of the things that separates the officers from the men. It also acts as a symbol of a lost innocence, as it does here; Sherriff tells us later in the screenplay that the section being read is the very end of the book, in which Alice's sister reflects on her own childhood. As in *Journey's End*, the drama is based on the tension between the situation (a wartime dugout, in both cases), and the attempts made within in it to carry on normal life:

They turn to the dugout entrance – with a last glance toward the house as it is framed in the rising moon.

WOMAN  
The house looks beautiful tonight –  
MAN  
Doesn't it?  
(pause)  
Did you turn the gas off under the ham?  
WOMAN  
Yes.  
They enter the dugout.<sup>645</sup>

The dugout itself is an unusual one – we're told that it is 'built of big, finely tooled granite blocks', with 'small fluted columns and a strong vaulted roof of beautiful workmanship.'<sup>646</sup> The Minivers are thus established as both typical (in their wartime



experience) and exceptional (in their home). The small town atmosphere is set up in the distance:

A cluster of old elms surrounds the house, stark in their winter bareness and black against the rising moon. Beyond can be seen the sparkle of a river, and then an undulating landscape of a meadowland and small dark clumps of trees. The man's head moves to the rambling outlines of a village and the thin steeple of a church.<sup>647</sup>

Sherriff is not credited on the finished film, in which an extended version of this scene is used, though not as an opening: it occurs nearly 90 minutes in, about three-quarters of the way through the film (which suggests that Sherriff may have originally intended to tell the story in flashback, in the manner of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*). The film opens, as does Sherriff's second version, with Mrs. Miniver buying an item that she has to explain to her husband, although it's summer rather than Christmas, and the item is an expensive hat rather than a dog.

Sherriff's three versions of the opening scene show three distinct aspects of his view of Britishness, and his recurring theme of continuity. The first locates the continuity in the landscape, the second in the family, and the third combines the two, contrasting them with the threat to stability that is represented by the war. (They also, incidentally, show how quickly he could write when he had to; the three entirely different scripts were produced in a little less than a month.) Each version tightens up the storytelling of the previous one, gradually getting closer to the present day (the first screenplay doesn't indicate a specific date for its events, but it's clearly a few years before the war), and gradually getting more economically written.

Sherriff's portrayal of Britishness remains remarkably consistent throughout his work – he places great emphasis on the idea of continuity, and the ways in which threats to it are either dispatched or assimilated. The next chapter will examine how this is

connected with another of his preoccupations, again going back to before *Journey's End*, the theme of personal courage.

## Chapter Eight - R. C. Sherriff : Heroism and Duty. *That Hamilton Woman* and *The Four Feathers*

Sherriff's interest in the subjects of heroism and duty long predated his literary career. His wartime diaries return obsessively to the question of his inability to live up to his own heroic ideal, as personified in the (mostly public school) Junior Officers that he saw around him; after his first meeting with his Colonel at the Front he wrote that '[a] cold fear came over me. "Am I an efficient officer?" "Do I know enough?" "Will I be sent back to England as an awful example of incompetence?"' <sup>648</sup> Later, comparing his conditions as an officer with those of the enlisted men, he writes that 'whatever I enjoyed by way of better comfort, I paid out again in mental dread.' <sup>649</sup>

As we have seen, heroism is an occasional theme in Sherriff's apprentice plays, appearing in several different forms. Simple physical courage is referred to in *The Woods of Meadoside*, in which Cuthbert (the part that Sherriff wrote for himself) debates whether he will have the nerve to confront the three roughs. Less obvious forms of heroism are shown by Leslie in *Cornlow-in the Downs*, who decides that it sometimes takes more courage to conform than to rebel, and Tom Martin in *Profit and Loss*, who suffers in silence on discovering that his girl has gone off with his superior officer. These last two examples are especially interesting as prefiguring the two kinds of heroism that Sherriff will explore in *The Four Feathers*, in the characters of Faversham and Durrance respectively.

It was *Journey's End* that established the way in which Sherriff was to deal with the question of heroism, with the portrayal of Stanhope setting the template for the heroic figures in his film work. Before his first appearance, Stanhope is described to us both as the rugger- and cricket-playing paragon that Raleigh remembers, and as the

hard-drinking frontline officer that he is now. Much of the play's first act is driven by this contrast, and the anticipation of what will happen when Raleigh meets his former idol. Stanhope himself is shown as aware of this contradiction:

STANHOPE: *[looking up quickly at OSBORNE and laughing]* Yes,  
I'm his hero.

OSBORNE: It's quite natural.

STANHOPE: You think so?

OSBORNE: Often it goes on as long as –

STANHOPE: - as long as the hero's a hero.

OSBORNE: It often goes on all through life.

STANHOPE: I wonder.<sup>650</sup>

Raleigh's journey through the first half of the play involves his reconciliation of the two visions of Stanhope, reaching a climax in Act II Scene 1 where Osborne reads Raleigh's letter describing Stanhope as 'the finest officer in the battalion.'<sup>651</sup>

Sherriff's heroic characters often possess this duality; their heroism offset by an apparent weakness: Harry Faversham's fear of his own cowardice in *The Four Feathers*, Nelson's adulterous love for Lady Hamilton. Guy Gibson is an exception to this pattern, the most straightforwardly heroic of Sherriff's characters. This is partly a product of *The Dam Busters'* unusual structure – the film gains its duality from being divided between the two protagonists.

Both *The Four Feathers* and *That Hamilton Woman* deal with questions of personal responsibility and duty, and both express it through a romantic triangle – Faversham, Durrance and Ethne in the first case, Nelson, Sir William and Lady Hamilton in the second – in which all three characters are tested in different ways, and all finally do what is required of them. Both films relate their historical settings to the contemporary political situation and the start of the Second World War. Both also treat the idea of heroism as a form of performance, connecting it with the conventions of the well-made play. As we have seen earlier, writers like Sherriff used these conventions

as a sort of mask, covering issues of class, gender and sexuality. For Sherriff's characters, the sense of duty often acts in a similar way.

### ***That Hamilton Woman/Lady Hamilton***

Where *The Four Feathers* is relatively understated in its references to contemporary politics, *That Hamilton Woman* (1941) was made as wartime propaganda, drawing parallels between Hitler and Napoleon, (who is described, with an anachronistic use of language, as a 'dictator'), and stressing the responsibility of neutral countries to oppose them. The didactic nature of the film was commented on at the time; John T. Flynn, director of the New York chapter of the isolationist organisation America First, described it as 'a persistent and continuous glorification of the whole object and progress of British imperialism.'<sup>652</sup> Sherriff wrote the screenplay in collaboration with Walter Reisch (1903-1983), a Viennese screenwriter and playwright who had travelled to Britain, and then to Hollywood, under the aegis of Alexander Korda, although the style and subject matter mark certain passages as Sherriff's work.

All three central characters – Lord Nelson, Lady Hamilton and Sir William Hamilton – are shown making sacrifices out of duty; Sir William Hamilton tolerates his wife's affair with Nelson for the good of the country, Nelson and Lady Hamilton end it for the same reason.

Nelson is initially depicted, in a manner similar to Mr. Chips, as a male character educated by a woman. He first appears as a misogynist, saying that he is 'not used to discussing matters of this kind [politics] in the presence of ladies',<sup>653</sup> but is won round by Lady Hamilton's ability to get him a royal audience, admitting later to her

that the victory at the Battle of the Nile ‘wouldn’t have been possible without you.’<sup>654</sup>

Once they have begun their affair, Nelson is explicit both about his military duty, and about his own inability to live up to his own moral code:

EMMA: You’ll come back? Won’t you?

NELSON: I wonder if I shall? I feel that I should not. You are married and I am married. In the magic and music of the ballroom, these things become rather blurred, but they stand out very clearly in the dawn. Your life is here – my life is there. We must obey the creeds and codes that we’ve sworn our lives to. I know that I must not come back and I know that nothing in this world can keep me away.<sup>655</sup>

Lord Nelson here shows some of Stanhope’s self-awareness; unsurprisingly, as Sherriff was writing for the actor who first played that part, Laurence Olivier. Later in the film, Nelson is shown as wavering from his sense of duty, and it is Lady Hamilton who acts as the voice of responsibility:

EMMA: Divorce.

NELSON: There is no other way.

EMMA: No, my love, that might be well enough for other people but not for you. You are not an ordinary person. You cannot behave as if you were a Mr. Jones or Mr. Thompson.

NELSON: I wish I were a Mr. Thompson.<sup>656</sup>

The heroism shown by Nelson and Emma, is contrasted with that of Emma’s husband, Sir William Hamilton, who recognizes and endures his wife’s affair, and is referred to in a drunken sailor’s toast as ‘the real hero of the hour.’<sup>657</sup> Sir William is philosophical about his situation, using phraseology that links him with *Twelfth Night*’s Malvolio:

You know, Emma, there are three kinds of deceived husband in the world. First, there are those who were born to be deceived. Second, who do not know, and third, who do not care. I’ve been wondering for some time now which of the three I shall be myself.<sup>658</sup>

After Emma has been told that she has to leave Nelson, Sir William says ‘Well, we both have our duty, haven’t we? Good luck with yours, dear.’<sup>659</sup>

Emma does her duty, sending Nelson to war immediately after saying that she can't bring herself to do so. In a speech where she laments her own ability to lie to Nelson about her love for him, she explicitly compares self-denial to staging a three-act play:

EMMA: William has just been talking to me – telling me about the repeated dispatches from the Admiralty. He also wanted me to put on a little performance for you. Act one – Emma Hamilton expresses a sudden desire to see the Sphinx and the Pyramids. Act two – Lord Nelson pleads – Emma Hamilton remains adamant. Act three – Emma Hamilton departs from Egypt a sadder and wiser woman. Poor William, he was so serious about it all. [...] Oh my darling, what is the truth? Should I have put on that comedy for you?

NELSON: It might have helped, perhaps.<sup>660</sup>

As one might expect from a wartime film, *That Hamilton Woman* is darker than *The Four Feathers*; it starts with Lady Hamilton already ruined, and is told in a *Mr. Chips*-like flashback structure – but it shares with the earlier film a preoccupation with the ideas of duty and heroism. *That Hamilton Woman* sets up love and duty as a choice, and all three central characters choose duty, despite what it costs them. With Harry Faversham, love and duty are complementary goals; he can only win the former by pursuing the latter.

### **Case Study – *The Four Feathers* (1939)**

A.E.W. Mason's 1902 novel of the Sudanese war had already been filmed three times, in 1915, 1921 and 1929, the last time as one of Merian C. Cooper and Ernest Schoedsack's late-silent travelogues. The novel is a tale of serial revenge, similar in structure to Alexandre Dumas' *The Count of Monte Cristo* (1844). Harry Feversham [*sic* – he is renamed in the film], a British army officer from an illustrious military

family, resigns his commission for unspecified reasons, on the eve of his regiment's departure for the 1882 Sudan campaign, and is sent three white feathers by his military colleagues, followed by a fourth from his fiancée, Ethne Eustace. Determined to reject the accusation of cowardice, he travels to the Sudan and returns the three feathers, performing great deeds of heroism in order to do so. He returns to Britain, and to Ethne, who marries him at the novel's end.

At its start, Mason's novel has the structure of a classic hero's journey story, of the kind that Joseph Campbell was later to define, in *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, as a monomyth, a story of the Hero's Departure, Initiation, and Return.<sup>661</sup> The novel includes implicit references to the story of Ulysses and Penelope (like the Greek hero, the returning Feversham is recognised by his dog before any human characters do so)<sup>662</sup> and explicit ones to that of Hamlet, as when Feversham, after his initial refusal of his commission, is comforted by Lieutenant Sutch:

‘Did you ever read “Hamlet”? he asked.

‘Of course.’ said Harry, in reply.

‘Ah, but did you ever consider it? The same disability is clear in that character. The thing which he foresaw, which he thought over, which he imagined in the act and the consequence – that he shrank from, upbraiding himself even as you have done. Yet when the moment of action comes, sharp and immediate, does he fail? No, he excels, and just by reason of that foresight.’<sup>663</sup>

Sutch is the only character to realise that Harry Feversham is more the child of his late mother (with whom it's implied that Sutch was in love) than of his military hero father:

A mere look at the father and son proved it so. Harry Feversham wore his father's name, but he had his mother's dark and haunted eyes, his mother's breadth of forehead, his mother's delicacy of profile, his mother's imagination. It needed perhaps a stranger to recognize the truth.<sup>664</sup>

Harry's returning of the feathers becomes a rite of passage, an overcoming of the feminine qualities represented by his mother, and a demonstration of his status as



an inheritor of his father's family name. It is also linked with British military history; we're told that Harry was born during the Crimean War, on June 15<sup>th</sup>, 1855, the day of the first British attack on the Redan,<sup>665</sup> in which his father received the injury that led to his being invalided out of the services. Harry's birth is thus linked with the end of his father's career, and with the heavily mythologised campaign of the Crimean War.

This war occupied an ambiguous place for Mason's original readers. William Howard Russell's reports in the *Times* had made it the first war to be covered by modern journalistic techniques, creating a new sense of war as a spectator sport, and a generation of military leaders who were more familiar to the general public than any had been before. Both the victories and defeats of the war, particularly the Battle of Balaclava (which, partly thanks to Tennyson's poem 'The Charge of the Light Brigade', still has an iconic quality as the exemplar of heroic failure), were reported on in a new journalistic detail; as A.N. Wilson writes in *The Victorians*:

And the British loved it. Their love of that war is reflected in almost every town in England to this day, where old men in 'cardigans' or young men in balaclava helmets can still be found in Alma Villas and Inkerman Terraces. [...] No British generals or admirals of the Hitler war were invested in the Homeric status which the Victorians gave to the quarrelsome and incompetent old men who led the Crimean invasion.<sup>666</sup>

At the same time, Russell's reports created an awareness of the shortcomings of these Homeric figures: 'Never before had the public heard such candid, or such immediate descriptions of the reality of war, the bungling as well as the heroism, the horrible deaths by disease, as well as the bloody consequences of battle.'<sup>667</sup> Wilson argues that the war was a major turning-point in Victorian Britain's shift from an aristocratic to a bourgeois nation, as 'the notion of aristocratic superiority would have been hard to sustain in its aftermath.'<sup>668</sup>

Sutch and General Feversham are positioned as representatives of that generation, simultaneously admirable and disastrous. By contrast, Harry's

contemporaries are embarking on a campaign that was notoriously unsuccessful; the 1882 Sudan campaign against Mohammed Ahmad, the Mahdi, which ended in the defeat of Hicks Pasha in 1883, the only time in African colonial history that a European power was successfully ousted by an African leader.<sup>669</sup> Although the original readers will have been aware of the ultimate defeat of the Mahdist rebellion at the Battle of Omdurman in 1898 (won decisively for the British by the Maxim gun) the novel ends with this more than a decade away, giving the book's ending an unsatisfying, incomplete feel.

Given the powerful symbolism and mythic quality of this story, it's all the more surprising that, for much of the novel's length, Mason doesn't concern himself with this central narrative. Of the novel's thirty-four chapters, the first six set up Feversham's story, ending with his determination to return the four feathers. Mason then spends the central section of the novel, roughly the next twenty chapters, focusing on the character of Ethne, and her suitor Durrance, a comrade of Feversham's who is blinded in action. Though Feversham returns as the protagonist in the final eight chapters, it is still Durrance who gets the novel's final words, heroically abandoning Ethne to Harry, and returning to the Sudan. To come to the novel after one of its film versions (as most readers today probably do)<sup>670</sup> is a disconcerting experience, like finding out, to repeat an analogy mentioned earlier, that Homer originally wrote the *Odyssey* from the point of view of one of Penelope's suitors.

As we will see, Sherriff changes the plot in two substantial ways, reframing both the personal and political aspects of the story, in the process turning Harry's acceptance of his military duty from a personal story into a national myth.

## Sherriff's 'Revised Draft'

Sherriff himself was frank about what he perceived as the novel's inadequacies for cinematic adaptation. In a lecture on adaptation that he wrote around 1949,<sup>671</sup> he describes the process:

When I adapted 'The Four Feathers' I got Mr. A.E.W. Mason to approve what amounted to an entirely different story or perhaps I should say an entirely different development from his original beginning. Here was a case where the basic idea was a good one for the screen, and all the characters vigorous and colourful. The characters, in fact, were so alive, that they went in the new direction without the least persuasion.<sup>672</sup>

(Characteristically, Sherriff had changed his story by the time he came to write *No Leading Lady*, in which he tells an anecdote about the elderly Mason not noticing the changes in the screenplay, praising Sherriff for its faithful nature, and only taking issue with his treatment of Major Fanshawe, a character who isn't in the novel.<sup>673</sup> As Roland Wales points out, he isn't in the screenplay either.)<sup>674</sup>

The R.C. Sherriff Archive carries two versions of this script; a 'Revised Draft' dated 15<sup>th</sup> June 1938, which is labelled as Sherriff's work alone, and a 'Final Shooting Script' dated 14<sup>th</sup> July of the same year, which includes additions and revisions by Sherriff, as well as pages credited to frequent Korda collaborator Arthur Wimperis. The BFI Archive includes another version of the latter script, with the same date, but naming both Wimperis and another favourite Korda screenwriter, Lajos Biro, as collaborators, and including more scenes as a postscript. These versions show both the way in which Sherriff created a new story out of Mason's novel, and how this was adapted for the final film. Sherriff's correspondence at the time of the second draft makes it clear that Wimperis and (to a lesser extent) Biro were brought in specifically to work on the comic aspects of the screenplay, once Sherriff had established the central

structure, and the heroic journey undergone by the central character, here renamed Faversham.

Like Sherriff's earlier scripts, the Revised Draft of *The Four Feathers* is divided into sequences. I have indicated the length and content of each of these, and whether they have an equivalent in Mason's novel. It should be noted that Sherriff changes the names of several of the characters, so that as well as Feversham becoming Faversham, Ethne becomes Daphne (though this changes in later drafts) and Sutch becomes Dr. Sutton:

Sequence A	13 pages	Fall of Khartoum	
Sequence B	7 pages	Faversham as a boy	Chapter 1
Sequence C	25 pages	Ten years later	Chapters 2 and 3
Sequence D	8 pages	Faversham /Dr. Sutton	Chapter 6
Sequence E	11 pages	In Egypt. Faversham's disguise.	
Sequence F	20 pages	Blinding of Durrance	
Sequence G	17 pages	Faversham's rescue of Durrance	
Sequence H	17 pages	In England. Daphne and Durrance	Chapter 13
Sequence I	32 pages	Battle of Omdurman	
Final Sequence (not indicated by a letter)			
	11 pages	Denouement in England	

This breakdown makes clear the extent to which Sherriff, after using Mason's opening and premise, went on to create a new story. This thesis will examine the way in which Sherriff constructs the story, both the microcosmic triumph of Harry, and the

macrocosmic triumph of the British army, and how this reflects the pre-war context in which the film was written.

Sherriff's first major change is to write a new plot, giving the screenplay a classically well-made three-act structure. As he had done with *The Invisible Man*, Sherriff takes the opening chapters of his source novel, and used them to create a new story, completing the heroic story that Mason had started. In his screenplay, Faversham travels to the Sudan where he takes on the disguise of a Sangali, a fictitious tribe whose tongues were cut out when they rebelled against the Mahdi (thus taking away the necessity for Faversham to learn any Arabic), and who can be recognized through a Cain-like brand on the forehead, thus marking a change of identity that leads into the character's Second Act.

Faversham rescues the blinded Durrance, is imprisoned, and, in the penultimate sequence, engineers a mass break-out with fellow prisoners Willoughby and Burroughs. The three of them loot the arsenal at Omdurman, and raise the Union Jack in place of the Mahdi's black flag, Faversham thus redeeming both himself and his country.

Sherriff's other major alteration to Mason's story, particularly in the earlier version of the screenplay, is to change its date. As already noted, the novel's Faversham is born in 1855, during the Crimean war. At the start of the novel, in 1869, he is celebrating his fourteenth birthday, and the military operation that leads to his refusal of a commission is thirteen years later, at the start of the 1882 Sudan campaign. Sherriff's Faversham is born in 1877, and celebrates his tenth birthday shortly after the fall of Khartoum and the death of General Gordon, which opens the screenplay in a thirteen-page prologue. (Harry's father remains a veteran of the Crimean War, which means that the generational difference between him and his son is considerably larger

than in the novel.)<sup>675</sup> The screenplay ends eleven years later, with Harry Faversham playing a decisive part at the 1898 Battle of Omdurman. This script thus starts with a British military failure – the loss of Khartoum – and ends with a triumph; the redemption of Faversham’s reputation is paralleled by the redemption of the British army, marked by the journey from the defeat of Gordon at the start to the victory of Kitchener at the end.

One effect of this is to change the story from a personal story to a national one: in Joseph Campbell’s terms, from a fairy story to a myth:

Typically, the hero of the fairy tale achieves a domestic, microcosmic triumph, and the hero of myth a world-historical macrocosmic triumph. Whereas the former – the youngest or despised child who becomes the master of extraordinary powers – prevails over his personal oppressors, the latter brings back from his adventure the means for the regeneration of his society as a whole.<sup>676</sup>

Sherriff adds details that emphasise the nature of Harry’s journey. When we first see the character as a child, he is set up as an outsider. This is made explicit in a dialogue exchange between General Faversham and Sutton:

GENERAL

Can’t understand the kid. Sent him to the best military school in England – spent hours of my time telling him about his famous ancestors – and what do you think? – I found him reading a book of poetry this morning! Shelley of all things! Lucky I caught him in time and burnt the damn thing.

DOCTOR

Shelley won’t hurt him. Gordon read poetry.

GENERAL

And look what happens! Poetry’s a menace to the Empire.<sup>677</sup>

(An incongruous love of poetry is a feature of other Sherriff heroes: in the 1930 novelisation of *Journey’s End*, co-written with Vernon Bartlett, Sherriff has Stanhope’s Head of House remark ‘I wouldn’t be surprised if the little blighter wrote poetry or something.’<sup>678</sup> Similarly, in the screenplay for *The Road Back*, one of the defeated

German soldiers says to another, after the latter has used a flowery turn of phrase ‘You’ll turn into a poet if you’re not careful.’)<sup>679</sup>

Sherriff also makes an important change to the novel in having General Faversham die in the period between Harry’s childhood and his refusal of his commission. (In the novel, General Feversham remains alive throughout; rather improbably, he carries on paying Harry’s allowance during his adventures in the Sudan.)<sup>680</sup> This makes Faversham’s quest even more urgent than it is in the novel; his motivation is partly the Hamlet-like desire to placate a dead father. It also means that the authority figure that Faversham has to deal with for the first part of the screenplay is not his own father, but Daphne’s, the Crimean War veteran General Burroughs, played in the finished film by C. Aubrey Smith, a British actor resident in the United States, who had become Hollywood’s defining idea of an English patriarch. This increases further the archetypal nature of Faversham’s journey; part of his motivation is to win Daphne, not just from his rival Durrance, but also from her dragon-like father. General Burroughs also appears in Sequence B, as a friend of Faversham’s father – it is he who gives Harry a birthday toast that sums up the association of heroism and family: ‘May he prove himself a true Faversham.’<sup>681</sup>

When we first see the adult Faversham, now an officer, he is still regarded by his messroom colleagues as something of a weakling:

WILLOUGHBY  
Did I frighten the poor lamb?  
DURRANCE  
Shouldn’t be surprised.  
WILLOUGHBY (getting up)  
No pleasing him these days. Moons about and reads books all night. He’s queer, definitely queer.<sup>682</sup>

In this, Faversham is contrasted with Durrance, who argues that Daphne has rejected him because he’s more capable than Faversham: he tells her ‘John Durrance,

you said, is a great lumbering bullock of a fellow who can well take care of himself. He's strong enough to stand alone, but Harry Faversham is not; he needs everything that I have in my power to give.'<sup>683</sup> (This dialogue sequence was taken out of later drafts, possibly as making Durrance too unsympathetic – in later versions of the script, he is more generous to Harry.)

These two characters are contrasted in different ways after the action moves to the Sudan. This second act of the screenplay is characterised by far less dialogue than the English-set, and more theatrical, first and third acts. This is partly in the nature of the genre; like Westerns, British Colonial Films place great emphasis on the landscape. Sherriff himself was aware of the importance of the visual to this section of the screenplay; in a letter to Alexander Korda dated 26<sup>th</sup> May 1938, and accompanying a new version of Sequence E, he writes that 'I have put the final scenes of Faversham's rescue of Durrance upon the Nile [...] there was a danger of repetition and monotony if the whole of this sequence were kept in the desert, and we have not yet used the River Nile for dramatic purposes.'<sup>684</sup> After the film was released, he wrote in response to a fan letter from one Adrian Brand that 'my own part was secondary to the lovely photography.'<sup>685</sup>

However, the emphasis on the visual isn't just a commercial choice, British Colonial Films (again, like Hollywood Westerns) also use landscape as a way of creating meaning; their subject is the reaction of the socialised individual to the natural environment. Here, we have two examples in the differing fates of Faversham and Durrance – both men experience a symbolic ordeal by fire on arrival in the Sudan, and both lose the use of a physical attribute. Faversham comes through his branding successfully, and gains a new identity without his voice; like Griffin in *The Invisible Man*, he is defined by his breath.<sup>686</sup> By contrast, Durrance's exposure to the sun, and



subsequent loss of his sight, causes his greatest crisis, from which Faversham has to save him.

Durrance's blinding is also associated with his colonial arrogance. On arrival in the Sudan, Durrance witnesses a game of cricket on the Egyptian sands:

Upon the open ground some men of his Company are playing an impromptu Cricket Match. Durrance cannot resist pleasure at this familiar sight – but quickly he has seen the thing that angers him.

The players have no cricket stumps, and to make a wicket, three of the men have piled their helmets one on top of the other and are playing bareheaded in the sun.<sup>687</sup>

Durrance bawls out the players for playing bareheaded, failing to acknowledge that they're not at home, then joins the game (typically for a Sherriff character, he goes on to make a half-century.) However, when Durrance is later abandoned in the desert, he fails to follow his own advice, taking his helmet off to mop his brow, and fails to put it back on, leading to the dizziness which causes him to fall facing the sun, and thus to his blindness. While Faversham changes his racial identity, and therefore passes through his ordeal by fire, Durrance retains his British identity, and fails his.

The turning point occurs when Faversham, in disguise, rescues the blinded Durrance following the battle:

Durrance is alone, slashing blindly around him with the clubbed rifle. The storm of the Dervishes passes him. A white-clad figure appears from the turmoil and leaps upon Durrance's shoulders. Durrance, weakened by his fever, collapses struggling amongst the fallen men.

[...]

A solitary white figure rises from the dead and glances cautiously around him. Assured that he is alone, he drags the dead bodies away from Durrance, and takes the unconscious man in his arms. He carries Durrance to the tent.<sup>688</sup>

(Faversham's physical appearance at this point, dressed all in white, associates him again with General Gordon, who is dressed the same way in the opening sequence.)

We see the disguised Faversham assisting the blinded Durrance, in a scene that echoes that between the disguised Edgar and blinded Gloucester in *King Lear*. (William Shakespeare is a shadowy presence in the various versions of this screenplay, especially those plays which, like *King Lear*, feature characters taken outside their normal context. Although Sherriff takes out the novel's explicit reference to *Hamlet*, he has Willoughby refer to *A Midsummer Night's Dream*<sup>689</sup> and, as we will see, a later draft has Durrance reciting from *The Tempest*.)

Like Gloucester, Durrance considers suicide, which is a recurring theme in this screenplay. In the prologue sequence, General Faversham tells a story of a soldier who, unable to deal with the disgrace of cowardice, had shot himself. Harry later describes this story to Dr. Sutton as one that had haunted him. Now, Durrance offers the gun to Harry, and asks to be killed:

You won't?... you're frightened? ... a coward? Very well – stay by yourself. Go to the devil alone. With the vultures picking your eyes out before you're dead!<sup>690</sup>

While Faversham becomes the military hero that Durrance had initially appeared to be, Durrance (the name inevitably suggests endurance) receives his test of courage in his reaction to his blindness. After his rescue and return to his regiment, we next see Durrance receiving rehabilitation on the Burroughs' estate, learning to ride, dress himself and shave:

GENERAL  
Brave man.  
DAPHNE  
Was there ever any doubt?  
GENERAL  
There was no doubt he had the one kind [of courage]. I'm glad he's got the other.<sup>691</sup>

For both Faversham and Durrance, heroism is expressed through playing a role; when Durrance is out of sight of Daphne and the General 'his desperate make-belief

[sic] of gaiety drops from him like a well-nigh unbearable load and the agony of the desert is in his eyes again.’<sup>692</sup>

There is also a third kind of heroism; that of Daphne. Shortly before the reveal that Faversham is still alive, she takes up the theme of courage and cowardice, saying that ‘I did behave brutally. I behaved like the worst kind of coward. I failed to help him [Faversham] when he was so totally in need of help.’<sup>693</sup> Daphne’s acknowledgement of her earlier act of cowardice functions as her equivalent moment to the acts of heroism performed by the men – Faversham in the Sudan, Durrance in Britain.

Running parallel to the fear of being a coward is that of being a fool. The theme is introduced in the scene between Faversham and Dr. Sutton, shortly before the former’s departure:

FAVERSHAM

The men who sent me those feathers knew me better than I knew myself. A man who tries to cheat his fate is more than a coward. He’s a fool as well.

DOCTOR

You’re wrong there, Harry. I never met a fool who had the imagination to be a coward.<sup>694</sup>

The idea that cowardice isn’t entirely a negative quality (or at least, is one that requires imagination) contrasts Faversham with Durrance; not as intelligent as Harry, but intelligent enough to realise the fact:

COLONEL

It certainly isn’t a picnic – but it’s your own damn fault. If you’d been a fool I’d have sent somebody else.

DURRANCE

Maybe you’re sending me because I *am* a fool.

COLONEL

Maybe.<sup>695</sup>

As in *Journey's End*, the contrast is between the more intelligent, but tormented, figures of Stanhope/Faversham, and the unimaginative, but decent, Trotter/Durrance.

The personal stories of Faversham and Durrance are paralleled by the political story of the British military, which Sherriff uses to refer both to the First World War, and to the political situation at the time of the film's making. Certain elements inevitably evoke the First World War, especially for a British audience; the presence of Lord Kitchener (an icon of the earlier conflict, because of the use of his image on recruiting posters, and his death in 1916),<sup>696</sup> and Durrance's blinding, which echoes that of the many officers affected by mustard-gas. One of the most-read wartime memoirs, Vera Brittain's *Testament of Youth* (first published in 1933, and written in reaction to *Journey's End*) included her account of vowing to marry a blinded friend of her deceased fiancé,<sup>697</sup> in the screenplay, Daphne makes the same decision.

The element of the screenplay that most evokes the Great War, however, is that contained in the title; the handing out of white feathers to young men out of uniform, by an organisation called the Order of the White Feather, was a feature of that war, as were poster campaigns that associated military service with romantic suitability: 'Is your 'best boy' wearing khaki? If not, DON'T YOU THINK he should be? If he does not think that you and your country are worth fighting for – do you think that he is WORTHY of you?'<sup>698</sup> (Roland Wales suggests that Sherriff himself may have been the recipient of this kind of criticism in the War, following his initial rejection from service.)<sup>699</sup>

As with Scribe's letters, and Ibsen's macaroons, Sherriff uses the feathers both as symbols and as storytelling devices. Unlike Mason, he gives the feathers a provenance, as pipe-cleaners in the Officers' Club.<sup>700</sup> (He may have been inspired in this by the 1929 film version which, with a fine disregard for period, has the officers

breaking the feathers off their quill-pens.) He also uses them as a source of dramatic irony, as when the blinded Durrance, back in Britain, pulls from his pocket a letter that he received from his unidentified rescuer:

Daphne's hand with the envelope as she turns it upside down. Out runs a tiny stream of sand – and then, as she gives it a slight shake, comes the feather with John Durrance's card upon it. The feather with the card lies on the table.<sup>701</sup>

Sherriff is here playing on three levels of information; that of the viewer, (who already knows that Faversham saved Durrance's life), of Daphne (who discovers it at this moment) and of Durrance (who, because of his blindness, is left in ignorance). Sherriff shows the well-made playwright's ability to manipulate the state when the audience knows more than the character, and to use props as a way of conveying information.

At other times, the screenplay evokes the contemporary political situation. The script opens in the House of Commons, with the Prime Minister, William Ewart Gladstone, claiming that the danger to General Gordon is greatly exaggerated, and arguing, in words that echo both American isolationists and British appeasers, that 'If we send an army we engage ourselves in a senseless war of no concern to us. [...] Let the Egyptians work out their own destiny, and let the British Empire mind its own business!'<sup>702</sup> This first sequence ends with the death of Gordon, and Kitchener's vow 'We will come back.',<sup>703</sup> setting up the story explicitly as one of revenge.

As well as appeasers, Sherriff creates a parallel with contemporary pacifists, represented in the 1930s by fictional characters like Alan Howard in Terence Rattigan's *French Without Tears* (1936) and in real life by organisations such as the Peace Pledge Union. Sherriff adds an idea that isn't in the novel by suggesting that Harry's reluctance to serve isn't simply due to cowardice, but also to a belief that, by devoting so much of their energy to wars abroad, military families like the Favershams and Burroughs have

neglected their duties at home. This view is first expressed by Daphne Burroughs, in a speech that makes her sound like Lopahkin in *The Cherry Orchard*, or Squidge in *The Feudal System*: ‘Father spent thirty years in India and Africa – and now my brother begins. There might have been a chance to save this house by farming the land... but Peter must go now.’<sup>704</sup>

When Faversham rejects his commission, he echoes this speech. The feminine values represented by Daphne are opposed to those associated with Faversham’s father.

HARRY

I should have taken this action months ago – when my father died. I accepted a Commission for his sake, because all his family were soldiers. When my father died, my duty towards him was done.

COLONEL (almost speechless with indignation)

Your duty towards him! Have you no duty towards your Country?

HARRY

My duty towards my country is in England and not in Egypt. When my father died I took over an estate on the verge of ruin because every man of my family has neglected it to fight in India and Africa – in every country but his own. If I do my job here I may save my home – with a dozen good farms and a hundred good men who are starving through my family’s neglect. If I go to Egypt I shall be away for years and the ruin will be complete.<sup>705</sup>

The suggestion that Faversham’s reluctance to serve may be due to principle as much as cowardice is original to Sherriff, and sets up Harry and Daphne as mouthpieces of upper middle-class pacifist ideas that had been current in the years before the film’s making; in 1933, the Oxford Union had passed, by 275 votes to 153, the motion that ‘This house will in no circumstances fight for its King and Country’, which had led to an anonymous correspondent sending the Union a box containing 275 white feathers.<sup>706</sup>

Opposed to this is the idea of duty, which connects the personal and political aspects of the screenplay. Gladstone’s argument in the opening sequence is contrasted with the view expressed by the Colonel who gives the orders to go to the Sudan:

[A] strong Nation like ours must face its duty to those who are not strong. If you see a man beating a horse, you knock him down even if it’s not your

horse. The people in the Sudan are not our people, but they are human beings tortured and kept in slavery. It's our job to give them a chance to make the Sudan a decent place to live.<sup>707</sup>

This sense of national duty is associated with a sense of personal duty, as expressed by Daphne when she discovers that Harry has refused his commission:

Some people are born free: they can do as they like without concern for consequences. But you are not one of those, Harry – and nor am I. We were born into a tradition – a code that we must obey even if we do not believe. We must obey because the pride and the happiness of everyone surrounding us depends on our own obedience.<sup>708</sup>

Faversham's acceptance of his military role, in travelling to the Sudan, associates him with those who might have initially opposed the coming conflict but were, by the late 'thirties, starting to accept it.

The script's final sequence completes the three-act structure, containing the *scènes à faire* for both Durrance's and Faversham's stories. This sequence isn't designated by a letter, just as 'FINAL SEQUENCE', suggesting that Sherriff, following the practice of Sardou, may have written it before some of the earlier sections.

In Durrance's *scène à faire*, he discovers from Dr. Sutton that Faversham is alive, and dictates a letter to Daphne, telling her that he's been told of a German specialist who can cure his blindness, and that he's going away for the treatment. This scene shows Sherriff's skill in manipulating the release of information. Durrance's blindness means that both the newspaper report telling of Faversham's survival, and Durrance's letter are heard by the audience, the first read by Sutton, the second dictated to him. The emotional effect is heightened by the audience's (and Sutton's) awareness that Durrance is lying, and by Daphne's absence, which means that we don't see her reaction. Here, Sherriff uses the reading of a letter as an emotional climax (as he had done in *Journey's End*), and evokes emotion in the audience by concealing it in the

characters. This isn't an obvious choice; in the original novel, the revelation is played out as a scene between Durrance and Ethne. The use of the letter, and Durrance's self-sacrifice, are both Sherriff's additions, which emphasise Durrance's own kind of heroism.

The film's final scene is also the *scène à faire* of the Faversham/Daphne plot. Having established himself as heroic in the wider world, Faversham must now do the same thing in the domestic sphere. Sherriff has Daphne ask a question that the audience must be thinking: 'What deed of reckless daring are you going to do to make me take back my feather?'<sup>709</sup> Sherriff answers the question, and ties together the screenplay's major strands, in a speech prompted by one of General Burroughs' many speeches about the failings of the modern army:

HARRY

General Burroughs! – you're a great soldier and I acknowledge it; but let me tell you, General, here and now – that the wars you fought were garden parties compared with ours! The reason you never got any breakfast was because your organisation was so rotten and your sanitary arrangements so bad that the maggots got your breakfast before you got a chance! The reasons your battles went on three weeks was because both sides only had three cannon balls between them, and you had to go and find them before you could fire them back again! – Your feather, Daphne.

Harry holds out the fourth feather to Daphne. She takes it and holds his hand in hers.

The General is too astonished to say a word.

FADE OUT<sup>710</sup>

This speech completes several of the film's themes; it demonstrates Harry's final act of courage, finally standing up to the older military generation that had also included his father, winning the hand (literally) of Daphne, and, at the same time, establishing the superiority of the modern army over that of General Burroughs' generation. This works on two levels. Historically, it draws on the audience's knowledge of the inefficiencies of the Crimean War. In terms of the 1930s, it carries a



subtextual application to the contrast between the army of the First World War (which Sherriff had portrayed in a somewhat unfavourable light in *Journey's End*) and that of the present day. The redemptive journey that is undergone by both Harry and the British army throughout the film is mirrored by that of the military within Sherriff's career to that point.

### **Final Shooting Script**

Sherriff's Final Shooting Script, dated 14<sup>th</sup> July 1938, makes several significant changes to the earlier version. It also, as noted before, includes additional sections by Arthur Wimperis, dated 21<sup>st</sup> and 25<sup>th</sup> July 1938. In a long letter dated 20<sup>th</sup> July 1938 (that is, while Wimperis was writing his additional scenes) and addressed to Korda's secretary Miss E. Corbett, Sherriff wrote his notes for changes that were to be made. These indicate that Wimperis (or 'Wimp', as Sherriff calls him) was especially responsible for adding comedy (not something Sherriff was particularly good at), and specifically for the characters of Willoughby and General Burroughs, who was being rethought as a comic character, thus downplaying the film's criticism of the British army:

Page 5 – Wimp to consider new and comic lines for General Burroughs upon his first entrance.

Page 6 – Wimp to write lines for General Burroughs to open the scene at the Crimea dinner party. Remind Wimp that Burroughs must be comic relief and all the menacing lines designed to intimidate the boy must come from General Faversham, or some other guest who is not funny.

[...]

Page 15 – Wimp to make the speech of General Burroughs more amusing, and true to the characters of the new 'comedy' General.

[...]

...Wimp is to deal with Willoughby on the lines discussed, giving him amusing lines all through.<sup>711</sup>

Wimperis' additions do indeed make General Burroughs more of a butt of humour than he is in the earlier script, so that even the slow-witted Willoughby has a laugh at his expense:

GENERAL BURROUGHS (angrily scornful)  
Brains? What's the use of brains in warfare? How many brains went to the making of the Charge at Balaclava? But (proudly) as that fellow Tennyson said 'All the world wondered!'.  
WILLOUGHBY (greatly daring)  
Didn't he also say 'Someone had blundered', sir?<sup>712</sup>

The effect of these additions is to make Faversham's exemplary nature even more apparent; he and his peers are not just braver than the previous generation, but wittier too. This is made especially clear in a running gag which Wimperis adds to the revisions dated 25<sup>th</sup> July 1938, in which General Burroughs is shown, in 1887 and 1897, telling identical stories of the Battle of Balaclava, using fruit, nuts and cigars from the table as props. Sherriff only had him tell this story once, though he had previously used the idea of a soldier constantly retelling the same story in *St. Helena* (1934), his play about Napoleon, co-written with Jeanne de Casilis.<sup>713</sup> Wimperis' revisions help set up a new version of the film's final moment, which Sherriff suggested in his letter to Corbett:

Page 124 – Last scene of all. Wimp has a grand chance here to finish his characterization of General Burroughs on good comedy lines. I hope he will have devised some special 'gag' for the General by this time which Harry explodes.<sup>714</sup>

Wimperis writes a revised version of Faversham's speech at the end of the film, in which he points out the inaccuracy of Burroughs' story, defeating General Burroughs in both a military and social context:

HARRY  
You were riding a horse called Caesar that my father sold you because, fine horseman as he was, he could never hold him.  
GENERAL (flattered)  
Quite right.

HARRY

Then - according to your story – you said ‘The 68<sup>th</sup> will move forward’ – The only trouble is that you never said it.

GENERAL (bristling)

Never said it!

HARRY

No, sir. You never had time. At that moment, my father told me, Caesar – startled by a stray bullet – snatched at his bridle and bolted straight for the Russian lines. Away went Caesar, and away went you, away went the 68<sup>th</sup> in hot pursuit, and another magnificent mistake was added to your already magnificent record. But nobody ever said ‘the 68<sup>th</sup> will move forward’ – unless it was the horse..... Come on, General – own up!<sup>715</sup>

Wimperis is here improving on Sherriff’s original scene in several ways; he’s adding the reincorporation of an earlier joke (this is the third time we’ve started to hear Burroughs’ story), making the moment more specifically a criticism of Burroughs rather than a general comment on the changing nature of warfare, and, most significantly, tying Harry’s debunking in to something that was told him by his father. The symbolic defeat of Burroughs by this means places Faversham’s final victory as being specifically over Burroughs, rather than his whole generation of military men, and allows us to see Faversham metaphorically reunited with his father, fulfilling the promise of his opening scene. It also emphasises the way in which the film’s narrative travels from a British military fiasco – the Battle of Balaclava – to a famous victory – the Battle of Omdurman.

Sherriff’s Final Shooting Script also makes some significant minor changes. Possibly in the interest of avoiding political divisiveness, he plays down the specific criticism of Gladstone, who is no longer identified by name. In his letter to Corbett, Sherriff adds:

Please remind Zolly [Zoltan Korda] not to make the politician resemble Gladstone because it might cause resentment to his many upholders, and because the lines themselves are not quoted from anything Gladstone actually said.<sup>716</sup>

The letter also indicates that some cast members, including John Clements, were on board (Sherriff credits him with making a script suggestion), and this version of the script includes some moments that show Sherriff tailoring the dialogue for individual actors. For instance, this script includes a moment in which Durrance reads, in Braille, Caliban's speech from *The Tempest* starting 'Be not afraid; the isle is full of noises,' and then remarks 'I knew that bit by heart anyway.' This is an in-joke; Ralph Richardson, the actor who plays Durrance, had appeared as Caliban at the Old Vic in 1930.<sup>717</sup>

The finished film further revises and shortens the screenplay – General Gordon dies in the opening moments, Ethne's speech about the neglect of the estate isn't in the final film (making her speech about duty more credible), nor is Durrance's cricket match.

Many of the reviews, especially in Britain, singled out Sherriff's screenplay for especial praise, both for his revisions to the story and the introduction of a more ambiguous tone than Mason's novel, simultaneously jingoistic and ironic. The reviewer in the *Manchester Guardian* expressed this in some detail:

But what calls for most praise in this film is not the acting and directing, but the contribution of that often overlooked and neglected individual, the scenario writer. R.C. Sherriff had [*sic*] taken great liberties with A.E.W. Mason's well-known, schoolboyish, but rather mistily elusive novel. One of the effects, of course, was to admit the Battle of Omdurman in a big way, but altogether the story had been so stiffened as to give far more drama to the vindication of Harry Faversham's honour and so rationalized that all these sons and daughters of regiments seemed a lot less like Mason's Jingoist prigs.<sup>718</sup>

A number of other reviewers also picked up on the way in which the film allowed the audience to both celebrate and satirise British military achievement. The *News Chronicle*, in a review with the lightly-mocking title 'The Coward Who Was a Pukka Sahib', writes that 'the pukka business' is not treated too seriously and that '[w]e

begin and end with fun at the expense of the gallant and rather fatheaded old general [...] who has grown into a highly respected and tiresome old bore.’<sup>719</sup> The *Times* reviewer writes of the way in which sympathy is ‘directed towards the hero, a constant reader of Shelley surrounded by a positive army of fire-eating Colonel Blimps.’<sup>720</sup>

It’s clear that this ambiguity of reading wasn’t confined to the critics; an interesting demonstration of how at least one contemporary viewer saw the film is found in the diary of Richard Burton, then aged 14 and still going by the name of Richard Jenkins. He commented on the film in his entry for 1 June 1940, and described it as showing ‘what family tradition can do to a man.’<sup>721</sup>

Other viewers were able to view the film less ironically, particularly relating its ideology to the contemporary situation. At the film’s premiere, A.E.W. Mason made a speech from the stage of the Odeon. The *Evening Standard* reported on this in an article headlined ‘Fine Film of British Heroism’:

‘There is a peculiar constancy and endurance in the English character’ said Mr. Mason, implying that the picture had demonstrated those qualities. ‘And if the occasion should arise they will be demonstrated again.’  
The audience cheered.<sup>722</sup>

Like all Korda productions, *The Four Feathers* was positioned explicitly as a challenge to the supremacy of Hollywood and was acknowledged as such in both British and American reviews; Eileen Creelman in the *New York Sun* described it as ‘just the sort of picture English studios should have been making for years, instead of letting Hollywood snatch all their historical melodramas [*sic*] from under their noses.’<sup>723</sup> The *Spectator* review, significantly, compared the relationship between Sherriff and Korda to that of an American writer/director team: ‘They seem to have perfectly fulfilled each other’s intentions – as [Robert] Riskin and [Frank] Capra did in the old days.’<sup>724</sup>

Shortly after the film's release, Sherriff joined Alexander Korda Productions as scenario writer and literary adviser. He was described, in the trade paper *Cinema*, as 'probably the most important writer that Britain has given to the screen.'<sup>725</sup>

*The Four Feathers*, perhaps more than any other screenplay, demonstrates Sherriff's skill as an adapter and collaborator. His changes to the original story, and his work with Arthur Wimperis, change Mason's novel from a personal quest into a national myth, which has become the 'definitive' version of the story. The screenplay received an almost shot-for-shot remake in *Storm Over the Nile* (UK, Zoltan Korda/Terence Young, 1955)<sup>726</sup>, and formed the basis of later screen adaptations of the novel; subsequent versions, directed by Don Sharp in 1978 and Shekhar Kapur in 2002, return the story to the time-frame of the novel, but retain the quest-like structure of Sherriff's screenplay.

## Chapter Nine - R.C. Sherriff: The Final Works. *The Dam Busters* and notes on *Dunkirk*

*The Dam Busters* was Sherriff's final filmed screenplay and, after *Journey's End*, probably his most celebrated work. It is also a work which is unusually well documented, with much of his research material available, as well as other writers' approaches to the screenplay, a full treatment, and a number of completed scripts. As such, it provides an opportunity to observe his working process in some detail.

### *The Dam Busters* - Sources and Early Versions

Sherriff's screenplay for *The Dam Busters* is adapted primarily from two published sources; Paul Brickhill's account of the exploits of the 617 Squadron, *The Dam Busters* (1951), and *Enemy Coast Ahead* (1946), the unfinished autobiography of Guy Gibson, leader of that squadron.<sup>727</sup> In adapting these, Sherriff had to deal with the unusual structure of the story, and the demands which this placed on his technique.

Both books are notable for their elitist view of military heroism. In his introduction to Gibson's book, Sir Arthur Harris, head of Bomber Command, emphasises what he saw as Gibson's exceptional nature, stressing the point by his unusual use of capitals, 'His natural aptitude for leadership, his outstanding skill and his extraordinary valour marked him early for command, for Great Attempts and Great Achievements'.<sup>728</sup> Harris ends his introduction with a similarly aristocratic, if rather incongruous, tribute: 'If there is a Valhalla, Guy Gibson and his band of brothers will be found there at parties, seated far above the salt.'<sup>729</sup> If Harris had any qualms about the irony of using Teutonic imagery in praise of a World War Two airman, he clearly overcame them.

Harris and Gibson's exceptionalist view of warfare was an unusual one at the time when his book was published. In the immediate postwar period, it was more common to encounter the idea of the 'people's war' expressed in wartime cinema, shown in the use of the first person plural in titles like *In Which We Serve* (Noël Coward/David Lean, 1942) and *Millions Like Us* (Sidney Gilliat/Frank Launder, 1943). By 1951, and the publication of Paul Brickhill's *The Dam Busters*, the public mood had changed. The book was an early entry in a run of non-fiction wartime books, often memoirs, that focused on what we might, by contrast, call 'the heroes' war': *The Wooden Horse* by Eric Williams (1949, filmed by Jack Lee, 1950), *The Colditz Story* by Pat Reid (1952, filmed by Guy Hamilton, 1955), *The Man Who Never Was* by Ewen Montagu (1954, filmed by Ronald Neame, 1956), *I Was Monty's Double* by M.E. Clifton James (1954, filmed by John Guillermin, 1958) and *Carve Her Name With Pride* by R.J. Minney (1956, filmed by Lewis Gilbert, 1958), as well as semi-autobiographical novels like *The Cruel Sea* by Nicholas Monsarrat (1951, filmed by Charles Frend, 1953) and *Ice Cold in Alex* by Christopher Landon (1957, filmed by J. Lee Thompson, 1958).<sup>730</sup> These books emphasise the exceptional nature of their heroes, and tend to value brains over brawn – it is notable that many deal with covert operations or escape. They also invest greatly in the idea of authenticity – the author's decorations are often listed on the title page, as a sort of stamp of authority, and many of the books bear dedications to dead comrades.

Brickhill wrote three books of this kind: *The Dam Busters* was preceded by *The Great Escape* (1950, filmed by John Sturges, 1963) and followed by *Reach for the Sky* (1954, filmed by Lewis Gilbert, 1956).<sup>731</sup> John Ramsden quotes Brickhill's *Times* obituarist as saying that these three books 'may almost be said to constitute an anthology of the cardinal points or wartime heroism as it was received by the generation



of schoolboys of the post-war period.’<sup>732</sup> The quality which Brickhill praises above all others is tenacity, whether this is represented by Douglas Bader, continuing to fly after the loss of his legs, the Great Escapers, having ninety-eight tunnels discovered before the one that gets them out,<sup>733</sup> or the doggedness of Wallis and Gibson.

Brickhill is clear about the elitist nature of the story he tells in *The Dam Busters*, and its political and international implications at the time when he was writing. In his introduction, he writes:

This is a story of quality against quantity, demonstrating that exceptional skill and ingenuity can give one man or one unit the effectiveness of ten. It seems that this is a rather British synthesis of talents, and perhaps this story will reassure those who are dismayed by the fact that the British and their allies are outnumbered in this not too amiable world.<sup>734</sup>

The book tells the story of 617 Squadron, nicknamed ‘the Dam Busters’ after its initial mission, a raid on three dams in German territory. The book’s first eight chapters (out of twenty-one) are concerned with this initial raid. Of these, the first three tell the story of the invention of the squadron’s signature weapon, the ‘bouncing bomb’, the next three with the formation of the squadron under the leadership of Guy Gibson, and the next two with the raid itself.

The book draws on interviews with many of those involved, including Barnes Wallis, the bomb’s inventor, as well as on *Enemy Coast Ahead*, from which he takes much of his dialogue. The Gibson book inevitably didn’t tell the first part of the story; at the time he was writing, the existence of the bomb was still a secret, so he couldn’t mention Wallis by name (Gibson calls him ‘Jeff’, by association with his military contact Captain Joseph Summers, who is referred to by his nickname of ‘Mutt’). By contrast, Brickhill writes in some detail about the invention of the bomb, giving the book an unusual structure; we have three chapters of Wallis’s tribulations before Gibson, the book’s main protagonist, makes his first appearance.

Brickhill draws parallels between his two central characters, both of whom are shown as dealing with repeated technical difficulties, and the intransigence of officials; military administration in Gibson's case, civil servants in Wallis'. Brickhill's attitude to the latter is shown in the convoluted language he uses to refer to them; two particular recurring opponents of Wallis are dubbed 'the cautious ones'<sup>735</sup> while another is 'a potentate in the upper strata of government.'<sup>736</sup>

As the booklist above suggests, many of these books quickly became films, forming one of the most successful British subgenres of the 1950s. As with the books, the style was set by the first entry, *The Wooden Horse*. The 1950 film version drew on techniques associated with the documentary film, using some amateur actors and stark black-and white photography that allowed the insertion of actuality footage. As in the books that inspired them, the stress in these films is on the idea of authenticity and the sense of being let in on privileged information.

The screen rights to Brickhill's book were purchased soon after publication by Associated British's Director of Productions, Robert Clark, who was also responsible for appointing the central personnel – director Michael Anderson, actors Michael Redgrave (as Wallis) and Associated British contract player Richard Todd (as Gibson). Sherriff was selected as screenwriter over candidates including the playwrights Emlyn Williams and Terence Rattigan, novelist C.S. Forester, and Ealing veteran T.E.B. Clarke.<sup>737</sup>

As mentioned above, Sherriff's archive for this film is unusually full, and gives a strong idea of his working methods. His archive at the Surrey History Centre contains a detailed outline by Sherriff, undated but probably written in early 1952, and two screenplays, one dated 24/10/52, and a revised version, dated 18/12/53, which includes

further revisions dated 31/3/54. In between these two, the BFI holds a ‘Finally Revised Script’, dated 2/2/53, which also includes some undated pages from a later version.

As well as Sherriff’s own writing, the research materials include a description of the bomb itself (labeled ‘Top Secret’ – the actual design of the bomb was still classified information), notes from interviews with members of the 617 squadron, and three adaptations of the story – a radio version by Brickhill himself, broadcast on 8<sup>th</sup> May 1951, an unsigned ‘First Draft Outline Treatment’ dated 10<sup>th</sup> November 1951, and a script by Production Supervisor W.A. Whittaker, dated February 1952, misleadingly described on its title page as a ‘treatment’. All three of these tell the story of the book’s first eight chapters, but take different approaches to it, and cast an interesting light on the decisions later made by Sherriff in his screenplay.

Brickhill’s own radio adaptation is, as one might expect, the one that stays closest to the structure of his book. The Announcer’s script for the introduction emphasises both the exceptional nature of those who were involved in the operation, and the sense that the audience is sharing in material that had previously been secret:

This is the B.B.C. Home Service. Eight years ago this month a tiny force of British bombers, led by Wing Commander Guy Gibson, V.C., D.S.O., D.F.C., smashed the Moehne and Eder Dams. This operation, though carried out by only nineteen Lancasters, flooded the Ruhr with 350 million tons of water and did more damage to Hitler’s war effort than some thousand bomber raids. Tonight we present a feature programme which describes for the first time the chain of events which led to this historic raid and how it was planned and carried out.<sup>738</sup>

Much of the story is told through narration, taken mostly straight from the book. The script eliminates many of the clashes with civil servants, and sets up Sir Arthur Harris as Wallis’ chief opponent within the military:

NARRATOR: A few days later they were shown into the office of Air Marshal Sir Arthur Harris, chief of the Bomber Command. As

they crossed the threshold the crisp voice hit them like a shock wave.

HARRIS: Now what is it you want. [*sic* – this script is often light on punctuation, and especially question marks] I’m pestered too much by inventors.

WALLIS: Well, it’s the idea for destroying German dams, Air Marshal. The effects on Germany would be enormous.

HARRIS: I’ve heard about it. Sounds a bit far-fetched. My boys’ lives are too precious to be wasted by crazy notions.

WALLIS: Perhaps I could explain it to you more fully and then you could see my films which show that it actually works.

HARRIS GRUNTS AFFIRMATIVELY.<sup>739</sup>

As this extract suggests, Brickhill was not an especially skilled writer of dialogue; one has to feel some sympathy for the actor playing Wallis, trying to give a natural inflection to that awkward last line. Brickhill demonstrates his discomfort with writing dialogue by failing to notice a clumsy accidental rhyme in a line he gives to Air Vice Marshal Sir Ralph Cochrane, Gibson’s superior officer, in their first scene together:

COCHRANE: Ah, come in Gibson. Have a cigarette.  
 GIBSON: Thank you, sir.  
 COCHRANE: First I want to congratulate you on the bar to your D.S.O.  
 That’s a very good show.<sup>740</sup>

Despite the awkward dialogue, and heavy reliance on narration, Brickhill’s script is important to the development of the story in terms of his selection of incidents from his own book. Almost all of the scenes that he chooses to dramatise are present in the later treatments and scripts, and it’s clear that Sherriff, and the writers of the other treatments, all consulted this script (the ‘D.S.O/very good show’ line is even repeated in the W.A. Whittaker version.)<sup>741</sup> It’s also likely that this play, with its large radio audience, helped to define what were the important elements of the story, at least the British public’s mind.

These elements are sometimes a little unexpected, such as the death of Gibson's black Labrador, Nigger, just before the climactic raid, and Gibson's decision to have him buried while the raid is in progress:

CORPORAL: What was it the C.O. said to you before he went. [*sic*] You looked quite surprised.

POWELL: Funny, you know. He asked me to bury Nigger outside his office at midnight.

CORPORAL: Cor, that's a queer one. Wonder why.

POWELL: I dunno, but... May be [*sic*] he thought he and Nigger might be going into the ground about the same time.<sup>742</sup>

As this thesis will argue later, Sherriff uses this element to great effect in his treatment and screenplay. Similarly, he echoes, and improves on, the radio play's final scene, which Brickhill places as a duologue between Wallis and his military contact Mutt Summers:

WALLIS: I can't feel myself any more. Those boys over there aren't drinking to their own safe return. They're drinking to their friends who aren't coming back.

SUMMERS: You mustn't think of it like that, B.N. This raid tonight is something towards ending the war,

WALLIS: I can't think of it like that now. I just feel I wish I'd never started it.<sup>743</sup>

Sherriff reframes this as a scene between Wallis and Gibson, and rewrites it to provide the closing moments of his screenplay.

The November 1951 treatment is identified by Roland Wales<sup>744</sup> as one referred to in a 1954 article in *The Age* as having been prepared by Walter Mycroft, working with either Paul Brickhill or W.A. Whittaker, in October 1951,<sup>745</sup> and there seems no reason to dispute this. The treatment opens with an Introductory Note setting out its central concerns:

This 'first draft introductory treatment' is submitted as an experimental attack on the subject, an attempt to explore one possible line of adaptation; i.e. with the flyers as the main thread.

It takes the story as far as the successful test of the full-sized bomb, which was the immediate prelude to the raid itself.

[...]

The frustrations of Barnes Wallis have been condensed because it might be against public policy in the critical times ahead to suggest that a brilliant war-shortening invention could be held back by lack of imagination on the part of authority.<sup>746</sup>

As this note suggests, the treatment is told from the point of view of the flyers, and Gibson in particular; the treatment begins with his return from bombing Potsdam, and being asked to form a new Squadron. Wallis doesn't appear until page 13 (out of 29), when he is introduced to Gibson as the architect of this Squadron:

[Gibson] is straightening his tie and smartening himself up in expectation of meeting a very high up R.A.F officer.

Mix to close shot of a benign [*sic*] clerical-looking old gentleman with a mop of white hair. (Bit of business to be invented to hold the scene for a moment). There is a knock on the door out of shot. From the eye-line of the old gentleman (Barnes Wallis), we see the door open and Mutt Summers and Guy Gibson appear.

Gibson's face is a study as he tries to conceal his surprise. Summers turns to Gibson and says with a slight smile 'This is Mr. Barnes Wallis.'<sup>747</sup>

In this version, the audience discovers information at the point when Gibson does, with the treatment drawing a parallel between Wallis and the filmmakers: Gibson is convinced of the efficacy of the bouncing bomb by being shown films of it (because of the security issue, the audience doesn't see the films, just the lights from the screen as they 'flicker over the faces of the tiny audience')<sup>748</sup> and the document containing the plans for the bomb is described as 'a bound volume similar to a scenario'.<sup>749</sup>

The development of the bomb is then shown in an extended flashback with a voiceover from Wallis, with, as the introductory note suggested, little emphasis on the struggles with civil servants that are such a strong feature of both Brickhill's book and the finished film. Instead, it is Gibson who is shown battling small-mindedness within the military, both officious N.C.O.s, such as a 'tough -looking Sergeant of Service

Police' (described as a 'Billy Hartnell type')<sup>750</sup> and desk-bound bureaucrats, as when he chews out the 'wingless, bespectacled and meticulous' equipment officer who has failed to issue the new Squadron with uniforms:

The phone explodes in [the equipment Officer's] ear in a torrent of words.  
The equipment officer jumps as if shot and holds the phone away from his ear.  
He looks horrified and says 'But sir.' Another torrent cuts him off. 'But...'<sup>751</sup>

This treatment repeatedly emphasises the youth of the flyers; when we first see them, they are described as 'a group of very noticeably youthful, indeed boyish young men'<sup>752</sup> and two white-coated waiters comment on the disjunction between their age and experience. This youthfulness is referred to in the portrayal of this treatment's love interest, in the form of a relationship between one of the flyers, Flight Lieutenant Dave Shannon, and W.A.A.F. Officer Anne Fowler. The two meet at the first gathering of the flyers who will later make up the squadron, in a 'love-at-first-sight' moment:

Across the room Dave Shannon notices a slim, dark, pretty W.A.A.F. officer, sitting in a chair looking at magazines. She looks up and their eyes meet and hold for a moment., and it is obvious they both find each other interesting. Unconsciously he fingers the big moustache that disguises his very youthful face.<sup>753</sup>

The relationship forms a romantic sub-plot throughout the treatment, with Gibson frequently referring to Shannon's youth ('That moustache is stuck on. He doesn't shave yet.')<sup>754</sup> and Anne wondering about the nature of the target. This treatment also includes a few suggested moments of sexual banter, as when we see female pilots from the A.T.A getting out of the planes: 'A gag about little blondes and big bombers here.'<sup>755</sup>

This treatment also provides an early version of the scene, found in different guises throughout the writing process, in which either Gibson or his colleague Flying Officer Frederick Spafford develops the idea for the device that allowed the flyers to determine that they were flying at the correct height. This involved two lights, one at

each end of the plane, focused so that the beams would converge on the ground (or water) when the plane had descended to the appropriate height. Brickhill had started the idea that this was based on watching the two spotlights converging on a striptease act at an ENSA show, which led to each subsequent approach to the script including a different version of this fictitious scene. Mycroft also locates it at an ENSA show, but makes the performer a clown, rather than a stripper:

The curtains then open on a darkened stage. A spotlight flicks on, throwing a pool of light on the floor of the stage. A clown jumps into the pool of light. Suddenly another flashlight flicks on from the other side of the hall, spilling another pool of light nearly on the floor of the stage. (this is the adaptation of the famous Fratellinis act).

Cut to long shot of the audience laughing. Closer shot. We see one man who is not laughing. He is gazing at the act with intense seriousness. It is Spafford. Suddenly he looks excited. He moves through a protesting row to Gibson, seated in the middle. He whispers excitedly into Gibson's ear. Gibson listens. His smile fades and he frowns slightly as if puzzled and then assumes a very intent expression. He turns and asks Spafford a question (none of this conversation can be heard).<sup>756</sup>

As we will see later, both W.A. Whittaker and Sherriff were to use variations of this scene, in ways which are indicative of their approaches to the material. In this case, it is telling that the audience is not given any information about what Spafford is saying to Gibson; as with Gibson's watching of the films of the bouncing bomb, we are reminded that not all information is to be shared.

The treatment ends with the last, successful test of the bomb, and a '[l]ong shot of Wallis dancing crazily in the rain'<sup>757</sup> and a final, rather perfunctory note about 'the sequences dealing with the hurry and tension of the last days of final preparation and then the great drama of the raid itself.'<sup>758</sup>

W.A. Whittaker's 'treatment' is similar to Mycroft's in focussing on the flyers rather than Wallis; it uses the same device of Wallis telling the backstory in a meeting with Gibson. Whittaker doesn't even consider the scene in which this happens to be



worth writing; he notes that ‘I have for the moment jumped the scene between Gibson and Barnes Wallis in order to continue quickly with the Squadron story. The contents of this scene are known and do not present great difficulty as very little dialogue is involved.’<sup>759</sup>

Whittaker’s treatment is, if anything, more favourable to the military (or, at least, its leaders) than Mycroft’s: the screenplay opens at the operations room at Bomber Command where there is ‘a quiet atmosphere of efficiency and a feeling of high command and great results’,<sup>760</sup> where even Sir Arthur Harris is portrayed as a friend to the enterprise:

HARRIS: I’ve got a job for you. Rather special. Do you know this chap Barnes Wallis?  
COCHRANE: I’ve known him about 20 years.  
HARRIS: He’s crazy, of course – all inventors are. But he’s got an idea that seems to have a fair chance of coming off. At all events he’s convinced me, and the Chief of Staff and the Prime Minister are both enthusiastic about it.<sup>761</sup>

By contrast with his positive view of the officer class, Whittaker’s screenplay shows internal tensions among the flyers; as in the November 1951 treatment, Gibson is shown dealing with military bureaucracy, as well as publicly shaming airmen who have breached security in postcards home.

The romantic subplot between Dave Shannon and Anne Fowler is present, with an added ‘meet-cute’ where they are introduced by Anne’s brother Bob, a young Pilot Officer and colleague of Shannon’s. Later, Anne Fowler is used to remind us of the dangers of low-flying:

ANNE: But you’re not going to attack a target like that?  
SHANNON: (after a slight pause) Maybe.  
ANNE: (almost protecting) But – but isn’t that taking an awful risk?  
SHANNON: That’s something of an understatement.<sup>762</sup>

Humour is far more a feature of Whittaker’s version than any other. The ENSA scene appears, but this time the performer is neither a stripper nor a clown but the comic

singer 'Miss Tessie O'Shea!' or 'at any event... someone of the "Guest Star" type.'<sup>763</sup>

There are moments of slapstick, as when a village policeman falls off his bicycle after a Lancaster practices low flying over him, and gags inserted at surprising points, as when Gibson, Wallis and Robert Hay are searching for fragments of bomb casing after one of their unsuccessful tests:

Bob Hay stops suddenly. Feels with his feet.

HAY: I've got something.

He fishes up something between his toes, and takes it in his hand. In CLOSE-UP we see a jagged thick piece of china with inscribed: [*sic*]

'A Present from Margate'<sup>764</sup>

The screenplay ends with 'a Churchillian figure (back to Camera)' addressing a 'distinguished group of British and American Service Officers and Civilians' with a tribute to the flyers 'while deploring the useless destruction brought about by the machinations of evil men',<sup>765</sup> followed by Gibson's return home. Whittaker's final note makes clear that there was still debate going on among the filmmakers about the best way to deal with the effects of the raid:

I feel this is the proper end of the story. The losses in the squadron will have been well established and to dwell of the destruction and loss of life in Germany would, I think, be a mistake. The effect of the destruction of the dams will have been well covered in the scene not yet written at the first meeting of Gibson and Barnes Wallis.<sup>766</sup>

### **Sherriff's Treatment**

The presence of these three scripts in Sherriff's archive makes it clear that he'd read them before making his own first attempt at an outline. His own 23-page treatment uses ideas from all three of these, but takes a very different approach, establishing the

tone and structure that will finally define the finished film. In particular, Sherriff makes three crucial decisions.

The first is to reject the flashback structure of the Mycroft and Whittaker treatments, and to return to the chronological structure of Brickhill's book. Sherriff's own note at the end of the treatment shows that he was uncertain how this would be received:

It may appear from the above outline that too much attention has been given to the adventures of Barnes Wallis (his difficulties in perfecting the bomb – creating official interest etc.) at the expense of the formation of the Squadron and the raid itself. This is because the earlier scenes covering the Barnes Wallis episodes need more space in the outline than they will actually occupy on the screen. Broadly speaking, the picture falls into three parts of approximately even length:-

Part 1. From the earliest Barnes Wallis experiments to the final instructions to go ahead.

Part 2: From the formation of the Squadron until the briefing scenes on the night of the raid,

Part 3: From the take-off on the night of the raid until the return at dawn.

The intention is to tell a balanced story of an achievement that begins in the mind of a scientist, through all the intricate plans and preparations in the hands of administrative officials and senior officers to the final phase when success or failure rests in the hands of young airmen.<sup>767</sup>

In adopting this structure, Sherriff was setting himself one of the most difficult technical tasks of his career, and one which he solves by being both quite conservative, and surprisingly radical.

To take the conservative part first, a number of 1950s World War Two films use a two-part structure whereby roughly the first half of the film is taken up with the formation of a plan, which is then carried out in the second half. This applies especially to those films dealing with covert operations, such as *I Was Monty's Double*, or escape, such as *The Wooden Horse*. This allows for a celebration of both parts of the British

war effort; brains in the first half, brawn in the second. To this extent, Sherriff's outline was following in an established pattern.

Where *The Dam Busters* differs from the above examples is in the fact that the shift from planning to action involves a change in protagonist. In, for instance, *The Wooden Horse*, those doing the planning and those doing the escaping are the same people. In following the structure of Brickhill's book, Sherriff was doing something quite unusual, and setting himself a considerable structural challenge. Like *The Way to the Stars*, *The Dam Busters* tells two stories; practically changing protagonists halfway through. Where Rattigan had used physical objects to link the two stories, Sherriff uses parallel scenes, setting up subliminal connections between his two central characters.

Sherriff's second major decision is to eliminate the love interest between Dave Shannon and Anne Fowler, and indeed to take out all significant female characters except Mrs. Wallis. W.A. Whittaker's account of a script meeting on 7 March 1952 shows that this was one of the first things that Sherriff decided: 'He feels that [the story] should be told simply and naturally, with no recourse to tricks of any sort. [...] It was also agreed that there should be no effort to introduce a feminine influence.'<sup>768</sup>

Again, Sherriff was being both conservative and radical here. While the British World War Two film is, by its nature, a very masculine genre (the release of *The Dam Busters* even prompted an article by F. Leslie Withers in the *Sunday Mercury* commenting on this),<sup>769</sup> those films that dealt with flyers had generally been the exceptions to this. Films made during and just after the war, such as *The Way to the Stars* (1945) and *A Matter of Life and Death* (1946), emphasise flyers' relationships with wives and lovers. Indeed, Guy Gibson himself described this contrast between

danger and domesticity as one of the defining features of the aviators' life, as distinct from that of other combatants:

Peace and war are vastly different. But the atmosphere our crews live in is shared by their next of kin. One moment they are together living their own lives and happy; a man and his wife walking hand in hand down a country lane may in a few hours be separated, perhaps for ever.<sup>770</sup>

Sherriff's elimination of 'feminine influence' was going against at least some of the expectations of his audience, especially given the well-publicised nature of the events depicted. The *Liverpool Post's* London film critic made this point when reviewing the finished film:

All that is missing in 'The Dam Busters' is the human element. I would not have it otherwise. The film's business was with the deed, not with the feelings of those who did it, though some may think it topples over backward in not allowing a pretty W.A.A.F. to kiss Dave Shannon farewell (as she actually did, and married him when he returned).<sup>771</sup>

The anonymous reviewer makes an important point; Sherriff's treatment and scripts are focused strongly on the mission, and the difficulties involved in carrying it out. The 'feelings of those who did it' are present, but only at the start, in Wallis' domestic life, and at the very end. Sherriff's elimination of 'feminine influence' is part of this focus.

The third major change, and one which became more pronounced as Sherriff continued the rewriting, was the almost complete elimination of humour. There are no slapstick moments with policemen on bicycles, no Tessie O'Shea-style guest stars, no Hartnell-ish N.C.O.s. There are jokes in this treatment, and in the later screenplays, but they are carefully placed, and tend to be associated with Barnes Wallis, rather than the flyers. In this respect, Sherriff was playing down the services humour which was present in many other British WW2 films, and, indeed, in his own earlier writing, in keeping with his stated desire to tell the story 'simply and naturally'.

One effect of Sherriff's structural approach is that the film starts, not in the military *milieux* of Whitaker and Mycroft's treatments, but in a typically (for Sherriff) idyllic rural setting:

Scene 1 A quiet road

Near Effingham in Surrey.

It is a fine spring evening in 1942, and as the following scenes are played the light falls and darkness comes.

A small car stops outside a house. It is the house of Barnes Wallis and the man who gets out of the car and goes to the gate is the Family Doctor.<sup>772</sup>

This opening immediately shows two aspects of Sherriff's approach. The first is a purely technical one; the Doctor will, together with Mrs. Wallis, serve as a source of exposition, like the servants in an Ibsen play. (Sherriff, in keeping with the principle of the late point of attack, starts his outline a little way into Brickhill's book, after Wallis has had the initial inspiration for the bouncing bomb.)

More subtly, this is the first moment where Sherriff starts to establish the subliminal links between Wallis and Gibson that will serve to tie together the screenplay's unusual structure. At the film's climax, the necessity of carrying out the raid before the light runs out will be a major plot element; here we see Wallis, testing out his ideas in the garden, having to deal with the same problem on a smaller scale, as he 'carries on with his experiment while sufficient light remains.'<sup>773</sup>

Wallis is shown developing his idea for the bomb, and dealing with recalcitrant officials, in keeping with a 1950s cynicism about civil servants. This reaches a dramatic climax when Wallis, following successful tests of design, asks for the resources to try out a full-size prototype:

Scene 15 Ministry of Supply

The Official is adamant. What is the use of experimenting with a dummy when there is no present hope of taking the matter further? And a Wellington Bomber; they are worth their weight in gold. What argument can he advance to secure the use of one for Wallis?

‘If you told them I invented it?’ says Wallis. ‘Don’t you think that might help?’<sup>774</sup>

This is one of the very few jokes in the treatment (as John Ramsden points out, in the finished film, it gives the first laugh, roughly eighteen minutes in)<sup>775</sup> and it shows several things, including Sherriff’s theatrical instinct for a strong curtain line. More significantly, the line marks a change in the audience’s perception of Wallis, who from this point onwards ceases to be the eccentric underdog and becomes a respected scientist. In this respect, Sherriff is employing a well-made playwright’s trick of using a piece of information – in this case, Wallis’ true status as an inventor - known to one character (and to most of the audience) but not to the other.

The administrative deadlock is broken when Mutt Summers suggests taking Wallis’ idea directly to Chief Marshall Arthur Harris, Head of Bomber Command:

Scene 21 Bomber Command Headquarters, near High Wyckham (sic)  
Presently Harris comes out of his office with a visitor. Not seeing Wallis and Summers he goes on talking to the visitor about ‘Another of these confounded inventors’ coming to see him this afternoon. He is sick and tired of them, and this institutional introduction is not encouraging to Wallis.<sup>776</sup>

Sherriff here uses an overheard conversation to place important information; this moment also serves to establish Arthur Harris as the major antagonist of this section. The winning round of Harris starts the film’s second section, with another theatrical curtain line as Harris briefs Air Vice Marshall Sir Ralph Cochrane:

Scene 30 Bomber Command Headquarters  
[...]  
‘A scientist named Wallis has produced a strange bomb which look as if it might work, and the first thing they need is a squadron of the best available men.’ Cochrane enquires who Harris has in mind for leading it and Harris says ‘Gibson’.<sup>777</sup>

The scene of the idea of the converging spotlights is present in this outline, although Sherriff uses it in a different way from earlier versions. Where Mycroft had referenced a clown show, and Whittaker had seen an opportunity for a guest star,

Sherriff places the emphasis firmly on the audience members, and on Gibson in particular:

Scene 48 West End Theatre

Having an hour to spare before catching their train to the North, Gibson and Hay go to a Music Hall. As they sit watching, Gibson begins to be interested in the way in which the spotlights are trained from the Upper Circle and Wings to fall exactly on the actress on the stage. He glances at Hay who appears more interested in the entertainment than in the thought that is maturing in Gibson's mind.<sup>778</sup>

Sherriff streamlines the story by making the idea Gibson's rather than Spafford's; he also expends very little energy on establishing what the show actually is, seeming unclear as to whether they're in a 'West End Theatre' or a 'Music Hall'.

The final section of Sherriff's outline is characterised by an emphasis on time, and on the changing phases of the moon. After an unsuccessful test at Reculver, which the outline carefully dates as occurring on 22<sup>nd</sup> April, 1943, Wallis has a final week to save the project. In a sequence that shows the influence of wartime documentaries, we see various factories working on the disparate parts that are needed for the raid:

Scene 54 Aircraft Factory (A.V. Roe and Co.)

Night shift; a slim new moon. A production line of Lancasters being modified; strange gear underneath.

Scene 55 Another Factory

The bombs are finally being assembled. (These factory scenes on night shift will stress the urgency.)

Scene 56

[...] the moon is nearing its first quarter.<sup>779</sup>

This stress on the importance of the moon helps to create one of the outline's more surprising aspects; a magical, almost pagan, sensibility, that places great importance on symbolism and sacrifice. This reaches its peak with the film's emotional climax, the death of Gibson's dog, Nigger, immediately before the raid:

Scene 74 Gibson's Room

As Gibson walks in he is met by his batman who breaks the news to him that his dog, Nigger, has been killed. It is hard for Gibson to master his feelings; he loved Nigger who was his constant companion. There is something ominous for this to happen at such a moment. He asks his batman to bury



Nigger outside his quarters at midnight; the time he will be over the Moehne Dam.<sup>780</sup>

This midnight burial, simultaneous with the raid, turns Nigger into a sacrificial animal, who dies so that the mission may succeed. The dog serves as a multi-levelled symbol; of the feelings that must be mastered if war is to be won, (his colouring inevitably suggests the Churchillian ‘black dog’ of depression),<sup>781</sup> of the dead comrades that the raid will leave and, ultimately, of death itself. In his 24/10/52 version of the screenplay, Sherriff even gives us a ‘dog’s-eye-view’ of the preparations, shortly before the animal’s death:

The Camera follows the dog across the airfield – seeing through the dog’s eyes the manifold activities of the ground crew, intent upon their tasks; bomb loading, fueling, testing etc.<sup>782</sup>

For a writer preoccupied with warfare, Sherriff shows remarkably little combat in his work. *Journey’s End* features a single German soldier, who’s already a prisoner when we first see him, *Lady Hamilton* hardly shows us any sea battles; only in the Technicolor spectacle of *The Four Feathers* do we ever see full-scale combat. *The Dam Busters* takes this to an extreme; both combat and death are present throughout, but until almost the end of the film, neither are seen at all, and no (human) character dies onscreen. The death of Nigger at this significant point carries a symbolic weight that stands in for the death that is constantly present, but never seen.

Sherriff’s brief description of the film’s final sequence, the raid itself, shows that he was sensitive to this question, and particularly how to show the effects of the raids on the enemy:

It is not possible at present to make a detailed scene sequence of the raid because much of it is technical and dependent upon facilities not yet decided. But it is intended to present the whole of the episode in exact historic detail with all the realism possible on the screen.

[...]

It is not intended to show the results of the raid in human terms on the German side.<sup>783</sup>

## Sherriff's Screenplays

According to Whittaker, Sherriff delivered his final complete script on 15 July.<sup>784</sup> This version hasn't survived, so the next script that we have is Sherriff's revision of 24 October.

This screenplay follows Sherriff's original outline very closely, to the extent of reproducing the opening description almost verbatim. Sherriff adds a joke about the Doctor knocking stones off Wallis' garden wall:

The drive is difficult to negotiate from the narrow road: the doctor has to reverse to get in, and in doing so knocks a couple of whitewashed stones off the loosely built wall beside the gate.<sup>785</sup>

Sherriff repeats the moment as the Doctor leaves, dislodging two more stones, which Wallis turns to replace as the car disappears. On one level, this is another moment in which Sherriff is establishing a subliminal connection between Wallis and Gibson – the Doctor's damaging of the wall is a foreshadowing of the destruction of the dams. This moment, and Mrs. Wallis' warning to the Doctor that 'You're bound to knock it down again when you go out.'<sup>786</sup> survive into the 'Finally Revised Script' of 2/2/53 but not into later revisions – presumably Sherriff (or somebody else) felt that the humour was at odds with the tone of this scene.

Wallis is introduced through expositional dialogue between Mrs. Wallis and the Doctor before we first see the man himself, we then see Wallis experimenting in the garden before he explains his plan to the Doctor. The use of this character as a focus for expositional dialogue, filling the same function that Gibson does in the Mycroft and Whittaker versions, is a little clumsy (tellingly, the Doctor doesn't appear again after this scene) as well as stretching credibility; in real life, Wallis would never discuss such

a secret plan with a civilian, a point mentioned by at least one contemporary reviewer.<sup>787</sup> Sherriff may have been recalling a point made by William Archer that doctors make a good audience for exposition as ‘the family physician is the professional confidant of real life.’<sup>788</sup>

Sherriff carefully prepares us for the switch in protagonist by withholding certain information until the second section of the film:

(Note: It will be recalled that no picture of these trials are [*sic*] shown in the scene where Wallis ran the films for Harris. In that case the Camera only showed Harris’ reactions. In this case it is vital that the audience must share, as far as possible, in Gibson’s first view of the weapon that he is to control.)<sup>789</sup>

Sherriff is here combining the structure of Brickhill’s original book with that of the Mycroft and Whittaker treatments – in the first section of the screenplay, we were allowed to sympathise with Wallis’ enthusiasm without being fully allowed in to what his idea was. It is only when our identification switches over to Gibson that we are given the full information.

Sherriff continues the process of establishing the connection between Wallis and Gibson in their tenacity in the face of adversity. At one point, Wallis is shown describing his resistance from Whitehall officials:

OFFICIAL: Of course it might help if you could get the support of somebody with personal influence. Why not go and see Sir Edward Hughes?  
WALLIS: I’ve seen him twice.  
OFFICIAL: Or Sir George Burnett?  
WALLIS: I’ve seen him three times.  
OFFICIAL: Oh – (he considers for a moment). Well, then of course there’s Lord Mansell...  
WALLIS: I sat outside his office all yesterday morning – he was too busy.  
OFFICIAL: I see. Then why not Sir Geoffrey Haynes?  
WALLIS: I sat outside his office all the afternoon.<sup>790</sup>

The dialogue here is contrapuntal and mannered, but not in the manner that one might expect. Most screenwriters would have composed this scene by the ‘rule of

three', having the official give three names, with Wallis' punchline on the third. By giving us four names, in two groups of two, Sherriff emphasises the drawn-out nature of Wallis' quest. This acts as a foreshadowing of the sequence of the raid, in which Sherriff deliberately avoids conventional dramatic build-ups, making us uncertain as to how many bombs are going to be dropped before the one that demolishes the dam (in the end, the Moehne dam is destroyed by the fourth bomb, the Eder by the third).

Sherriff also connects the two men by their restrained use of language; both are shown trying to contain their feelings, rather than expressing the anger that's present in the original outline. Both also use a variation of the line 'I'll do my best'; Wallis when told he has two months to prepare the bomb,<sup>791</sup> Gibson (using the plural) after his first meeting with Wallis.<sup>792</sup> This line, with its suggestion of plucky amateurism (and of the Boy Scouts), is an important one in the British war film of this period,<sup>793</sup> and says something about the deliberately underplayed tone of the whole film. The style of dialogue associated with Wallis and Gibson is neatly summed up by an exchange between them after an unsuccessful trial of the bomb:

WALLIS: Why didn't you come and watch with me?  
 GIBSON: Oh, well, I know how you must have been feeling. I guessed you'd rather be alone. (pause). It's the devil, isn't it?  
 WALLIS: Yes. It is rather.<sup>794</sup>

(John Ramsden points out that Wallis' 'It is, rather' also appears in *Journey's End*, showing the consistency of Sherriff's dialogue style.)<sup>795</sup>

Sherriff connects the first and second sections of the film by his use of imagery drawn from games, toys and, later in the film, sport. At the start of the film, Wallis' plan is described in terms of a children's game; his daughter Elizabeth says 'I've got to help Daddy with the marble game'<sup>796</sup> while the Doctor observes that 'he seems to be having a fine old game out there.'<sup>797</sup> Wallis himself says that he got the idea for the bomb from watching 'some boys playing ducks and drakes with stones.'<sup>798</sup> As the

screenplay continues, and the plan becomes larger, the imagery of games changes to that of sport: Arthur Harris is introduced talking to a colleague about the latter's son's match at school, two of the flyers fill in time before the raid by 'talking about cricket as a safe subject far removed from the business at hand.'<sup>799</sup> This association of warfare and sport peaks with one of Wallis' infrequent jokes, after the bomb's final successful test:

3 <sup>rd</sup> OBSERVER:	Well, Mr. Wallis. It must be a wonderful feeling to achieve a thing like this; to conceive something absolutely unheard of and carry it through with flying colours. How on earth did you ever get the idea?
WALLIS:	(modestly) Well, to be quite honest, it wasn't really my idea at all. I got it from Nelson.
2 <sup>nd</sup> OBSERVER:	(after a puzzled silence) Nelson, you say?
WALLIS:	Yes. He discovered that under certain conditions he got much more destructive results by making his cannon balls ricochet off the sea before hitting the enemy ships. Usually he pitched them quite short – about two thirds of the way between his guns and the target but there's some evidence to suggest that during the Battle of the Nile he dismissed the French Flagship with a Yorker.

The OBSERVER looks concerned. He fears that the strain has been too much for WALLIS.<sup>800</sup>

This sequence is clearly pure Sherriff, linking Wallis with the Nelson of *That Hamilton Woman*, emphasising the continuity of both British sport and British warfare, and connecting two of his favourite subjects, cricket and military life, a link which had been a feature of his writing since *Journey's End*.

This section of *The Dam Busters* between Gibson's introduction and the final raid shares a number of stylistic features with that play, including the association of war with school. When the Squadron is first assembled, Sherriff describes the atmosphere as 'rather like the first evening of a new term at a Public School.'<sup>801</sup> ('Evening' is a significant word here; Sherriff's default image is of a boarding school.) The film also shares with the play a preoccupation with meals (we see an Accountant Officer trying

and failing to get bacon and eggs with the flyers) and with waiting. One of the most effective sequences in this screenplay is a sequence of vignettes of the individual flyers as they prepare for the raid. Sherriff is emphatic about the visual nature of these scenes:

(Note: It is intended that the following scenes – up till the moment of take-off – should rely as little as possible on the spoken word.

As the moment for departure approaches, and the tension grows, less and less is said.)

(a) YOUNG, already dressed, is tidying his table; stacking the books and papers in neat piles. His BATMAN is turning back the bed. The BATMAN takes a brief look round and exits. YOUNG picks up an identification tag and straps it round his wrist.

(b) HOPGOOD, in his room alone, is finishing a letter. He glances at his watch, completes and seals his letter, and gets up to dress.

(c) MAUDSLAY is lying on his bed. He looks at his watch, gets up, and, wandering to his table, begins to wind a small clock.

(d) MARTIN and LEGGO have almost dressed. They have pulled on their flying boots. MARTIN is putting on an extra sweater. He looks rather bulky with all his extra clothes.

LEGGO: If you come floating down on the end of a parachute, they'll think you're a stuffed decoy.

MARTIN: We'll be too low to bail out on this trip

LEGGO's polo-neck sweater is white. MARTIN's black. MARTIN stuffs his mascot in his pocket, a little Koala bear about four inches high, grey-furred with black button eyes.

(e) GIBSON, in his office, is signing a few papers. He makes a final tidy up. He picks up a dog's leash and drops it into the waste paper basket.<sup>802</sup>

Sherriff concludes his screenplay with a dialogue scene between the two protagonists, in which the human cost of the action is discussed for the first time. Typically, the screenplay ends with an unstated intention, and a return to military routine:

GIBSON: ([H]e looks at WALLIS' haggard face and smiles.) You've had a worse night than any of us. You go and find the doctor and ask for one of his sleeping pills.

WALLIS: Aren't you going to turn in?

GIBSON: I've got to write some letters first.

He goes on down the steps. WALLIS watches him, then wearily continues on his way up.

[...]  
GIBSON goes out into the bright sunlight and makes his way down the road to his quarters.  
A YOUNG AIRCRAFTSMAN, passing by, gives the Officer a smart salute.  
GIBSON returns it, and walks on alone.

THE END<sup>803</sup>

The subtext of Gibson's last line is less clear to us than it must have been to the film's original audience, many of whom would have had personal experience of receiving letters of condolence from a commanding officer. Where the radio play had placed this scene between Wallis and Summers, Sherriff uses it as a *scène à faire* for both Wallis and Gibson, and for the relationship between them, concluding both of their stories in the film's final moments.

A smaller example of Sherriff's technique is shown by the way in which he borrows a trick from Terence Rattigan. In *French Without Tears*, Rattigan had used the device of having two characters make a bet on the outcome of a scene, as a way of giving the scene (and, in this case, the act) a strong curtain line.<sup>804</sup> Sherriff physicalises the same technique in a sequence when Wallis and Mutt Summers are watching the bomb's final test before their meeting with Sir Arthur Harris. Summers has bet Wallis half a crown that the bomb won't work:

As SUMMERS peers down, he sees one big splash on the water. Assuming that the bomb has sunk, he swings a hand round in WALLIS's direction to collect his half crown.

SUMMERS: It's sunk.

But WALLIS is intently watching the strip of sea beneath them. His face lights up in triumph as a second splash is seen, a hundred yards or so ahead of the first.

WALLIS: (pointing) Look!

SUMMERS looks down in astonishment; he veers off a little and the long strip of water is clearly seen. A third and fourth splash appear – in a dead straight line: receding into the distance.

WALLIS: (exultant) It's all right! - it works!

SUMMERS digs into his pocket for half-a-crown; he is very happy to pay.<sup>805</sup>

The later script revisions maintain the structure of this screenplay, with changes coming mostly in the form of edits and subtle rewrites. For instance, the 'Wellington bomber' joke is honed through revision, showing the precision with which Sherriff approached dialogue. In the so-called 'Finally Revised Script', dated 2/2/53, 'Don't you think...' is changed to 'Do you think...'<sup>806</sup>, making Wallis' question less impertinent and more disingenuous. In his revised script of 18/12/53, Sherriff finally comes up with the definitive version: 'If you told them I designed it – do you think that might help?'<sup>807</sup> The change from 'invented' to 'designed' is small but significant – Sherriff presumably realised that, in this film, the word 'invented' must only ever be applied to the bouncing bomb. (He also took out a scene in which Wallis' invention of the Wellington bomber was mentioned before this moment, thus pre-empting the joke.)<sup>808</sup>

In the 'Finally Revised Script' of 2/2/53, Sherriff sets up another correspondence between the first and second sections of the film when he uses Wallis' tests at Harmondsworth to provide a foreshadowing of the final raid:

Another charge is detonated. This time the cleft is narrower, but it breaches the wall successfully and out pours the water. The CAMERA holds this longer than the previous experiments, showing results that will later prove to be very similar to the actual destruction of the Moehne dam.<sup>809</sup>

One significant change in the drafts, carrying on into the finished film, concerns the portrayal of Sir Arthur Harris, who had read and disliked Sherriff's first version of the script. Harris is written as more sympathetic to Wallis as the revisions carry on,



and even more so in the finished film. The script in the BFI Archive has an Elstree Studios inter-Departmental Communication tucked into it at the point where Harris appears:

To: Mr. Alistair Bell  
From: Walter C. Mycroft

26<sup>th</sup> May 1954

Dear Mr. Bell,

THE DAM BUSTERS

Please see me about the Harris scene (“bouncing bomb”) in above script.

Yours sincerely,  
Walter C. Mycroft<sup>810</sup>

We know from the Sherriff Archive that there was at least one more rewrite of the script in between that in the BFI Archive and Mycroft’s memo. At any rate, it’s reasonable to conclude, from what we know about Mycroft, that he was involved in the softening of the film’s portrayal of Harris, who in the finished film has almost entirely lost the antagonism to the project that he had in earlier versions.

Contemporary reviews of the film are generally very favourable to Sherriff’s screenplay, if sometimes a little grudging: the *Spectator* reviewer wrote that ‘R.C. Sherriff can be thanked for a sensible, almost too sensible script.’<sup>811</sup> Many reviewers commented on Sherriff’s capture of military dialogue, comparing it with that of other war films of the period. Dennis W. Clarke summed this up well in the *Tatler*:

R.C. Sherriff’s script is the key. Here, at last, is recognition that Service people on operations talk mostly - if they talk at all – of the job in hand and are not always making music-hall jokes about the rations or ‘the missus’. It is curious that it had to be Sherriff, a veteran of the 14-18 war, who broke this tiresome script-writers’ convention.<sup>812</sup>

A number of reviewers also praised Sherriff’s use of non-verbal scenes, Barbara Verecker writing in *Queen* that ‘[i]t is in these scenes, when the emotion is implied

rather than stated, that the film goes deepest and is most moving.’<sup>813</sup> Dilys Powell in the *Sunday Times* made a similar point when she wrote that it was ‘worth noting to what an extent the author has used silence, rests in the dialogue.’<sup>814</sup>

*The Dam Busters* was Sherriff’s last filmed screenplay, and the last great success of his writing career; although other screenplays were commissioned, especially after the success of the film, none were filmed. It encapsulates many of the concerns of his screenwriting- war, duty, the nature of Englishness – as well as showing his longstanding technical concerns with structure and adaptation. It marks the way in which the concerns that he had been working with since *Journey’s End* (and before) could be re-examined and reworked for a new generation and serves as an appropriate end to his screenwriting career.

### **Notes on *Dunkirk***

One project that Sherriff worked on after *The Dam Busters* was the Ealing Studios production *Dunkirk*. Sherriff’s draft screenplay was not used for the finished film; in a detail that seems almost too historically apt, one reason for this may have been the comments made by the young theatre critic Kenneth Tynan, then working as a Script Editor at Ealing, who criticised the screenplay’s ignoring of the French element, and argued that the screenplay was ‘a good adventure story “The Big Retreat” but it isn’t “Dunkirk”’.<sup>815</sup> Sherriff responded to studio criticism of his script by writing, on the seventeenth of May 1956, a twenty-page letter which summed up some of his views on scriptwriting in general and screenplays in particular. It is worth quoting some of this, as a demonstration of the extent to which Sherriff’s craftsmanship derived from the Archer tradition.

Firstly, there is the dislike of writing which draws attention to itself:

[I]n telling the story on the screen, we are bound in advance to certain obligations. We have to tell the truth and nothing but the truth; the treatment has to be straightforward and sincere, with none of the smart dramatic tricks and artificial tricks of invention that belong to the stock in trade of less exacting stories.<sup>816</sup>

There is the importance of structure, particularly the three-act structure, with its beginning and end in equilibrium, separated by a middle act in flux:

My first concern of course was the structure; to give a fair balance to each of its different aspects; to avoid over-emphasis in one direction at the expense of others, and to give the result a dramatic form.<sup>817</sup>

If the dramatic form of the Military Campaign can be stated in a few words, it would be this: Order is reduced to chaos by the German attack: chaos threatens complete disaster, but order, at the last moment, is snatched back from chaos in the Dunkirk bridgehead, and saves the day.<sup>818</sup>

There is the use of character in relation to story:

I might here quote the old saying that every story falls into one of two classes: those in which the characters control the events, and those in which the events take command of the characters. The story of Dunkirk clearly falls into the second group [...]<sup>819</sup>

There is the use of backstory only when it helps the narrative:

I believe that we should only give our audience information about the background of a character so far as it informs the behaviour of that character in the story we are telling.<sup>820</sup>

When an audience is interested in a character, they subconsciously fill in his background. They will supply him with a better girl friend than we can.<sup>821</sup>

There is the importance of showing characters making a choice. The following paragraph was written in response to a suggestion that the Mayor of Dunkirk be introduced as a character:

And where would be the drama? - If the Mayor of Dunkirk had been confronted by a crucial decision; a choice between the alternatives of allowing the British Army to embark from Dunkirk at the expense of the destruction of his town, or of saving his town by refusing the army admission [...] – then indeed there would be drama. But the Mayor of Dunkirk could have had no choice, and no decision to make.<sup>822</sup>

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, there is the sense of a screenplay as a controlled relationship with the audience:

All through the previous sequences we have been building up, stage by stage, scene by scene towards the climax on the Dunkirk beaches.

We have seen the British army fighting its way towards the sea; we have seen the small boats preparing and setting out for the hazardous rescue. If we have succeeded, as we hope, the audience will be keyed up with expectancy; their whole attention and whole desire is to witness the dramatic climax on the beaches.

If, at this point, we break off to play a relatively unimportant scene between two Frenchmen whom we have not seen before and shall not see again [...] then I feel sure that the sturdy British public will tell the mayor of Dunkirk to go chase himself.<sup>823</sup>

Written towards the end of his career, and following one of his greatest successes, this letter marks the closest that Sherriff ever came to writing a manifesto of his craft. What is striking is the extent to which this manifesto clearly derives from his own apprenticeship as a playwright, and his reading of William Archer. Sherriff's ideas are clearly in a direct line from Archer's, sometimes even echoing individual passages. For instance, there is the 'order-chaos-order' three-act structure:

There is a peculiar interest in watching the rise and development out of nothing, as it were, of a dramatic complication. [...] 'From calm, to storm, to calm' is its characteristic formula; whether the concluding calm be one of life and serenity or of despair and death.<sup>824</sup>

There is the importance of choice:

If the essence of drama is crisis, it follows that nothing can be more dramatic than a momentous choice, which may make or mar both the character and the fortune of the chooser and others. There is an element of choice in all action which is, or seems to be, the product of free will: but there is a particular crispness of effect when two alternatives are clearly formulated, and the choice is made after a mental struggle, accentuated, perhaps, by impassioned advocacy of the conflicting interests.<sup>825</sup>

Above all, there is the process by which the mind of the audience is controlled, moment to moment:

It is his [the dramatist's] business to play upon the collective mind of his audience as upon a keyboard – to arouse just the right order and measure of anticipation, and fulfil it, or outdo it, in just the right measure at just the right time. The skill of the dramatist, as distinct from his genius or inspiration, lies in the correctness of his insight into the mind of his audience.<sup>826</sup>

Here, at the end of his screenwriting career, Sherriff returns to the principles of the well-made play that he learnt at the beginning of it, and which he maintained throughout his writing for both stage and screen, in terms that could have come from his first mentor.

## Conclusion

*The Dam Busters* makes an appropriate end-point for this thesis, as the culmination of a certain kind of British cinema, and also of the theatre from which it had partly come. The film emphasises techniques that we have come to associate with the well-made play; a dramaturgy based on signposting and reincorporation (even across two protagonists), careful exposition and release of information so that the audience knows more than, less than, or as much as the characters, according to which is most effective, the use and reuse of certain elements and images within the narrative, giving a sense of completeness, and a careful control of the audience's response from moment to moment.

Within two years of the film's release, the theatre had changed substantially; the West End had seen the British premiere of Samuel Beckett's *Waiting for Godot* (1955), the first night of John Osborne's *Look Back in Anger* (1956) and, also in 1956, the first London visit of Brecht's Berliner Ensemble. All of these marked significant shifts in what was seen as possible in the British theatre; Beckett changed ideas of form, reminding the drama, as Sherriff's nemesis Kenneth Tynan put it, 'of how much it can do without and still exist',<sup>827</sup> Osborne changed ideas of content, showing a milieu that had rarely been seen on stage, and Brecht questioned the relationship between the two, and ultimately the whole function of the medium. These three events, together with the critical recognition of Joan Littlewood's Theatre Workshop, and Peter Hall's founding of the Royal Shakespeare Company, changed both the reality and the perception of the British theatre, and therefore its relationship with the cinema, at the same time that television was increasingly acting as a medium for new writing, and new writers. By the time John Russell Taylor came to write *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* in

1967, the term was, as he said himself, ‘almost invariably used in modern criticism as an insult.’<sup>828</sup>

Similarly, the British cinema reacted to changes in the arts and society; 1956 was not just the year of *Look Back in Anger*, but also of *The Curse of Frankenstein* (Terence Fisher, 1956). This instituted the run of Hammer horrors, one of the many new elements and movements in British cinema in the late 1950s and early 1960s, including the rise of kitchen-sink realism and the founding of Woodfall Films, both products of changes in the theatre. Though playwrights continued to work within the cinema, both media had changed in ways that created a different relationship from the one that this thesis describes. The film careers of postwar dramatists such as John Osborne, Harold Pinter, Robert Bolt, Alun Owen, Charles Wood, and Shelagh Delaney belong to another study.

The aim of this thesis has been to place the work of an individual playwright/screenwriter within its context, and therefore to show part of the wider process whereby stage playwrights worked within the cinema, and the effects that this had. As such, it follows in the footsteps of scholars such as Jill Nelmes, who has sought to emphasise the study of the screenwriter within the British cinema, and Christine Gledhill, who has examined the relationship between theatre and cinema in the later silent period.<sup>829</sup> Gledhill’s concerns are more aesthetic and cultural than those of the present thesis, which is more concerned with methods – the techniques used by individual writers in both media, and the way in which they relate.

The relationship between cinema and theatre (and, since the 1950s, television) is one of the distinctive features of the British cinema, and has been recognised as such in academia since at least the 1970s. However, this has tended to focus on certain areas; on the adaptation of theatrical material, or on actors: Geoff Brown’s 1986 essay “‘Sister

of the Stage”: British Film and British Theatre’ analyses the relationship almost entirely in terms of film versions of stage plays.<sup>830</sup> The present study aims to examine the relationship in terms of the less obvious, but possibly more significant, area of scriptwriting; the presence of large numbers of stage-trained writers in the British cinema has helped to define its style and techniques, and continues to do so (witness the continuing screen work of, among many others, Tom Stoppard, David Hare, Christopher Hampton, Jez Butterworth, and Abi Morgan). In this respect, it is misleading to see the influence of the stage playwright either as a negative, as some earlier scholars have done, or simply as a precursor to the younger medium (what Gledhill, quoting David Mayer, refers to as the ‘baton’ view of history.)<sup>831</sup> This thesis takes the view that it is more productive, and more truthful to the actual experience of those who work in both media, to see the relationship as a dialogue, with the writers’ work in one medium having an inevitable effect on the other.

The introduction to this thesis quoted Jill Nelmes’ assertion that ‘[n]either the screenwriter nor the screenplay in British cinema has received the acknowledgement that either deserves.’<sup>832</sup> The present thesis is part of an attempt to rectify this omission, looking at a specific group of writers, and the ways in which their previous experience impacted upon their work for the screen.



## Notes

### Introduction

<sup>1</sup> Articulated by, for instance, Lee Russell in his essay on Hawks. See Russell, Lee – ‘Howard Hawks’ in *New Left Review*, no. 24, March-April 1964, quoted in Hillier, Jim and Peter Wollen – (Editors) *Howard Hawks/American Artist* (London: British Film Institute, 1996), pp. 83-86.

<sup>2</sup> Nelmes, Jill - *The Screenwriter in British Cinema* (London: BFI Publishing, 2014), p.1.

<sup>3</sup> Stam, Robert - *Literature Through Film: Realism, Magic and the Art of Adaptation* (Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 2005), p. 4.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.

### Chapter One – The Well-Made Play

<sup>5</sup> Greene, Graham - *Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader* Edited by David Parkinson. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1993), p. 173.

<sup>6</sup> Fawcett, L'Estrange - *Writing for the Films* (London: Sir Isaac Pitman and Sons, Ltd., 1932), p. 43.

<sup>7</sup> Pronko, Leonard C. - *Eugene Labiche and Georges Feydeau* (New York: Grove Press, 1982), pp 3-4.

<sup>8</sup> Atkins, Beryl T., Alain Duval and Rosemary C. Milne – *Collins Robert French-English English French Dictionary* (London, Glasgow and Toronto: Collins, 1978), p.279.

<sup>9</sup> Eisenberg, Evan – *The Recording Angel: Music, Records and Culture from Aristotle to Zappa* (London: Picador, 1988), p. 23. Eisenberg is here adapting and reversing Goethe's description of architecture as 'frozen music'.

<sup>10</sup> Archer, William - *Play-Making, A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London: Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1912), p. 166.

<sup>11</sup> Taylor, John Russell - *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p.12.

<sup>12</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 154,

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, p.67.

<sup>14</sup> The expository servant is used as a symbol of a certain kind of theatre even today; in a 2019 interview, Vicky Featherstone, Artistic Director of the Royal Court Theatre, said that she associates the phrase 'well-made play' with 'Ibsen and Chekhov, "protracted narrative development" and "a maid coming on for two scenes".' See Costa, Maddy – 'The Well-Made Play and the Play Made Well'., 5/3/2019, <https://www.writeaplay.co.uk/the-well-made-play-and-the-play-made-well-by-maddy-costa/>, accessed 26/8/2019.

<sup>15</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 131.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted in Edgar, David - *How Plays Work* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2009), p. 72.

<sup>17</sup> Blanc, Charles - *Discours en response au discours prononce par M. Victorien Sardou, pour sa reception a l'academie francaise, le 23 Mai, 1878* (Paris, 1878), translated by and quoted in Stanton, Stephen S. (Editor) - *Camille and Other Plays* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1957) Introduction, p. xxiii.

<sup>18</sup> Meisel, Martin – *How Plays Work: Reading and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), pp. 65-66.

<sup>19</sup> Reynolds, Frederick - *The Dramatist/or Stop Him Who Can/A Comedy/as it is performed at the/Theatre Royal, Covent Garden* (London: T.N. Longman, Paternoster –Row, 1793), p. 18.

<sup>20</sup> Archer, William, *Play-Making*, p.174.

<sup>21</sup> From the preface to *La Haine*, quoted in Stanton, Stephen S., *Camille and Other Plays*, p. xxiii.

<sup>22</sup> Rattigan, Terence - 'The Mechanics of Writing Plays' (1949) Typescript article in Rattigan Archive, British Library Manuscript Collection, ADD MS 74526, p. 2.

<sup>23</sup> Jerrold, Douglas – *Black Ey'd Susan* in Rowell, George (Editor) - *Nineteenth Century Plays* (Second Edition) (Oxford/New York: Oxford University Press, 1972), pp. 1-43, p. 43.

<sup>24</sup> Dyer, Richard - *Brief Encounter* (BFI Film Classics) (London: BFI Publishing, 1995), p. 44.

<sup>25</sup> Scribe, Eugene - *A Glass of Water, (Un Verre D'Eau, 1840)* translated by Robert Cornthwaite (New York: Smith and Kraus, 1995), p.11

<sup>26</sup> Booth, Michael R. – *English Melodrama* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1965), p. 144.

<sup>27</sup> See William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 253.

<sup>28</sup> Pronko, *Eugene Labiche and Georges Feydeau*, p.9.

<sup>29</sup> Priestley, J.B. - *The Art of the Dramatist/ and Other Writings on Theatre* (London: Oberon Books, 2005), p.56.

<sup>30</sup> *The Pall Mall Gazette*, quoted in Taylor, *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, p. 29.

<sup>31</sup> Robertson, T.W. - *Caste in Six Plays* (Ashover: Amber Lane Press, 1980), pp. 119- 176, p.121.

- <sup>32</sup> Pinero, Arthur Wing - *Robert Louis Stevenson: The Dramatist* (London: Chiswick Press, 1903) 'A lecture delivered by Arthur W. Pinero to the members of the Philosophical Institution of Edinburgh at the Music Hall, Edinburgh, on Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> February 1903.', p.13.
- <sup>33</sup> Hamilton, Clayton - *The Theory of the Theatre and Other Principles of Dramatic Criticism* (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1939) Consolidated Edition including *The Theory of the Theatre* (1910), *Studies in Stagecraft* (1914), *Problems of the Playwright* (1917) and *Seen on the Stage* (1920)., p.119.
- <sup>34</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (Three Volumes) (London: Constable and Company, 1932, reprinted 1948) Vol. I. p.45
- <sup>35</sup> Peter, John - *Vladimir's Carrot: Modern Drama and the Modern Imagination* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1987), p. 7.
- <sup>36</sup> Archer, William, *Play-Making*, pp. 50-51.
- <sup>37</sup> Fyfe, H. Hamilton - 'Sir Arthur Pinero's Plays and Players' (1930) p. 259, quoted in Pinero, Arthur Wing - *Trelawny of the 'Wells' and Other Plays*. Edited and with an introduction by J.S. Bratton. (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. ix. My italics.
- <sup>38</sup> Archer, William - 'Ibsen's Craftsmanship' ('Fortnightly Review', July 1906) in *William Archer on Ibsen: The Major Essays 1889-1919*. Edited by Thomas Postlewait (Westport, Connecticut, and London: Greenwood Press, 1984), p. 107.
- <sup>39</sup> Archer, William - 'Ibsen's Apprenticeship' ('Fortnightly Review' Jan. 1904) in *William Archer on Ibsen*, p. 76. Although Ibsen used Scribe's techniques, he was not an admirer of his work, which he described as 'dramatic candy-floss'. See Meyer, Michael - *Henrik Ibsen* (Abridged Edition) (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1974), p. 73.
- <sup>40</sup> Meyer, Michael - Introduction to Ibsen, Henrik, *A Doll's House*, translated and edited by Michael Meyer in *Plays; Two*. (London: Methuen, 1980.), pp. 11- 21, p.16.
- <sup>41</sup> Ibsen, Henrik - *A Doll's House*, translated and edited by Michael Meyer in *Plays; Two*. (London: Methuen, 1980.), pp. 23-104, p.26.
- <sup>42</sup> This remains an important technique in the teaching of screenwriting – Gulino and Shears refer to it as the 'contrasting of emotional valences'. See Gulino, Paul Joseph and Connie Shears - *The Science of Screenwriting: The Neuroscience Behind Storytelling Strategies* (New York and London: Bloomsbury, 2018), p. 45.
- <sup>43</sup> Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, p.53.
- <sup>44</sup> Aristotle - *The Poetics*, translated by Ingram Bywater, quoted in Gerould, Daniel (Editor.) - *Theatre/Theory/Theatre; The Major Critical Texts from Aristotle and Zeami to Soyinka and Havel* (New York and London, Applause Books, 2000), pp. 43-67, p.54.
- <sup>45</sup> Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, p.72.
- <sup>46</sup> Rachel O'Riordan's production of the play at the Lyric Theatre, Hammersmith, in 2019 emphasised this point by placing the front door, with a caged letter box, upstage centre. The letter was thus in view of the audience throughout the play's last two acts.
- <sup>47</sup> Gulino and Shears, p. 45. Modern screenwriters often refer to this kind of technique as a 'Chekhov gun', a reference to a comment made to Anton Chekhov by the director of the Moscow Arts Theatre, Nemirovich-Danchenko, that a gun placed before the audience at the end of one act must go off in the next. See Wright, Nicholas - *Ninety-Nine Plays/Key Plays since the Oresteia chosen by Nicholas Wright* (London: Methuen, 1992), p. 111.
- <sup>48</sup> Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, p.80.
- <sup>49</sup> *Ibid*, p.80.
- <sup>50</sup> *Ibid*, p.84.
- <sup>51</sup> *Ibid*, p.92.
- <sup>52</sup> *Ibid*, p.97.
- <sup>53</sup> William Archer tells a story of the Business Manager of the Novelty Theatre, where the play received its British premiere, witnessing a rehearsal of the final scene, and predicting a great commercial success. He changed his mind when he realised that Nora's walking out was the end of the last act, and not, as he'd imagined, the end of the first. See William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 281.
- <sup>54</sup> Owen, Alistair (Editor) - *Hampton on Hampton* (London; Faber and Faber, 2005), p.43.
- <sup>55</sup> Morison, Mary (Editor.) - *The Correspondence of Henrik Ibsen: The Translation Edited by Mary Morison* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1905), p.174.
- <sup>56</sup> Ibsen, *A Doll's House*, p.17.
- <sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, p.54.
- <sup>58</sup> Quoted in 'Q.E.D.' – 'The Opulence of Dramatists', *Times Literary Supplement*, 1/8/1902, pp. 229-30
- <sup>59</sup> Jerome, Jerome K., (writing anonymously as 'A Dramatist') - *Playwriting – A Handbook for Would-Be Dramatic Authors* (London: The Stage Office, 1888), p.81.

- <sup>60</sup> Quoted in Pinero, *Robert Louis Stevenson; The Dramatist* p. 28. Stevenson was a close friend of William Archer, and uses his address as that of Morris and John in *The Wrong Box* (1889). See Stevenson, Robert Louis, and Osbourne, Lloyd - *The Wrong Box*. Edited and Introduced by Ernest Mehew (London; Nonesuch Press, 1989), pp. xxvii-xxix.
- <sup>61</sup> Quoted in Griffin, Penny - *Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones*, (Houndsmills and London, Macmillan Education, 1991), p. 105.
- <sup>62</sup> Luckhurst, Mary - *Dramaturgy: A Revolution in Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), p. 82.
- <sup>63</sup> Wordsworth, William and Coleridge, Samuel Taylor - *Lyrical Ballads*. (1798) Edited by R.L. Brett and A.R. Jones. Second Edition. (London; Routledge, 1991), p. 257.
- <sup>64</sup> Quoted in a letter from J. Churton Collins, *Times Literary Supplement*, 9<sup>th</sup> May 1902, p.132. The translation is Butcher's.
- <sup>65</sup> Anon, - 'Ibsen's Last Play', in the *Times Literary Supplement*, 30<sup>th</sup> January 1903, p. 34.
- <sup>66</sup> Jones, John - *On Aristotle and Greek Tragedy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1962), pp. 19-20.
- <sup>67</sup> *Times Literary Supplement*, 23<sup>rd</sup> May 1902, p.149.
- <sup>68</sup> Taylor, *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, p.11.
- <sup>69</sup> Matthews, J. Brander - *A Study of the Drama*, (London: Longmans, Green and Co. 1910). pp. 305-6.
- <sup>70</sup> Jerome, *Playwriting*, p.11.
- <sup>71</sup> *Ibid*, p.18.
- <sup>72</sup> Hennequin, Alfred: *The Art of Playwriting /Being a Practical Treatise on the Elements of Dramatic Construction/ Intended for the Playwright, the Student and the Dramatic Critic* (Cambridge, Mass: The Riverside Press, 1890), p. x.
- <sup>73</sup> Archer, Frank - *How to Write a Good Play* (London: Sampson Low, Marston and Company, 1892), p. 6.
- <sup>74</sup> Jerome, *Playwriting*, p.11
- <sup>75</sup> Sturges, Preston - *Preston Sturges on Preston Sturges*, adapted and edited by Sandy Sturges (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1991), p. 235,
- <sup>76</sup> Van Druten, John - *Playwright at Work* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), *passim*
- <sup>77</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *No Leading Lady* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1968), p. 26.
- <sup>78</sup> Gillette, William - Introduction to *How to Write a Play* Letters from Augier, Banville, Demery, Dumas, Gondinet, Labiche, Legouve, Pailleron, Sardou and Zola, translated by Dudley Miles, with an introduction by William Gillette. Publications of the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University in the City of New York. Third Series: Papers on Playmaking. No. II. (New York: Printed for the Dramatic Museum of Columbia University, 1916), p.5.
- <sup>79</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 311.
- <sup>80</sup> *Ibid*, p.27.
- <sup>81</sup> Anon. ('A Theatrical Manager's Reader') - *The Dramatic Author's Companion* (London: Mills and Boon, 1910), p.101.
- <sup>82</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 49.
- <sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p.250.
- <sup>84</sup> Morley, Sheridan - *Spread a Little Happiness; The First Hundred Years of the British Musical* (New York: Thames and Hudson, 1987), p.41.
- <sup>85</sup> Macdonell, A.G. - *England, Their England* (First published 1933. London: Picador, 1983), pp. 127-8.
- <sup>86</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.
- <sup>87</sup> de Jongh, Nicholas - *Politics, Prudery and Perversions; The Censoring of the English Stage 1901-1968* (London; Methuen Publishing Limited, 2000), p.29.
- <sup>88</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 66-7.
- <sup>89</sup> *Ibid*, pp.48-9.
- <sup>90</sup> Connolly, Cyril - *Enemies of Promise* (First published 1938. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1961), p. 16.
- <sup>91</sup> Evans, B. Ifor, - *English Literature Between the Wars* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd., 1948), p.3.
- <sup>92</sup> Williams, Emlyn - *Emlyn; An Early Autobiography (1927-1935) A sequel to George (1905-1927)* (London: Bodley Head, 1973), pp.24-5.
- <sup>93</sup> *Encyclopedia Britannica*, Eleventh Edition, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1911) Volume 24, p. 482.
- <sup>94</sup> Schickel, Richard - *D.W.Griffith* (London: Pavilion Books, 1984), p.91. Tom Stempel, in his history of American screenwriting, assumes that this was an adaptation of Puccini's opera, but it is clear from Griffith's original reference that he was thinking of *La Tosca* rather than *Tosca*. See Stempel, Tom - *Framework: A History of Screenwriting in the American Film* (New Expanded Edition.) (New York: Continuum, 1991), p. 17. It is possible that Stempel was unaware of the existence of the play, in which Griffith had appeared as an actor four years previously. (Schickel, *D.W. Griffith*, p.64). Marc Norman repeats Stempel's mistake in his own

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history of American screenwriting: see Norman, Marc - *What Happens Next; A History of American Screenwriting* (London: Aurum Press. 2008), p.29.

<sup>95</sup> Azlant, Edward - *The Theory, History and Practice of Screenwriting, 1897-1920* (Unpublished Ph.D. Thesis. University of Wisconsin –Madison, 1980), p.122.

<sup>96</sup> de Mille, Agnes - *Dance to the Piper*, London, Hamish Hamilton Ltd, 1951), pp. 4-7

<sup>97</sup> Sargent, Epes Winthrop - *The Technique of the Photoplay* (New York: Motion Picture World. Second Edition, 1913. Third Edition, 1916). Third Edition, p. 352.

<sup>98</sup> Azlant, *Screenwriting*, p. 131.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, p.134. Azlant was writing in 1980, after the publication of Syd Field's *Screenplay* (1979), but before the explosion of screenwriting manuals that it engendered.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>101</sup> Patterson, Frances Taylor - *Cinema Craftmanship – A Book for Photoplaywrights* (New York: Harcourt Brace and Company, 1921.) (Second Edition), p.3.

<sup>102</sup> *Ibid*, p.7.

<sup>103</sup> Dimick, Howard T. - *Modern Photoplay Writing/ Its Craftmanship/ A Manual Demonstrating the Structural Principles of the New Art as Practised by the Modern Photoplaywright* (Franklin, Ohio; James Knapp Reeve, 1922), p. 25.

<sup>104</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.

<sup>105</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 116.

<sup>106</sup> Sargent (Third Edition), p. vii.

<sup>107</sup> Sargent (Second Edition), p.6.

<sup>108</sup> Sargent (Third Edition), p. 5.

<sup>109</sup> Sargent (Second Edition), p. 7.

<sup>110</sup> Sargent (Third Edition), p. v.

<sup>111</sup> *Ibid*, p. 302.

<sup>112</sup> Neal, Robert Wilson - *Short Stories in the Making/A Writer's and Student's Introduction to the Technique and Practical Composition of Short Stories, including an Adaptation of the Principles of the Stage Plot to Short Story Writing* (New York: Oxford University Press – American Branch, 1914), p. ix.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, p. 74.

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 74-5.

<sup>115</sup> Ball, Eustace Hale - *The Art of the Photoplay* (New York: Veritas Publishing Company, 1913), p.51.

<sup>116</sup> Low, Rachael - *The History of the British Film, 1914-1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin, 1950), p.63.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, p.64.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, p.60.

<sup>119</sup> *Ibid*, p. 61.

<sup>120</sup> Hepworth, Cecil M. - *Came the Dawn* (London: Phoenix House Ltd., 1951), p.148.

<sup>121</sup> Low, Rachael - *The History of the British Film 1918-1929* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1971), p. 112.

<sup>122</sup> Weston, Harold - *The Art of Photo Play Writing*, (London: McBride, Nast and Co. Ltd, 1916), p. 54.

## Chapter Two – The British Cinema in the 1930s

<sup>123</sup> Perry, George - *The Great British Picture Show*: (London: Hart-Davis, MacGibbon, 1974), p.10.

<sup>124</sup> Shiach, Don - *Great British Movies*, (London: Pocket Essentials, 2006), p. 10.

<sup>125</sup> Chibnall, Steve - *Quota Quickies: The Birth of the British 'B' Film* (London: BFI Publishing, 2007), p. 1.

<sup>126</sup> Ryall, Tom - *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, (London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Athlone, 1986), p.39.

<sup>127</sup> *Kine Weekly*. 16 August, 1923, p.1, quoted in Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, p.40.

<sup>128</sup> Low, Rachael - *The History of the British Film 1914-1918* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1950), p.65.

<sup>129</sup> Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, p.2.

<sup>130</sup> Hartog, Simon 'State Protection of a Beleaguered Industry' pp. 59-73 in Curran, James and Vincent Porter - *British Cinema History* (London: Weidenfield and Nicholson, 1983), p.64.

<sup>131</sup> Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, p. 18.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2.

<sup>134</sup> Balcon, Michael - *Michael Balcon Presents... A Lifetime of British Films* (London: Hutchinson, 1969), p.28.

<sup>135</sup> Sweet, Matthew - *Shepperton Babylon: The Lost Worlds of British Cinema* (London: Faber and Faber, 2005), p.103.

<sup>136</sup> Neame, Ronald - *Straight from the Horse's Mouth*, p.36. Quoted in Chibnall, p.36.

- <sup>137</sup> Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, p. 28.
- <sup>138</sup> *Film Weekly*, 20 February 1937, p.5, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 31.
- <sup>139</sup> Schatz, Thomas - *The Genius of the System* (Second edition) (Minnesota; University of Minnesota Press, 2010), *passim*.
- <sup>140</sup> 'Leeds Condemns Quota Act', *Kinematograph Weekly*, 23 May 1935, p.13, quoted in Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, p. 232.
- <sup>141</sup> Ackland, Rodney and Elspeth Grant – *The Celluloid Mistress/or: The Custard Pie of Dr. Caligari* (London: Allen Wingate, 1954), p. 24.
- <sup>142</sup> *Ibid*, p. 26.
- <sup>143</sup> Chibnall, *Quota Quickies*, p.20.
- <sup>144</sup> McCabe, Cameron (pseudonym for Ernest Borneman) - *The Face on the Cutting-Room Floor* (First published 1937. London: Picador Classic, 2016), pp. 103-4.
- <sup>145</sup> For Shaw's contract, see chapter 3; for Galsworthy's, Geoff Brown's talk at the Cinema Museum, Kennington, on 9/11/17.
- <sup>146</sup> Greene, Graham 'Subjects and Stories' in *Mornings in the Dark: The Graham Greene Film Reader* Edited by David Parkinson. (Harmondsworth, Penguin, 1993), pp. 409-18, p. 409.
- <sup>147</sup> British Board of Film Censors Scenario Report 2 (BFI Library, Special Collections), quoted in Street, Sarah - *British Cinema in Documents* (London: Routledge, 2000), p. 28. The film was finally made in 1941, when it was explicitly positioned as a period piece, reflecting the world before the War; see Chapter 4.
- <sup>148</sup> Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, p.69.
- <sup>149</sup> French, Philip, in *The Observer*, 7 July 1991.
- <sup>150</sup> Balcon, *Michael Balcon Presents*, p. 92.
- <sup>151</sup> In a talk at the Cinema Museum, Kennington, on 9/11/17
- <sup>152</sup> Bruce Babington, in his book on the duo, argues that the particular qualities of Launder and Gilliat's writing may have come from the combination of Launder's theatrical background with Gilliat's literary one (he had previously been a novelist and critic). See Babington, Bruce - *Launder and Gilliat* (British Film Makers.) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2002), p. 9.
- <sup>153</sup> Macphail, Angus – 'Analysis of Authors', Memorandum to Michael Balcon, 28/3/30, quoted in Napper, Lawrence – *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years* (Exeter: University of Exeter Press, 2008), p. 75.
- <sup>154</sup> See Napper, *British Cinema and Middlebrow Culture in the Interwar Years*, p. 81.
- <sup>155</sup> Ryall, *Alfred Hitchcock and the British Cinema*, pp. 48-49
- <sup>156</sup> Dean, Basil 'The Future of Screen and Stage', in Davy, Charles (Editor) - *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Lovat Dickson Limited, 1938) pp. 172-184, pp. 175-6.
- <sup>157</sup> Walker, Greg - *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. ix.
- <sup>158</sup> Glancy, H. Mark - *When Hollywood Loved Britain; The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999),
- <sup>159</sup> 'Making British Films for the World', *Film Weekly*, 25 August 1933, p 4-5-, p. 5, quoted in Walker, *The private Life of Henry VIII*, p. 96.
- <sup>160</sup> Biro, Lajos - *Gods and Kings: Six Plays* (London: George Allen and Unwin Ltd., 1945), p. 7.
- <sup>161</sup> Biro, Lajos and Arthur Wimperis - *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (London: Methuen and Co. Ltd, 1934), p.2.
- <sup>162</sup> Betts, Ernest, Introduction to *Ibid*, p. xvi.
- <sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, p. ix.
- <sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, p. xv.
- <sup>165</sup> *Ibid*, p. xv.
- <sup>166</sup> Dickinson, Thorold - *A Discovery of Cinema*, (London: Oxford University Press, 1971), p.33.
- <sup>167</sup> Montagu, Ivor, 'Old Man's Mumble: Reflections on a semi-centenary' *Sight and Sound*, Autumn 1975, (pp.220-4, 247), p. 220.
- <sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, p. 223.
- <sup>169</sup> Dickinson, *A Discovery of Cinema*, p. 24.
- <sup>170</sup> Bennett, *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense*, p. 57.
- <sup>171</sup> Hardy, Forsyth, 'Censorship and Film Societies', pp.264-278, in Davy, *Footnotes to the Film*, p. 275.
- <sup>172</sup> Anthony, Scott - *Night Mail* (BFI Film Classics) (London: British Film Institute, 2007), p. 11.
- <sup>173</sup> 'The Course of Realism' in Grierson, John - *Grierson on Documentary* (Revised Edition.) (London: Faber and Faber, 1966.), p. 199.
- <sup>174</sup> Dickinson, *A Discovery of Cinema*, p.14.
- <sup>175</sup> 'First Principles of Documentary' in Grierson, *Grierson on Documentary*, p. 147.
- <sup>176</sup> See Rebellato, Dan – *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), *passim*, but particularly Chapter 7 'Sister Mary Discipline: growing up straight at the Royal

Court', pp. 193-223. There is a direct causal connection here; the Royal Court was associated, through directors Tony Richardson and Lindsay Anderson, with the Free Cinema movement, which took some of its philosophy from Grierson.

<sup>177</sup> Taylor, John Russell – 'Surviving' Interview with Alfred Hitchcock in *Sight and Sound* 46 (Summer 1977), pp. 174-176, quoted in Gottlieb, Sidney (Editor.) - *Hitchcock on Hitchcock* (London: Faber and Faber, 1995), pp. 59-63, p. 60.

<sup>178</sup> Hitchcock, Alfred and John K. Newnham – 'My Screen Memories', a five-part series in *Film Weekly*, 2-30 May 1936, quoted in Gottlieb, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, pp. 7-26, p.13.

<sup>179</sup> Hitchcock said himself that, in *Waltzes from Vienna*, he 'made no attempt to get away from the successful stage play as it stood.' See *Ibid*, p. 19.

<sup>180</sup> Hitchcock, Alfred - 'Direction', pp. 3-15, in Davy (Editor), *Footnotes to the Film*, pp. 6-7.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, p.9.

<sup>182</sup> Hitchcock's work uses theatrical techniques so much that at least one commentator has assumed (erroneously) that he had a pre-cinema career as a stage director; see North, Sam – *The Instinctive Screenplay: Watching and Writing Screen Drama* (London: Palgrave, 2017), p.86.

<sup>183</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 169-70. Hitchcock had a long-standing ambition to make a film based on J.M. Barrie's play *Mary Rose*. See Taylor, 'Surviving', p. 62.

<sup>184</sup> *Film Weekly*, December 14, 1934, p.14, quoted in Gottlieb, *Hitchcock on Hitchcock*, p. 169.

<sup>185</sup> Bennett, *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense*, p. 57.

<sup>186</sup> *Ibid*, p.49.

<sup>187</sup> See Boucicault, Dion - *The Octoroon* (1859) in Gassner, John (Editor) - *Best Plays of the Early American Theatre: From the Beginning to 1916* (New York; Crown Publishers, Inc., 1967) pp. 185-215.

<sup>188</sup> Bennett, *Hitchcock's Partner in Suspense*, p. 52.

<sup>189</sup> *Ibid*, p. 54. Charles Drazin credits Angus Macphail with the invention of the term, based on the recollection of Diana Morgan, who said that Macguffins were frequently discussed in story conferences at Ealing Studios in the 1940s. See Drazin, Charles - *The Finest Years: British Cinema of the 1940s* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1998), p. 89. Bennett and Macphail had worked together on *The 39 Steps*.

<sup>190</sup> *Ibid*, p.50.

<sup>191</sup> Drazin,,*Korda*, p.143.

<sup>192</sup> Zuckmayer, Carl - *The Captain of Kopenick*, (London: Geoffrey Bles, 1932). The play has been presented twice by the UK National Theatre, in 1971 and 2013. Both times, it was extensively rewritten and restructured by the translator; John Mortimer in 1971 and Ron Hutchinson in 2013.

<sup>193</sup> Greene, *Mornings in the Dark*, pp. 158-9.

<sup>194</sup> Wallace, Leonard - 'Korda's castles in the air' *Film Weekly*, 7/11/1936, p. 43, quoted in McFarlane, Brian - *An Autobiography of British Cinema* (London: Methuen, 1997), p.345.

<sup>195</sup> Low, Rachael - *Film Making in 1930s Britain* (London: George Allan and Unwin, 1985), p.198.

<sup>196</sup> Greene, *Mornings in the Dark*, p.280.

<sup>197</sup> *Ibid*, p.284.

<sup>198</sup> Davy, Charles, 'Postscript: The Cinema Marches On' pp. 303-322, in Davy, *Footnotes to the Film*, p.312. The film that Grierson refers to, *Farewell Again*, is credited to five writers, chiefly the West End playwright Clemence Dane.

### Chapter Three – The Screenwriter as Star: George Bernard Shaw and Noël Coward

<sup>199</sup> Emma Rice's *Brief Encounter* (2007), produced by Kneehigh Theatre, combines elements from both screen and stage versions. See Rice, Emma – *Brief Encounter* [adapted from Noël Coward's screenplay, and his play *Still Life*, 2007]. (British Library, Modern Play Scripts 11568)

<sup>200</sup> Holroyd, Michael - *Bernard Shaw: Volume 3, 1918-1950: the Lure of Fantasy* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1991), p. 97

<sup>201</sup> Letter, 12/12/08, quoted in Dukore, Bernard F. (Editor) - *The Collected Screenplays of Bernard Shaw* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1980), p. 3.

<sup>202</sup> Letter, 19/8/12, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 3.

<sup>203</sup> 'A Relief from the Romantic Film' in Shaw, George Bernard - *Platform and Pulpit*, edited by Dan H. Laurence, (New York: Hill and Wang, 1961), p. 178, quoted in *Ibid*, p.3

<sup>204</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 4.

<sup>205</sup> Henderson, Archibald - *Table-Talk of G.B.S* (New York: Harper and Brothers, 1925), p. 46, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>206</sup> *New York Times*, 19/5/29, quoted in *Ibid*, p.13.

<sup>207</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Selected One-Act Plays* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1972), p. 45.

<sup>208</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 21.

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- <sup>209</sup> Interview, 20/9/76, quoted in *Ibid*, p. 22.
- <sup>210</sup> Quoted in Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: Volume Three*, p. 377.
- <sup>211</sup> *Ibid*, p. 377.
- <sup>212</sup> Both quoted in Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p.25.
- <sup>213</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.
- <sup>214</sup> *Ibid*, p.28.
- <sup>215</sup> G.S Street - Letter from Lord Chamberlain's Office, 23/2/14; Lord Chamberlain's Correspondence, British Library.
- <sup>216</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 70.
- <sup>217</sup> Quoted in Kellaway.
- <sup>218</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Pygmalion: a Play in Five Acts*. By a Fellow of the Royal Society of Literature (London: Constable and Company Ltd, 1913), p. 82.
- <sup>219</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Pygmalion* (London: Constable and Company, 1931), pp. 279/280.
- <sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 223/224.
- <sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 238/239.
- <sup>222</sup> *Ibid*, p. 244.
- <sup>223</sup> Archer, William - *Play-Making, A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London, Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1912), p. 161.
- <sup>224</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1931), p. 252.
- <sup>225</sup> Meisel, p. 179.
- <sup>226</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Pygmalion* (1934 Screenplay) (British Library Manuscript Collection, ADD 50628), p. 5.
- <sup>227</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1931), p.280.
- <sup>228</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1934), p. 11.
- <sup>229</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35.
- <sup>230</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.
- <sup>231</sup> Deans, Marjorie - *Meeting at the Sphinx: Gabriel Pascal's Production of Bernard Shaw's Caesar and Cleopatra/ With Forewords by both the Author and Producer* (London: Macdonald and Co., 1945), p. 49.
- <sup>232</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1931), p.279.
- <sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, p. 272.
- <sup>234</sup> This was one of the changes that Shaw retained when he produced his 'definitive' version of the play – in the 1941 edition, the line is 'I shouldnt mind...'. Shaw, George Bernard - *Pygmalion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1941) p. 132.
- <sup>235</sup> Quoted in Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 69.
- <sup>236</sup> *Ibid*, p. 272.
- <sup>237</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>238</sup> Letter from David Lean to Edwin A. Davis, quoted in Brownlow, Kevin, *David Lean* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996) pp. 120-121
- <sup>239</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p.83.
- <sup>240</sup> *Ibid*, p. 70. Dukore's terminology is misleading here; *My Fair Lady* is a musical play, in the manner of Rodgers and Hammerstein, rather than a musical comedy.
- <sup>241</sup> Lerner, Alan Jay - *My Fair Lady*, (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1958.), p.6.
- <sup>242</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p. 85.
- <sup>243</sup> Shaw, Bernard *Pygmalion* (1941), p. 11.
- <sup>244</sup> Dukore, *Collected Screenplays*, p.459.
- <sup>245</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1934), p. 18.
- <sup>246</sup> The relevant scene is filed with the originally submitted version of the play in the Lord Chamberlain's Archives. See Shaw, George Bernard – *Pygmalion – Additional Scenes* (1941). (British Library, filed with LCP 1914/8)
- <sup>247</sup> Shaw, *Pygmalion* (1941), p. 139.
- <sup>248</sup> 'Show News', *Daily Mail*, 13/10/38 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)
- <sup>249</sup> 'Margrave Says', *Daily Mail*, 13/10/38 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)
- <sup>250</sup> Although Morley, like Malleeson, is now thought of mostly as an actor, he was, at the time the film was made, well known as author of the West End hit *Goodness, How Sad!* (1937). His patrician manner, like Malleeson's befuddled servant act, was misleading; both men were politically on the left.
- <sup>251</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Major Barbara* (First published 1905. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1960), p. 72.
- <sup>252</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Major Barbara* in Dukore (Editor) - *The Collected Screenplays of Bernard Shaw* (London: George Prior Publishers, 1980), pp. 281-351, p. 281.
- <sup>253</sup> *Ibid*, p. 307.
- <sup>254</sup> *Ibid*, p. 284.

- <sup>255</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - *Major Barbara: A Screen Version* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1944), p. v.
- <sup>256</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - 'The Technical Novelty in Ibsen's Plays' in Shaw, George Bernard - *Major Critical Essays* (London: Constable and Company, 1932), pp. 135-146, passim.
- <sup>257</sup> Dukore, Introduction to *Collected Screenplays*, p.115.
- <sup>258</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - 'Preface' to *Three Plays for Puritans: The Devil's Disciple, Caesar and Cleopatra, Captain Brassbound's Conversion* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1946), pp. 7-39, p. 29.
- <sup>259</sup> Shaw, George Bernard - 'Notes to Caesar and Cleopatra' in *Three Plays for Puritans*, pp.244 – 254, p. 249.
- <sup>260</sup> Hoare, Philip - *Noël Coward: A Biography*, (London: Sinclair-Stevenson, 1995), p. 458.
- <sup>261</sup> Lesley, Cole - *The Life of Noël Coward* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1976), p. 138.
- <sup>262</sup> Taylor, John Russell - *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, p.115.
- <sup>263</sup> Edgar, David - 'Noël Coward and the Transformation of British Comedy' in Kaplan, Joel and Stowell, Sheila (Editors) - *Look Back in Pleasure: Noël Coward Reconsidered* (London: Methuen, 2000), p.10.
- <sup>264</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.
- <sup>265</sup> I'm not the first person to make this comparison – see Barr, Charles - *English Hitchcock* (Moffat: Cameron and Hollis, 1999), p. 47, in which he comments on the similarities between the two men. Coward later saw Hitchcock filming *Rope* in 1948, and described the film as 'a brilliant idea, brilliantly organised'. See Payn, Graham and Morley, Sheridan (Editors), *The Noël Coward Diaries* (London: Macmillan, 1982), p. 103.
- <sup>266</sup> Coward, Noël, *Cavalcade*, (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1932), p.96.
- <sup>267</sup> 1927 magazine interview, quoted in Day, Barry - 'General Introduction' to Coward, Noël - *Screenplays* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2015), pp. xi-xiii, p. xi.
- <sup>268</sup> Quoted in Aldgate, Alan, and Jeffrey Richards - *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (New Edition) (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2007), p. 193.
- <sup>269</sup> Quoted in Day, Barry - *Coward on Film: The Cinema of Noël Coward* (Lanham, Maryland/Toronto/Oxford: Scarecrow Press, 2005), pp. 53/4.
- <sup>270</sup> Coward, Noël – 'Class' in *Collected Revue Sketches and Parodies* (London: Methuen Drama, 1999), pp. 41-49, p. 42.
- <sup>271</sup> *Ibid*, p. 46.
- <sup>272</sup> Coward, Noël – 'Some Other Private Lives' in *Collected Revue Sketches and Parodies* pp. 277-282, p.278.
- <sup>273</sup> Glancy, H. Mark - *When Hollywood Loved Britain; The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 73.
- <sup>274</sup> Hoare, p. 121.
- <sup>275</sup> Brownlow, Kevin - *David Lean*, (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.154.
- <sup>276</sup> Silver, Alain and James Ursini, *David Lean and his Films* (London: Leslie Prewin, 1974), p. 17, quoted in Aldgate, Alan, and Jeffrey Richards - *Britain Can Take It: British Cinema in the Second World War* (New Edition) (London: I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2007), p. 206.
- <sup>277</sup> Payn and Morley, p.19.
- <sup>278</sup> Morley, Sheridan - *A Talent to Amuse: A Biography of Noël Coward* (London: Heinemann, 1969), p. 189. I was a supernumerary in the 1995 Sadlers' Wells revival of the play, and can testify to the military discipline needed to marshal the crowds.
- <sup>279</sup> Coward, Noël - *In Which We Serve* Final Treatment 10/12/41, (David Lean Collection, BFI Library, DLE1), p.26.
- <sup>280</sup> Olivier, Laurence - Letter to Rex Harrison, 23/5/1963, quoted in Rosenthal, Daniel (Editor) - *Dramatic Exchanges; The Lives and Letters of the National Theatre* (London: Profile Books, 2018), p. 16.
- <sup>281</sup> Quoted in Lejeune, C.A. - 'Too Bad' in *Chestnuts in Her Lap 1936-1946* (London: Phoenix House Limited, 1947), pp. 160-161, p.160.
- <sup>282</sup> Coward, *In Which We Serve* Final Treatment, p.53.
- <sup>283</sup> Payn and Morley, *The Noël Coward Diaries*, p.262.
- <sup>284</sup> Coward, Noël - *In Which We Serve* Shooting Script, (BFI Special Collections, S11280) p. 9. This line isn't in Coward's final treatment, and may have been added later.
- <sup>285</sup> Quoted in Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p. 324.
- <sup>286</sup> Quoted in Day, 'General Introduction', p.5.
- <sup>287</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3
- <sup>288</sup> Brownlow, *David Lean*, p. xv.
- <sup>289</sup> Quoted in Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p.270.
- <sup>290</sup> Quoted in Morley, *A Talent to Amuse*, p.231.
- <sup>291</sup> Coward, *Still Life in Play Parade: Volume IV* (London: William Heinemann Ltd, 1954), pp. 238-283, p.240.
- <sup>292</sup> *Ibid*, p. 266.
- <sup>293</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>294</sup> Holland, Peter - 'A Class Act' in Kaplan, Joel and Sheila Stowell (Editors.) - *Look Back in Pleasure: Noel Coward Reconsidered*, pp.80-90, p. 88.



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- <sup>295</sup> Quoted in Brownlow, *David Lean*, p. 194.
- <sup>296</sup> *Ibid*, p.195.
- <sup>297</sup> Ronald Neame, interviewed for BBC Arena, *The Noël Coward Trilogy*, produced and directed by Adam Low, 1998.
- <sup>298</sup> Coward, Noel – *Brief Encounter* Second Script (BFI Special Collections, S13931) and *Brief Encounter* Release Script (David Lean Archive, BFI, DLE -2)
- <sup>299</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter* Second Script, p. 3.
- <sup>300</sup> *Ibid*, p.5.
- <sup>301</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.
- <sup>302</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.
- <sup>303</sup> *Ibid*, p.41.
- <sup>304</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p. 163.
- <sup>305</sup> Waters, Steve - *The Secret Life of Plays* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2010), p. 60.
- <sup>306</sup> Williams, Melanie – *David Lean* (British Film Makers). Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014), *passim*, but especially Chapter 4 ‘Women in Love’, pp.84-132.
- <sup>307</sup> Madeleine remained a popular name for unseen women in British drama; John Osborne, in what may be a nod to Coward, uses almost the same name (‘Madeline’) for Jimmy Porter’s lost love in *Look Back in Anger*. See Osborne, John - *Look Back in Anger* (London: Faber and Faber, 1957), p. 18.
- <sup>308</sup> Coward, *Still Life*, p. 275.
- <sup>309</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter* Second Script, p.61. The pink pen annotator amends ‘Alec my dear’ to ‘my dear Alec’.
- <sup>310</sup> *Ibid*, p.24. One of the annotators has underlined the repetition of ‘love’, though it remains in the finished film.
- <sup>311</sup> Coward would write detailed biographies for his characters, often including material that didn’t end up in the final script. David Lean recalled him saying ‘You’ve got to know what every character eats for breakfast, although you should never show them eating breakfast.’ See Organ, Stephen (Editor) - *David Lean Interviews* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 43.
- <sup>312</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter* Second Script, p. 12. Surprisingly, this line survives in later drafts, and into the finished film, although it contradicts what we later discover about both Laura and Fred. This is even mentioned on the ‘Goofs’ section of the film’s imdb page: see [https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037558/goofs/?tab=gf&ref=tt\\_trv\\_gf](https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0037558/goofs/?tab=gf&ref=tt_trv_gf) (accessed 22/3/20)
- <sup>313</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter* Second Script, p. 20.
- <sup>314</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.
- <sup>315</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22. A handwritten note next to the last line reads ‘Look up in play’. Later on in the same scene, another note, next to Alex’s ‘You could never be dull.’ reads ‘ditto’. Clearly, at this stage, the script was still being checked next to *Still Life*.
- <sup>316</sup> Brownlow, *David Lean*, p. 202
- <sup>317</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter*, Second Script, p. 13. Coward reused the device of having a plot development occur through a crossword clue in his 1951 play *Relative Values*. See Coward, Noël - *Relative Values in Play Parade. Volume V.* (London: Heinemann, 1958), pp. 257-371, p. 293.
- <sup>318</sup> Haskell, Molly - *From Reverence to Rape: The Treatment of Women in the Movies* (New York: Holt, Reinhart and Winston, 1975), p, 155.
- <sup>319</sup> *Ibid*, p. 156.
- <sup>320</sup> *Ibid*, p. 163.
- <sup>321</sup> Coward, *Still Life*, p. 277
- <sup>322</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p. 359.
- <sup>323</sup> Coward, *Brief Encounter* Second Script, p.1.
- <sup>324</sup> See Williams, Melanie, p.100. Tellingly, it is this moment that provides Williams’ book with its cover image, making it into a symbol of Lean’s whole *oeuvre*.
- <sup>325</sup> Hoare, *Noël Coward*, p. 359.
- <sup>326</sup> Coward, Noël - Introduction to *Play Parade IV* (London: William Heinemann Ltd., 1954), pp. vii-xv, p. x.
- <sup>327</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>328</sup> Coward, Noël - *The Astonished Heart: A Play in Six Scenes in Play Parade IV* (London: Heinemann, 1954) pp. 27-70, p. 33.
- <sup>329</sup> Coward, Noël - *The Astonished Heart in Screenplays* pp. 365-497, p. 380. For more detail on the social significance of ‘milk-in-first’, see Sandbrook, Dominic - *Never Had It So Good: A History of Britain from Suez to the Beatles* (London: Little, Brown, 2005), p. 30.
- <sup>330</sup> Coward’s attitude towards, and understanding of, psychoanalysis may be inferred from a dialogue exchange in the play *Blithe Spirit* (1941):
- RUTH: Perhaps you should see a nerve-specialist.

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CHARLES: I am not in the least neurotic and never have been.  
 RUTH: A psycho-analyst then.  
 CHARLES: I refuse to endure months of expensive humiliation only to be told at the end of it that at the age of four I was in love with my rocking-horse.

See Coward, Noël - *Blithe Spirit* in *Play Parade: Volume V* (London: Heinemann, 1948), pp. 493-625, p. 554.

<sup>331</sup> This line, though in the finished film, isn't in the published script, suggesting that it was added during filming.

<sup>332</sup> David Pirie, in an interesting piece of 1970s *auteurist* fundamentalism, discusses the film as an example of the puritanical attitude towards sex typically displayed by its co-director, Terence Fisher and, as such, a precursor of the films he was later to direct at Hammer Studios. See Pirie, David – *A Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973), pp. 51-2.

<sup>333</sup> Quoted in Day, Barry, Introduction to *The Astonished Heart* in Coward, Noël - *Screenplays*, pp. 359-362, p. 362.

<sup>334</sup> Box, Sydney - 'A New Deal for Film Writers' in *Penguin Film Review* 3, August 1947, pp. 49-52, p. 50.

<sup>335</sup> Of the four others, two were written by Powell and Pressburger – *The Life and Death of Colonel Blimp* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1943) and *One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1942), one - *The Way Ahead* (Carol Reed, 1944) - by the novelist Eric Ambler, and one - *The Seventh Veil* (Compton Bennett, 1945) - by Box himself, writing in collaboration with his wife Muriel.

#### Chapter Four - Terence Rattigan

<sup>336</sup> Powell, Anthony - *Faces in My Time*, Volume III of *To Keep the Ball Rolling: The Memoirs of Anthony Powell* (London: Heinemann, 1980), p.39.

<sup>337</sup> Wansell, Geoffrey – *Terence Rattigan: A Biography* (London: Fourth Estate, 1995), pp. 152, 232 and 299 respectively.

<sup>338</sup> Rattigan, Terence - *French Without Tears* in *Collected Plays: Volume One* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), pp. 1-82, p. 20.

<sup>339</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 59/60

<sup>340</sup> *Ibid*, p. 18.

<sup>341</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>342</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16

<sup>343</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.

<sup>344</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.

<sup>345</sup> *Ibid*, p. 47.

<sup>346</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>347</sup> Rattigan, Terence - *Flare Path* in *Collected Plays: Volume One* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953) pp. 83-196, p. 109.

<sup>348</sup> *Ibid*, p. 123.

<sup>349</sup> *Ibid*, p. 134.

<sup>350</sup> Rattigan was a keen cricketer, along with a large number of other British playwrights, and there is perhaps a connection between the form of the sport and that of a certain strain of British theatre writing. Kenneth Tynan, in his *New Yorker* profile of Tom Stoppard argues that '[c]ricket attracts artists who are either conservative or apolitical; e.g. P. G. Wodehouse, Terence Rattigan, Samuel Beckett, Kingsley Amis, Harold Pinter and Stoppard', while '[l]eftists, on the whole, prefer soccer'. See Tynan, Kenneth – *Show People: Profiles in Entertainment* (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1979), pp. 49-50. (Harold Pinter's political engagement postdates this essay, although describing Beckett, a former French Resistance fighter, as 'apolitical' is stretching a point.). As we will see, cricket is a recurring theme in the writing of the firmly conservative R. C. Sherriff.

<sup>351</sup> Rattigan, Terence, - 'Preface' to *Collected Plays: Volume One* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), pp. vii-xxi, p. xx.

<sup>352</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>353</sup> Rattigan, Terence - 'A Magnificent Pity for Camels' in Sutro, John (Editor) - *Diversion: Twenty-Two Authors on the Lively Arts* (London: Max Parrish, 1950), pp.178-185, p. 183. The typescript version of this article, held in the Rattigan Archive at the British Library, has the significant title 'Writer, Director and Camera: a battle'. See British Library Add MS 74362.

<sup>354</sup> *Ibid*, p. 182.

<sup>355</sup> Rattigan, Terence - *The Sound Barrier* (Shooting Script) (British Library Add MS 74361), p21.

<sup>356</sup> Archer, William - *Play-Making, A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London, Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1912), p. 98.

<sup>357</sup> Durgnat, Raymond - *A Mirror for England: British Movies from Austerity to Affluence* (2<sup>nd</sup> edition) (London: British Film Institute, 2011), p. 226.

<sup>358</sup> See, for instance, Brownlow, Kevin - *David Lean* (London: Faber and Faber, 1996), p.282.

- <sup>359</sup> Cottis, David and Naomi Kosten, - 'Michael Powell; The Red Tie' (Interview with Michael Powell) in *City Wise*, Issue No. 21 (December 1986), pp. 10/11, p. 10.
- <sup>360</sup> Rattigan, Terence and Richard Sherman, - *Rendezvous* (British Library Add MS 74310), p. 2
- <sup>361</sup> *Ibid*, p. 40.
- <sup>362</sup> *Ibid*, p. 43.
- <sup>363</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.
- <sup>364</sup> *Ibid*, p. 68.
- <sup>365</sup> *Ibid*, p.70.
- <sup>366</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.
- <sup>367</sup> Rattigan, Terence and Anatole de Grunwald, - *For Johnny* (British Library Add MS 74311), p. 6
- <sup>368</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.
- <sup>369</sup> *Ibid*, p. 67.
- <sup>370</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.
- <sup>371</sup> *Ibid*, p. 201.
- <sup>372</sup> *Ibid*, p.90.
- <sup>373</sup> *Ibid*, p. 140.
- <sup>374</sup> *Ibid*, p. 199.
- <sup>375</sup> Rebellato, Dan – 'Introduction' to Rattigan, Terence – *In Praise of Love* (London: Nick Hern Books, 2001), pp. v-xxxvi, p.xxix.
- <sup>376</sup> When verse drama became fashionable in the 1950s, Rattigan was mocking of the movement; his 1950 play *Who Is Sylvia?* includes a scene in which two chorus girls discuss a recent theatre trip:  
DORIS: That wasn't Shakespeare, dear. It was quite modern, Mr Wetherby was saying. He said the man who wrote it is still alive. Fancy.  
CHLOE:Of course it wasn't modern, silly. It was poetical. And they were all dressed up and medieval.  
DORIS: A play can be poetical and dressed up medieval and still be modern, dear, if it's by a man who's still alive.  
CHLOE:Well, I didn't understand it.  
DORIS: (*Patiently*). Nor did I, dear. Not a bloody word.  
See Rattigan, Terence - *Who Is Sylvia?* in *Collected Plays: Volume Two* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), pp. 201-288, p. 267.
- <sup>377</sup> Wansell, p. 96.
- <sup>378</sup> After *Pygmalion*, shots of a central character in the bath became something of a signature for Asquith; in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (Anthony Asquith, 1952), the first appearance of Michael Redgrave as Ernest shows him in a bath, blurred as if seen through out-of-focus opera glasses.
- <sup>379</sup> Rattigan originally intended the character to be 'a blond, swishy queer', but changed the joke in rehearsal. See Wansell, p. 77.
- <sup>380</sup> Wansell, p. 102.
- <sup>381</sup> The Covid 19 situation, and the consequent closure of the BFI Archive, meant that I was unable to see this film during the rewrite period for this thesis.
- <sup>382</sup> Rattigan, Terence – *The Winslow Boy* in *Collected Plays; Volume One* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), pp. 353-452 p. 433. David Mamet, a Rattigan admirer who adapted and directed his own film of *The Winslow Boy* in 1999, borrowed this technique for the third act of *Oleanna* (1992), in which the principal character is revealed not to have been home for two days, thus missing the piece of information which informs the play's final moments. See Mamet, David – *Oleanna* (London: Eyre Methuen, 1993), p. 76.
- <sup>383</sup> Rattigan, *The Winslow Boy*, p.409..
- <sup>384</sup> Quoted in Wansell, pp. 159-60. Rattigan's theatre history is a little off here – by 1912, this kind of bravura curtain line was already quite old-fashioned.
- <sup>385</sup> Rattigan, *The Winslow Boy*, 448.
- <sup>386</sup> *Ibid*, p. 451.
- <sup>387</sup> At the time of the play's writing, Rattigan was in a relationship with the Conservative MP 'Chips' Channon, to whose son, Paul, it is dedicated. See Wansell, p. 155.
- <sup>388</sup> Stephen Potter's book had been published in 1947, and with its sequels, went on to exert a considerable influence on British stage and screen writing in the postwar years. See Potter, Stephen – *The Theory and Practice of Gamesmanship/or/The Art of Winning Games Without Actually Cheating* (London: Rupert Hart-Davis, 1947)
- <sup>389</sup> Rattigan, *The Winslow Boy*, p. 427. This is also a rather public private joke; the line 'wait and see' was associated with the Prime Minister at the time the film is set, the director's father, Herbert Asquith.
- <sup>390</sup> *Ibid*, p. 423.
- <sup>391</sup> As such, it was commented on by Kenneth Tynan in his review of *Ross* (1961). See Tynan, Kenneth - *A View of the English Stage* (St. Albans: Paladin, 1976), pp. 327-9.

- <sup>392</sup> Mamet, David - *The Winslow Boy* in *The Winslow Boy* and *The Spanish Prisoner: Two Screenplays* (London: Faber and Faber, 1999), pp. 105-209, p. 209. Mamet changes 'feministic' to 'Feminist'.
- <sup>393</sup> Quoted in Ryall, Tom – *Anthony Asquith* (British Film Makers) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2005), p. 128.
- <sup>394</sup> Rattigan, Terence – *The Browning Version* in *Collected Plays: Volume Two* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1953), pp. 1-48, p. 34
- <sup>395</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.
- <sup>396</sup> Ryall, Anthony Asquith, p. 133.
- <sup>397</sup> Rattigan, *The Browning Version*, p. 48.
- <sup>398</sup> Quoted in Ryall, Anthony Asquith, p. 134.
- <sup>399</sup> This is a personal memory of the ITV news for 30<sup>th</sup> November 1977.
- <sup>400</sup> Wansell, p. 224. Rattigan made this comment with regard to the ending of *The Deep Blue Sea*, which he considered ending with Hester's suicide when the play was a one-act, but which he believed needed a different ending when he expanded it to full-length.
- <sup>401</sup> Greene, Graham – *Brighton Rock* (First published 1938. London: Penguin, 1970), p.247.
- <sup>402</sup> Quoted in Chibnall, Steve – *Brighton Rock* (Turner Classic Movies. British Film Guides). (London; I.B. Tauris, 2005), p. 101.
- <sup>403</sup> *Ibid*, p. 102.
- <sup>404</sup> Darlow, Michael - *Terence Rattigan: The Man and his Work* (London: Quartet Books, 2000) p.268.
- <sup>405</sup> Rattigan, *The Sound Barrier*, p.49.
- <sup>406</sup> Lean, David - Letter to Terence Rattigan, 16/4/51, (British Library Add MS 74362)
- <sup>407</sup> Rattigan, Terence, - Letter to David Lean, 17/4/51 (British Library Add MS 74362)
- <sup>408</sup> Rattigan, Terence - *Collected Plays Volume Two*, Introduction, p. xi. (In the typescript version of this introduction, Rattigan wrote that Aunt Edna 'votes Conservative consistently'; he later changed this to 'goes to Church on Sunday'. See British Library Add MS 74362, p. 221)
- <sup>409</sup> Rattigan, *The Sound Barrier*, p.86.
- <sup>410</sup> *Ibid*, p. 100.
- <sup>411</sup> *Ibid* p.4. In the finished film, Philips' expression of joy at this point is almost sexual.
- <sup>412</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 82-3. The finished film changes the assignment of dialogue here – Susan gets 'One of the Greek gods' and John 'He did'.
- <sup>413</sup> *Ibid*, p.35.
- <sup>414</sup> *Ibid*, p. 63.
- <sup>415</sup> Bowyer, Edward, (Society of British Aircraft Contractors Ltd.), - Letter to David Lean, 2/7/51, in British Library Add MS 74362.
- <sup>416</sup> Rattigan, *The Sound Barrier*, p. 168. The finished film cuts the reference to Hitler's bunker.
- <sup>417</sup> Wolfe, Tom - *The Right Stuff* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1980), p. 50. Given Wolfe's methods, this may be a paraphrase rather than a direct quote.
- <sup>418</sup> de Havilland, Geoffrey - Letter to David Lean, 10/7/51, in British Library Add MS 74362.
- <sup>419</sup> Organ, Stephen (Editor) - *David Lean Interviews* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p. 8.
- <sup>420</sup> Wansell, p.330.
- <sup>421</sup> John Russell Taylor, *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, p.158.
- <sup>422</sup> The finished film emphasises the connection by casting Michael Redgrave – Crocker-Harris in *The Browning Version* – as the headmaster

## Chapter Five – R.C. Sherriff: Introduction

- <sup>423</sup> imdb entry for R.C.Sherriff,: [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792670/bio?ref=nm\\_ov\\_bio\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792670/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm), accessed 21/4/19.
- <sup>424</sup> Ramsden, John - *The Dam Busters* (A British Film Guide) (London and New York: I.B. Tauris, 2003), p. 38. Ramsden, along with other commentators, including Dan Reballato, implies that Sherriff was a celibate homosexual. See Reballato, Dan – *1956 And All That: The Making of Modern British Drama* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999), p. 163. Sherriff's biographer, Roland Wales, avoids any definite statement here, but does say that there is little evidence that he ever had a sexual relationship of any sort.
- <sup>425</sup> Terkel, Studs - *The Spectator: Talk About Movies and Play With the People Who Make Them* (New York: The New Press, 1999), p. 117.
- <sup>426</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - 'The English Public Schools After the War', in Panichas, George A. (Editor) - *Promise of Greatness; The War of 1914-1918* (London: Cassell and Company, Ltd., 1968) ,pp. 133-154, p. 134.
- <sup>427</sup> *Ibid*, p. 137. Roland Wales has cast some doubt on this account, and suggests that the real reason why Sherriff didn't get a commission was simply that he was too young. See Wales, Roland - *From Journey's End*

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to *The Dam Busters: The Life of R.C. Sherriff, Playwright of the Trenches* (Barnsley: Pen and Sword Military, 2016), p. 4.,

<sup>428</sup> See, for instance, the Military Wiki entry for Sherriff, [https://military.wikia.org/wiki/R. C. Sherriff](https://military.wikia.org/wiki/R._C._Sherriff), accessed 29/8/19

<sup>429</sup> Rebellato, 1956 *And All That*, Chapter 3, *passim*.

<sup>430</sup> Clemence Dane was the pseudonym of Winifred Ashton, Gordon Daviot that of Elizabeth Mackintosh, who also wrote novels under the pseudonym of Josephine Tey. For a more detailed exploration of this idea, see Gale, Maggie B., - *West End Women: Women and the London Stage 1918-1962* (London: Routledge, 1996).

<sup>431</sup> In the 'sixties, when fashions in playwriting had changed, Rattigan himself was happy to point this out – see Rattigan, Terence, - 'Preface' to *Collected Plays: Volume Three* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1964) pp. vii-xxvii, p.xii.

<sup>432</sup> Wansell, p. 24.

<sup>433</sup> Wales,, p. xi.

<sup>434</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *No Leading Lady*, (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1968) , p. 135.

<sup>435</sup> Archer, William, *Play-Making, A Manual of Craftsmanship* (London, Chapman and Hall, Ltd, 1912), p.ix

<sup>436</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>437</sup> Sherriff, *No Leading Lady*, p. 18.

<sup>438</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>439</sup> Sherriff, R.C. *An 'Itch in the Proceedings* typescript (R.C. Sherriff Archive 2332/3/2/1/2, n.d., c.1921), p. 15.

<sup>440</sup> Sherriff, *No Leading Lady*, p. 26.

<sup>441</sup> *Ibid*, p. 175.

<sup>442</sup> Hollindale, Peter - Introduction to Barrie, J.M - *Peter Pan and Other Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), p. xxi

<sup>443</sup> Curtis Brown Agency – Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 22/6/22, (R.C. Sherriff archive 2332/1/1/9)

<sup>444</sup> Curtis Brown Agency – Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 5/3/23, (R.C. Sherriff archive 2332/1/1/9)

<sup>445</sup> Curtis Brown Agency – Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 17/10/24, (R.C. Sherriff archive 2332/1/1/9)

<sup>446</sup> Curtis Brown Agency – Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 14/11/24, (R.C. Sherriff archive 2332 1/1/9)

<sup>447</sup> *Surrey Comet*, 7 March 1925, quoted in Wales, *From Journey's End to the Dam Busters*, p.63.

<sup>448</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Woods of Meadowside* typescript (R.C. Sherriff archive 2332/3/2/2/4, n.d. c.1922), p. 5.

<sup>449</sup> This was the second time that Sherriff had cast himself as a clergyman. In *An 'Itch in the Proceedings*, he played 'The Reverend Teddington Locke'.

<sup>450</sup> Sherriff, *The Woods of Meadowside*, p. 12.

<sup>451</sup> *Ibid*, p. 6.

<sup>452</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.

<sup>453</sup> *Ibid*, p.4.

<sup>454</sup> *Ibid*, p. 8.

<sup>455</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10.

<sup>456</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 161.

<sup>457</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Profit and Loss* typescript (R.C. Sherriff archive, 2332/2/3/4, n.d., c.1923), p.9.

<sup>458</sup> *Ibid*, p. 36.

<sup>459</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.

<sup>460</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.

<sup>461</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p.17.

<sup>462</sup> Sherriff, *Profit and Loss*, p. 8.

<sup>463</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>464</sup> *Ibid*, p. 45.

<sup>465</sup> *Ibid*, p. 60.

<sup>466</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Cornlow –in-the-Downs* typescript, (R.C.Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/2/4/4, n.d. c..1923).

Unpaginated.

<sup>467</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>468</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>469</sup> Sherriff, R.C., *The Feudal System* typescript (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/2/5/2, n.d. c.1925), p.9.

<sup>470</sup> *Ibid*, p. 24.

<sup>471</sup> *Ibid*, p.43.

<sup>472</sup> *Ibid*, 46.

<sup>473</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116. Bessie is described throughout the play in terms of aspiration and imitation; the dress shop in which she works specialises in cheap knock-offs of fashionable designs.

<sup>474</sup> *Ibid*, p. 118.

<sup>475</sup> Sherriff almost certainly hadn't seen Chekhov's play (its only British production had been in 1911), but he's very likely to have read it, especially given Shaw's championing of the Russian dramatist in the preface to *Heartbreak House*. Coincidentally, Sherriff's future collaborator, James Whale, designed and performed in *The Cherry Orchard*'s West End premiere, later in 1925. See Curtis, James - *James Whale; A New World of Gods and Monsters* (London: Faber and Faber, 1998), p. 37.

<sup>476</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Mr. Birdie's Finger* typescript, (R. C. Sherriff archive, 2332/3/2/6, n.d. c.1926), unpaginated.

<sup>477</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>478</sup> Winter's daughter Joan, who is shown as the power behind the throne, asks 'But can't you see what it'll mean to the villagers who are here now? – why, an old lady in the last Village we developed, told us she sold fifty-one tins of pineapple this year against twelve last year. It'll make the fortunes of your tradespeople.' (*Ibid.*) The choice of content is significant – pineapple, as an exotic fruit, represents an alien presence domesticated for general consumption.

<sup>479</sup> *Journey's End* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1983), p.12.

<sup>480</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 15.

<sup>481</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 19.

<sup>482</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 10.

<sup>483</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 47.

<sup>484</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 17.

<sup>485</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Badger's Green in Six Plays* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1930), pp. 239-347, p. 335.

<sup>486</sup> Sherriff, *Journey's End*, p. 40.

<sup>487</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.

<sup>488</sup> Douglas-Fairhurst, Robert, - *The Story of Alice: Lewis Carroll and the Secret History of Wonderland*, (London: Harvill Secker, 2015), p. 383.

<sup>489</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Goodbye Mr. Chips: Adapted by R.C. Sherriff from the novel by James Hilton*, (Typescript screenplay, April 1936.) (R.C. Sherriff archive, 2332/3/6/10), p. 124.

<sup>490</sup> See IMDB - Entry on R.C. Sherriff, [https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792670/bio?ref=nm\\_ov\\_bio\\_sm](https://www.imdb.com/name/nm0792670/bio?ref=nm_ov_bio_sm), accessed 21/4/19. Michael Moorcock repeats the error in his Preface to Sherriff's novel *The Hopkins Manuscript*. See Moorcock, Michael – Preface to Sherriff, R.C. – *The Hopkins Manuscript* (London: Persephone Books, 2005), pp. v-xiv, p. v.

<sup>491</sup> The story of *The Road Back*, and Universal's gradual softening of the story under German pressure, is outside the remit of this thesis. See Urwand, Ben - *The Collaboration: Hollywood's Pact With Hitler* (Cambridge, Mass.: Belknap Press, 2013), pp. 180-187.

<sup>492</sup> The French serial killer and blood drinker, the original for the story of Bluebeard, would have been familiar to Whale and Sherriff as a character in Shaw's *St. Joan*.

<sup>493</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Dracula's Daughter: A Screenplay by R.C. Sherriff. As a sequel to 'Dracula' by Bram Stoker* July-August 1935 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/6/9) p.68.

<sup>494</sup> Curtis, *James Whale*, p. 260.

<sup>495</sup> See Rigby, Jonathan – *American Gothic: Sixty Years of Horror Cinema* (London: Reynolds and Hearn Ltd., 2007), p. 167.

<sup>496</sup> Wales., p. 170.

<sup>497</sup> *Ibid.*, p.174.

<sup>498</sup> See Maugham, W. Somerset and R.C. Sherriff - *Quartet* (New York: Avon Publishing Company Inc., 1949)

<sup>499</sup> Sydney Box's diary for 14/2/48, quoted in Spicer, Andrew - *Sydney Box* (British Film Makers) (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2006), p. 120.

## Chapter Six – R.C. Sherriff: *The Invisible Man* and the Well-Made Screenplay

<sup>500</sup> Sherriff., *No Leading Lady*, p.260.

<sup>501</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 267.

<sup>502</sup> Curtis, p. 199

<sup>503</sup> Wales, p.160.

<sup>504</sup> Robert McKee cites *Kiss of the Spider Woman* (1985) as another example. See McKee, Robert - *Story: Substance, Structure, Style and the Principles of Storytelling* (London: Methuen, 1998), p. 231.

<sup>505</sup> Wells, H.G. - *The Invisible Man* (London: Fontana, 1959), p. 110.

<sup>506</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Invisible Man: from the Novel by H.G. Wells*. Typescript screenplay (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/6/3), 12 June 1933, no page numbers, B – 4

<sup>507</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 126. This kind of moment, where a character in a fiction comments on the contrived or clichéd nature of a situation, is referred to by the TV Tropes website as a 'Signal from Fred'. <http://tvtropes.org/pmwiki/pmwiki.php/Website/TurkeyCityLexicon>. (Accessed 6/10/14)

- <sup>508</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, E-5.
- <sup>509</sup> *Ibid*, D-74. Notice that Sherriff delays the impact – ‘that hovers’ - in the same way that he had in *Profit and Loss*.
- <sup>510</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 174.
- <sup>511</sup> See Yorke, John - *Into the Woods: How Stories Work and Why We Tell Them* (London: Penguin, 2013), *passim*.
- <sup>512</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, D- 78 and 79.
- <sup>513</sup> Ball, Philip - *Invisible: The Dangerous Allure of the Unseen* (London: The Bodley Head, 2014), p. 173.
- <sup>514</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, E – 64.
- <sup>515</sup> *Ibid*, E -79.
- <sup>516</sup> *Ibid*, E-81
- <sup>517</sup> *Ibid*, E – 78/79.
- <sup>518</sup> *Ibid*, H -6.
- <sup>519</sup> *Ibid*, H-11. The deathbed return of a monstrous figure to an normal state is repeated in *Werewolf of London* (Stuart Walker, 1935), which recycles a number of elements from *The Invisible Man* - a love triangle that echoes the Griffin/Flora/Kemp rivalry, the significance of an Eastern flower to the plot, and a scene where the titular monster arrives at a pub/lodging house, complete with an automatic piano and comic relief landlady. Jonathan Rigby describes the later film as containing ‘a host of half-hearted James Whale-isms’ (Rigby, p.155) – some of them are more precisely R. C. Sherriff-isms.
- <sup>520</sup> *Ibid*, B-48.
- <sup>521</sup> Philip Ball suggests that one of the effects that Whale added – the riderless bicycle – is borrowed from one such film, *Le Voleur Invisible/The Invisible Thief* (Ferdinand Zecca, 1909), made by the Gaumont film company in France. See Ball, *Invisible*, p. 186.
- <sup>522</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, B – 57-61.
- <sup>523</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 155.
- <sup>524</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154. Wells’ Griffin, who is altogether more melancholic than Sherriff’s, never actually does any of these things – he spends much of this part of the novel experiencing the inconveniences of invisibility rather than the advantages.
- <sup>525</sup> *Ibid*, p. 77.
- <sup>526</sup> *Ibid*, p. 132.
- <sup>527</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, p.E-4.
- <sup>528</sup> *Ibid*, E – 5-6.
- <sup>529</sup> *Ibid*, E – 10.
- <sup>530</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 88. The suggestion by a sceptical onlooker that a scientific effect may be a conjuring trick is a recurring device in Wells’ fiction; he also uses it in both *The Time Machine* (1895) and *The Man Who Could Work Miracles* (1898). See Wells, H.G. - *Selected Short Fiction* (Harmondsworth: Penguin Books, 1958), pp. 11 and 304.
- <sup>531</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.
- <sup>532</sup> *Ibid*, p. 158.
- <sup>533</sup> *Ibid*, p. 154.
- <sup>534</sup> Sherriff, *No Leading Lady*, p. 263.
- <sup>535</sup> Wells, H.G. - *The Scientific Romances of H.G. Wells* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), p. viii, quoted in Ball, p. 173.
- <sup>536</sup> Quoted in Ball, *Invisible*, p. 168.
- <sup>537</sup> *Ibid*, p. 179.
- <sup>538</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, A – 7
- <sup>539</sup> Sherriff also uses this name in *The Jimmy Lawton Story*, probably his first attempt at an extended piece of writing; see Wales, *From Journey’s End to The Dam Busters*, p. 6.
- <sup>540</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 183.
- <sup>541</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, D- 42-43. In the finished film, Claude Rains slightly improves on this line; instead of ‘murders of great men – and little men’, he says ‘murders of great men – murders of little men’, which emphasises the balanced nature of the line, and he says ‘we might even wreck a train or two’ instead of ‘we may’, making it seem even more casual.
- <sup>542</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, F -77.
- <sup>543</sup> Sherriff, *Journey’s End*, p. 56.
- <sup>544</sup> Newman, Kim (Editor) – ‘Introduction’ to Newman, Kim - *The BFI Companion to Horror* (London: Cassell, 1996), pp. 11-16, p. 13.
- <sup>545</sup> The term is particularly associated with the criticism of Kim Newman; see, for instance, Newman, Kim – *Nightmare Movies: A Critical History of the Horror Film, 1968-1988* (New Edition) (London: Bloomsbury, 1988), p. 13. The concept was first articulated, though not named, by David Pirie in 1973. See Pirie, David - A



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*Heritage of Horror: The English Gothic Cinema 1946-1972*. (London: Gordon Fraser, 1973), *passim*, but especially Chapter 3 'The World of Terence Fisher', pp. 50-65.

<sup>546</sup> Webbing, Peggy - *Frankenstein: A Play in a Prologue and Three Acts (based upon Mrs. Shelley's well known book)*, Typescript (Lord Chamberlain's Plays, 1927/47), p. 3

<sup>547</sup> Janet Staiger identifies this as a conscious decision on the part of Warner Brothers, and cites it as an example of the way in which Hollywood producers made an effort to ensure that their product was recognisably different from that of other studios. See Staiger, Janet, 'Standardization and Differentiation; the reinforcement and dispersion of Hollywood's practices' in Bordwell, David, Janet Staiger and Kristin Thompson – *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style and Mode of Production to 1960* (London: Routledge, 1985), pp. 96-113, p. 111.

<sup>548</sup> Spadoni, Robert - *Uncanny Bodies: The Coming of Sound Film and the Origins of the Horror Genre*, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2007), p. 2.

<sup>549</sup> *Ibid*, *passim*, but see especially pp. 55-60.

<sup>550</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, D-13.

<sup>551</sup> Quinlivan, Davina - *The Place of Breath in Cinema*, (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2012), p.2.

<sup>552</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>553</sup> Though changes in the ways in which films are shown have eliminated this smoke-filled beam, it was an important part of the cinema experience for more than one generation; David Lean said in a 1984 interview that when he first visited a cinema, he was immediately transfixed by '[t]hat beam of light traveling through the smoke' See Organ, Stephen (Editor) - *David Lean Interviews* (Mississippi: University Press of Mississippi, 2009), p.61. Dennis Potter, describing his childhood filmgoing, writes of 'the silvered images in my head, forever fixed there by a shining, slanting beam in which the blue cigarette smoke swivels' See Potter, Dennis - *The Art of Invention; Selected Non-Fiction 1953-94*, (London: Oberon Books, 2015), p. 152. Marina Warner discusses the connections between smoke, invisibility and cinema in her book *Phantasmagoria* - see Warner, Marina – *Phantasmagoria: Spirit Visions, Metaphors and Media into the Twenty-First Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), *passim*, but especially Chapters 25 and 26.

<sup>554</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p. 26.

<sup>555</sup> *Ibid*, p. 127.

<sup>556</sup> Thomson, David - *A New Biographical Dictionary of the Cinema* (First edition), (London: Secker and Warburg, 1975), p. 418. Thomson makes this remark with reference to Laurence Olivier's *Henry V*.

<sup>557</sup> Curtis, p.200.

<sup>558</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, B-45.

<sup>559</sup> Wright, Basil - 'Handling the Camera' in Davy, Charles, (Editor) - *Footnotes to the Film* (London: Lovat Dickson Ltd, 1938), pp. 37-53, p. 47.

<sup>560</sup> Sherriff, *The Invisible Man*, B-45.

<sup>561</sup> Anobile, Richard J. (Editor) - *Frankenstein*, (Film Classics Library) (London: Picador Books, 1974), p. 9.

<sup>562</sup> Shelley, Percy 'Continuation of the Shelley Papers/On "Frankenstein"', *Athenaeum* (November 10, 1832) p.730, quoted in Skal, David J., - *Screams of Reason: Mad Science and Modern Culture* (New York and London, W.W. Norton and Company, 1998), p.53.

<sup>563</sup> The criminal brain was first added in a script credited to Garrett Fort, with a still disputed amount of input from the project's original director, Robert Florey. A later version, written by John Russell, added the twist of Frankenstein's hunchbacked assistant, Fritz, taking this brain in a panic after dropping the one originally intended for the Creature. See Skal, *Screams of Reason*, pp. 118-9 and 128.

<sup>564</sup> Undated speech transcript (R. C. Sherriff Archive), quoted in Curtis, *James Whale* p. 200.

<sup>565</sup> Wells, *The Invisible Man*, p.147.

<sup>566</sup> *Ibid*, p. 149.

<sup>567</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to Miss Gordon Daviot, 24/10/34. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/1/1/9).

<sup>568</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>569</sup> I am indebted to Roland Wales for confirmation of this.

## Chapter Seven – R.C. Sherriff: The English Pattern and the Hollywood 'British' Film

<sup>570</sup> Glancy, H. Mark, *When Hollywood Loved Britain: The Hollywood 'British' Film 1939-1945* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), p. 3.

<sup>571</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79.

<sup>572</sup> *Ibid*, p. 72.

<sup>573</sup> Hilton, James - *Good-bye, Mr. Chips* (Boston: Little, Brown and Company, 1934), p. 114.

<sup>574</sup> *Ibid*, p. 21.

<sup>575</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>576</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 38-9.



- <sup>577</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 43-4. 'You know, Chips, having all those hundreds of boys cooped up here is really an unnatural arrangement, when you come to think of it. So when anything does occur that oughtn't to, don't you think it's a bit unfair to come down on them as if it were their own fault for being here?'
- 'Don't know about that, Kathie, but I do know that, for everybody's sake, we have to be pretty strict about this sort of thing. One black sheep can contaminate others.'
- 'After he himself has been contaminated to begin with. After all, that's probably what *did* happen, isn't it?'
- <sup>578</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 45-6.
- <sup>579</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 7/1/1935 (R.C.Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>580</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 25/1/1935. (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>581</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 11/3/1935 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>582</sup> Hilton, James - Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 6/2/1936, (R.C.Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>583</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 20/2/1936, (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>584</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>585</sup> Hilton, James - Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 9/3/1936 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39).
- <sup>586</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>587</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 27/3/1936, (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>588</sup> Hilton, James - Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 9/3/1936 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39).
- <sup>589</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 27/3/1936 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39).
- <sup>590</sup> Hilton, James - *To You, Mr. Chips* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1939), p. 37.
- <sup>591</sup> 'Notes by Mr. Thalberg', 16 July 1936; *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, MGM/USC, quoted in Glancy, *When Hollywood Loved Britain*, pp. 84-5.
- <sup>592</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Goodbye Mr. Chips: Adapted by R.C. Sherriff from the novel by James Hilton*, Typescript screenplay, April 1936. (R.C. Sherriff aArchive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/10), p. 9.
- <sup>593</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.
- <sup>594</sup> Hilton, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, p.13.
- <sup>595</sup> Sherriff, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, p.22.
- <sup>596</sup> *Ibid*, p. 30.
- <sup>597</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.
- <sup>598</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.
- <sup>599</sup> *Ibid*, p. 48.
- <sup>600</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.
- <sup>601</sup> *Ibid*, p. 55. This exchange remains in the finished film, where Robert Donat plays up the innuendo by inserting a fractional pause before 'dress'.
- <sup>602</sup> *Ibid*, p. 56.
- <sup>603</sup> Hilton, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, p. 28.
- <sup>604</sup> Glancy, p. 84.
- <sup>605</sup> Sherriff, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, p. 67.
- <sup>606</sup> *Ibid*, p. 73.
- <sup>607</sup> *Ibid*, p. 83.
- <sup>608</sup> Hilton, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, p. 73.
- <sup>609</sup> Sherriff, *Goodbye Mr. Chips*, p.90.
- <sup>610</sup> Hilton, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, p. 76.
- <sup>611</sup> Sherriff, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, p. 125. In the finished film this is upgraded to a D.S.O.
- <sup>612</sup> *Ibid*, p. 128.
- <sup>613</sup> *Ibid*, p. 91.
- <sup>614</sup> *Ibid* p. 93.
- <sup>615</sup> *Ibid*, p. 119.
- <sup>616</sup> *Ibid*, p. 120.
- <sup>617</sup> Corporal punishment is also used as a bonding device in the novelisation of *Journey's End* – in the school section that precedes the action of the play, we are shown Stanhope caning Raleigh. See Sherriff, R.C. and Vernon Bartlett - *Journey's End: A Novel* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1930), p.36.
- <sup>618</sup> Sherriff, *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, p. 134.
- <sup>619</sup> Hilton, *Good-bye, Mr. Chips*, p. 107.
- <sup>620</sup> Hilton, James - Letter to R. C. Sherriff, 28/1/1935 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>621</sup> Hilton, *To You, Mr. Chips*, pp. 53-54.
- <sup>622</sup> 'Pattern' is a word that occurs frequently in discussions of Englishness during the 1930s/40s; Anthony Aldgate and Jeffrey Richards refer to its use by Noël Coward (in the closing speech of *Cavalcade*) and, more surprisingly, by George Orwell and Humphrey Jennings. See Aldgate and Richards, p. 201
- <sup>623</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 15/5/1939 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>624</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 30/4/1936 (R.C Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39)

- <sup>625</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to Victor Saville, 19/7/1938 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/30).
- <sup>626</sup> Sherriff, R. C. - Letter to James Hilton, 15/5/1939 (R.C. Sherriff archive, 3813/1/39). The extraordinary precision of that figure says something about Sherriff's approach to his work.
- <sup>627</sup> Barnes, Howard - *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* Review, *Herald Tribune*, 16/5/1939, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/5/2/29)
- <sup>628</sup> Anon, - *Times* review of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, 9/6/1939. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/5/2/29)
- <sup>629</sup> Lejeune, C.A. - *Goodbye, Mr. Chips* review, *The Schoolmaster and Women Teachers' Chronicle*, 29/6/1939. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/5/2/29)
- <sup>630</sup> Hilton, James - Letter to R.C. Sherriff, 1/5/1939, (R. C. Sherriff Archive, 3813/1/39)
- <sup>631</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to James Hilton, 13/8/1939 (R. C. Sherriff Archive, 3813/1/39).
- <sup>632</sup> Anon. - *Sheffield Daily Telegraph* review of *Goodbye, Mr. Chips*, 2/5/1939. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/5/2/29)
- <sup>633</sup> Struther, Jan (pseudonym for Joyce Anstruther) - *Mrs. Miniver* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1939), p. 202.
- <sup>634</sup> *Ibid*, p. 227.
- <sup>635</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *No Leading Lady* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1968), p. 208.
- <sup>636</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Mrs. Miniver* 1<sup>st</sup> script, 16/10/40 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/6/18/1), p. 1.
- <sup>637</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 29/30.
- <sup>638</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Mrs Miniver*, 2<sup>nd</sup> script, 24/10/1940, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/6/18/2), p. 1.
- <sup>639</sup> Struther, *Mrs. Miniver*, p.35.
- <sup>640</sup> *Ibid*, p. 203.
- <sup>641</sup> *Ibid*.
- <sup>642</sup> Snyder, Blake, *Save the Cat!: The Last Book on Screenwriting That You'll Ever Need* (Studio City, CA: Michael Weise Productions, 2005), p. xv. Snyder defines the 'Save the cat' scene as 'the scene where we meet the hero and the hero *does* something – like saving a cat – that defines who he is and makes us, the audience, like him'.
- <sup>643</sup> Sherriff, *Mrs. Miniver*, 2<sup>nd</sup> script, p. 15.
- <sup>644</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Mrs. Miniver*, 3<sup>rd</sup> script, 6/11/1940, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/6/18/3), p.1.
- <sup>645</sup> *Ibid*, p. 5.
- <sup>646</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 2/3.
- <sup>647</sup> *Ibid*, p. 4.

## Chapter Eight – R.C. Sherriff: Heroism and Duty. *That Hamilton Woman* and *The Four Feathers*

- <sup>648</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Memories of Active Service in France and Belgium, 1916-17*. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, 2332/3/9/32), p.47.
- <sup>649</sup> *Ibid*, p. 364.
- <sup>650</sup> Sherriff, *Journey's End*, p. 20.
- <sup>651</sup> *Ibid*, p. 49.
- <sup>652</sup> Quoted in Glancy, p. 63.
- <sup>653</sup> Sherriff, R.C and Reisch, Walter - *That Hamilton Woman* Dialogue Continuity script, (BFI Special Collection, S1018), p. 11
- <sup>654</sup> *Ibid*, p. 19.
- <sup>655</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23.
- <sup>656</sup> *Ibid*, p. 34.
- <sup>657</sup> *Ibid*, p.21.
- <sup>658</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23. The phrasing here carries a slight suggestion of Malvolio's phrase from *Twelfth Night*, Act II, Scene 5 '[S]ome are born great, some achieve greatness, and some have greatness thrust upon 'em.' As examined later, William Shakespeare also runs as an undercurrent throughout the various versions of *The Four Feathers*.
- <sup>659</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.
- <sup>660</sup> *Ibid*, p. 22.
- <sup>661</sup> See Campbell, Joseph - *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, (First published 1949. London: Paladin, 1988.), Campbell's analysis, with its three-part structure, itself owes something to the well-made play.
- <sup>662</sup> Mason, A.E.W. - *The Four Feathers* (First published 1902. London: Fontana, 1978.), p. 265.
- <sup>663</sup> *Ibid*, p. 51.
- <sup>664</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 13-14.
- <sup>665</sup> *Ibid*, p. 16.
- <sup>666</sup> *Ibid*, p. 186.
- <sup>667</sup> Wilson, A.N. - *The Victorians*, (London; Arrow Books, 2003), p. 175
- <sup>668</sup> *Ibid*, p. 198.

- <sup>669</sup> Michael Asher quotes an 1883 report by the *Times* reporter Frank Power, describing Hicks' campaign as one which 'even the most sanguine look on with the greatest gloom.' See Asher, Michael - *Khartoum: The Ultimate Imperial Adventure* (London: Viking, 2005), p. xxvi.
- <sup>670</sup> The 1978 edition that I have bears the cover line 'Seven times a major film' and has a cover photo from the 1939 film.
- <sup>671</sup> This lecture, which exists as a typescript in the R.C. Sherriff archive, is undated. However, Sherriff states that roughly 500 films have been made each year since 1929, making a total of around 10,000. This suggests a date around 1949.
- <sup>672</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Untitled lecture on screenwriting, c. 1949 (R.C. Sherriff Archive 2332/3/7/7/1) p. 7. Sherriff's wording here is remarkably similar to that of William Archer in *Play-Making*, p. ix.
- <sup>673</sup> Sherriff, *No Leading Lady*, p. 291.
- <sup>674</sup> Wales, p. 366.
- <sup>675</sup> The later version of the script adds a line to account for this, suggesting that General Faversham married late in life. Sherriff, R.C. - *The Four Feathers: Final Shooting Script* Typescript screenplay, 14/7/38, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/15), p. 4.
- <sup>676</sup> Campbell, Joseph - *The Hero With a Thousand Faces*, pp. 37-8.
- <sup>677</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Four Feathers: Revised Draft* Typescript screenplay 15/6/38 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/14), p. 15.
- <sup>678</sup> Sherriff, R.C. and Bartlett, Vernon - *Journey's End* (London; Victor Gollancz, 1930), p. 25.
- <sup>679</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Road Back Incomplete* Typescript Screenplay, n.d., c.1932 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/1), p. 3. In the finished film, this line is slightly rephrased 'You'll turn into a poet if you don't look out for yourself.'
- <sup>680</sup> Mason, *The Four Feathers*, p. 53.
- <sup>681</sup> Sherriff, *The Four Feathers* Revised Draft, p. 18.
- <sup>682</sup> *Ibid*, p. 27.
- <sup>683</sup> *Ibid*, p. 33.
- <sup>684</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to Alexander Korda, 26/5/38, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 3813/1/30)
- <sup>685</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to Adrian Brand Esq., 2/5/39, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 3813/1/48)
- <sup>686</sup> Faversham in this part of the film is very precisely the opposite of Griffin; where Griffin was speech without a body, Faversham is a body without speech.
- <sup>687</sup> Sherriff, *The Four Feathers* Revised Draft, p. 54.
- <sup>688</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 89-90.
- <sup>689</sup> *Ibid*, p.121.
- <sup>690</sup> *Ibid*, p. 95.
- <sup>691</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.
- <sup>692</sup> *Ibid*, p. 104.
- <sup>693</sup> *Ibid*, p. 111.
- <sup>694</sup> *Ibid.*, p.52.
- <sup>695</sup> *Ibid*, p. 59.
- <sup>696</sup> Sherriff himself had been in training at Gidea Park when he received the news of Kitchener's death, and wrote to his father about the depression and loss of morale that was experienced within the camp. See Wales, *From Journey's End to the Dam Busters*, p. 18.
- <sup>697</sup> Brittain, Vera - *Testament of Youth; An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1910-1925* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd., 1935). Sherriff's characterisation of Daphne may owe something to Brittain, whose brother, fiancé, and blinded suitor were schoolfriends, collectively referred to as the 'Three Musketeers'.
- <sup>698</sup> Savage, Jon, - *Teenage: The Creation of Youth 1875-1945* (London: Pimlico Press, 2008), p. 145.
- <sup>699</sup> Wales, , p.5.
- <sup>700</sup> Sherriff, *The Four Feathers* Revised Draft, p. 40.
- <sup>701</sup> *Ibid*, p. 116.
- <sup>702</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 2/3.
- <sup>703</sup> *Ibid*, p.13.
- <sup>704</sup> *Ibid*, p. 31.
- <sup>705</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 36/7.
- <sup>706</sup> Edwards, Martin - *The Golden Age of Murder; The Mystery of the Writers Who Invented the Modern Detective Story* (London: Harper Collins, 2015), pp. 265-6.
- <sup>707</sup> Sherriff, *The Four Feathers* Revised Draft, p. 30.
- <sup>708</sup> *Ibid*, p. 44.
- <sup>709</sup> *Ibid*, p. 160.

<sup>710</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 160-1

<sup>711</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - Letter to Miss E. Corbett, 20/7/38 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 3813/1/30)

<sup>712</sup> Sherriff/Wimperis, *The Four Feathers* Final Shooting Script, p.16a.

<sup>713</sup> Sherriff, R.C. and de Casilis, Jeanne - *St. Helena: A Play in Twelve Scenes* (London: Victor Gollancz Ltd, 1934), p. 87. John Dighton and Robert Hamer later reused the joke in the screenplay for *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (1949). See Hamer, Robert [and John Dighton] - *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1984), pp. 55-6.

<sup>714</sup> Sherriff, Letter to Miss E. Corbett.

<sup>715</sup> Sherriff/Wimperis, *The Four Feathers* Final Shooting Script, pp.124-5. Burroughs' accidental cavalry charge here is similar to that of Sergio in Shaw's *Arms and the Man* (1894). Wimperis almost certainly knew the play, and could have been reminded of it by A.E.W. Mason, who played Major Plechanoff in the original production.

<sup>716</sup> Sherriff, Letter to Miss E. Corbett.

<sup>717</sup> Richardson went on to become a favourite actor of Sherriff, who wrote him lead parts in two plays, *The White Carnation* and *Home at Seven*. Richardson also directed a film version of the latter, his only film as director.

<sup>718</sup> Anon. - *Manchester Guardian* review of *The Four Feathers* 'An Omdurman in Colour - 'The Four Feathers', 19/4/39. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>719</sup> Borthwick, A.T. - 'The Coward Who Was a Pukka Sahib'. *News Chronicle*, 18/4/39. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>720</sup> Anon. - *Times* review of 'The Four Feathers', 8/4/1939, p. 12 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>721</sup> Burton, Richard, Diary Entry for 1 June 1940, quoted in Williams, Chris (Editor) - *The Richard Burton Diaries* (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 2012), p. 45.

<sup>722</sup> Anon. - *Evening Standard* Review of *The Four Feathers*, 'Fine Film of British Heroism', 18/4/39 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>723</sup> Creelman, Eileen - 'The New Movies' *New York Sun*, 4/8/39. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>724</sup> Anon. - *Spectator* review of 'The Four Feathers', 28/4/39. Other reviewers, including the *Times* critic quoted above, related the attitudes of the unsympathetic characters to those of David Low's creation. The *Cavalcade* reviewer (29/4/39) referred to the feathers as 'little tokens of an outraged Blimperry'. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>725</sup> Anon. - *Cinema*, 'R.C. Sherriff Joins Korda', 10/5/39. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/27)

<sup>726</sup> The film even reuses some footage from the earlier version, including John Laurie's entire performance as the Mahdi.

## Chapter Nine – R.C. Sherriff: The Final Works. *The Dam Busters* and Notes on *Dunkirk*

<sup>727</sup> Brickhill, Paul - *The Dam Busters* (London: Evans Bros. Ltd., 1951), and Gibson, Guy - *Enemy Coast Ahead* (London: Michael Joseph Ltd., 1946). With an Introduction by Sir Arthur Harris.

<sup>728</sup> Harris, Arthur – Introduction to Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, pp. vii-viii, p.vii.

<sup>729</sup> *Ibid*, p. viii.

<sup>730</sup> See Williams, Eric – *The Wooden Horse* (London: Fontana, 1956), Reid, Pat R. – *The Colditz Story* (London: Hodder and Staughton, 1952), Montagu, Ewen – *The Man Who Never Was* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1956), Clifton James, M. E. - *I Was Monty's Double*, (London: Rider and Co, London, 1954), Minney, R.J. – *Carve Her Name With Pride* (London: George Newnes, 1956), Monsarrat, Nicholas – *The Cruel Sea* (London: Cassell and Co., 1951) and Landon, Christopher – *Ice Cold in Alex* (London: Heinemann, 1957)

<sup>731</sup> See Brickhill, Paul – *The Great Escape* ((1950) London: Faber and Faber, 1951), and Brickhill, Paul - *Reach for the Sky: The Story of Douglas Bader CBE DSO DFC* (1954) in *Great World War II Air Stories* (London: Octopus Books, 1982), pp. 391-670.

<sup>732</sup> Quoted in Ramsden, John - *The Dam Busters*, (London; I.B. Tauris and Co. Ltd, 2003), p. 19.

<sup>733</sup> Brickhill, *The Great Escape*, p.108.

<sup>734</sup> Brickhill, Paul, *The Dam Busters*, p. 11. Brickhill's world-view got more exceptionalist over the course of his three books; where *The Great Escape* (1951) is a story of teamwork and demarcation, and *The Dam Busters* (1951) is about a squadron of exceptional individuals, *Reach For the Sky* (1954) is very much the story of one man. Brickhill's language in this last book is sometimes positively messianic: 'I am no churchman, [...] but sometimes a vagrant thought intrudes that some hand not of this world may be using Bader as a vessel bearing another lesson for man in his struggle.' See Brickhill, *Reach for the Sky*, p. 670.

<sup>735</sup> *Ibid*, p. 38.

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<sup>736</sup> *Ibid*, p.14.

<sup>737</sup> It is interesting to speculate how these various writers could have treated the same material. Where Sherriff creates parallels between Wallis and Gibson, Rattigan might have stressed the differences between them; where Sherriff plays down the comedy, T.E.B. Clarke might have emphasised it.

<sup>738</sup> Brickhill, Paul - *The Dam-Busters*, Radio Script, 1951 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/31/3), p. 1.

<sup>739</sup> *Ibid*, p.10.

<sup>740</sup> *Ibid*, p.12.

<sup>741</sup> Whittaker, W.A. - *The Dam Busters* screenplay, February 1952 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/31/12), p. 10. While this could be a coincidence, I doubt the likelihood of two writers coming up with such an awkward line independently.

<sup>742</sup> Brickhill, *The Dam-Busters* radio script, p. 22.

<sup>743</sup> *Ibid*, p. 37.

<sup>744</sup> Wales, p.278.

<sup>745</sup> Thompson, Laurence - 'The Story Behind a Great British War Film', article in *The Age*, 26/6/1954.

Accessed online,

<https://news.google.com/newspapers?nid=1300&dat=19540626&id=6vZjAAAAIBAJ&sjid=xMUDAAAAIBA&pg=6854.7678261&hl=en>, 15/9/2016.

<sup>746</sup> Mycroft, Walter and Paul Brickhill/W.A. Whittaker (?) - *The Dam Busters* 'First Draft Outline Treatment', 10/10/51 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/31/7), Introductory Note.

<sup>747</sup> *Ibid*, p. 13.

<sup>748</sup> *Ibid*, p. 14.

<sup>749</sup> *Ibid*, p. 15.

<sup>750</sup> *Ibid*, p. 10. William Hartnell first played a Sergeant in *The Way Ahead* (1944) and continued to appear as N.C.O.s throughout his career.

<sup>751</sup> *Ibid*, p. 11.

<sup>752</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>753</sup> *Ibid*, p.8.

<sup>754</sup> *Ibid*, p. 23

<sup>755</sup> *Ibid*, p. 20.

<sup>756</sup> *Ibid*, pp. 23/4.

<sup>757</sup> *Ibid*, p. 29.

<sup>758</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>759</sup> Whittaker, W.A. *The Dam Busters* screenplay, p. 31.

<sup>760</sup> *Ibid*, p.1.

<sup>761</sup> *Ibid*.

<sup>762</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated. (This screenplay has no page numbers after 31.)

<sup>763</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated.

<sup>764</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated.

<sup>765</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated.

<sup>766</sup> *Ibid*, unpaginated.

<sup>767</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Dam Busters* Outline of Screenplay (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/31/9), p. 23.

<sup>768</sup> Quoted in Thompson, 'The Story of a Great British War Film'.

<sup>769</sup> Watkins, F. Leslie, - 'Our films are fully MANNED', Article in the *Sunday Mercury*, 15/5/55. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20)

<sup>770</sup> Gibson, *Enemy Coast Ahead*, 'Foreword and Dedication', pp. ix-xiv, p. x.

<sup>771</sup> Anon. - *Liverpool Post* review of *The Dam Busters*, 21/5/55, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20)

<sup>772</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters* Outline, p. 1.

<sup>773</sup> *Ibid*, p. 2. The nature and quality of light is a recurring theme in the descriptions in Sherriff's work for both stage and screen. Paul Fussell suggests that this preoccupation is a characteristic of writers who served in the trenches. See Fussell, Paul – *The Great War and Modern Memory* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975), pp. 51-63.

<sup>774</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7.

<sup>775</sup> Ramsden, *The Dam Busters*, p. 59.

<sup>776</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters* outline, p. 10.

<sup>777</sup> *Ibid*, p. 12.

<sup>778</sup> *Ibid*, p.16.

<sup>779</sup> *Ibid*, p. 17/18

- <sup>780</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 22.
- <sup>781</sup> Although the use of ‘black dog’ as a metaphor for depression is particularly associated with Churchill, he is only ever recorded as using it once, in a 1911 letter. The phrase dates back to the 1700s, and was often used by Samuel Johnson. See Cryer, Max - *Who Said That First? The Curious Origin of Common Words and Phrases* (Chichester: Summersdale Publishers, 2011), p. 25.
- <sup>782</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Dam Busters*, Screenplay 24/10/52, p. 77
- <sup>783</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters* outline, pp. 22/3.
- <sup>784</sup> Wales, p. 280.
- <sup>785</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, 24/10/52, p.1
- <sup>786</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>787</sup> Anon. - *Brighton Herald* review of *The Dam Busters*, 9/7/55 – ‘My only quarrel was with [Wallis]’ stupidity in disclosing the plan to bust the Moehne dam so casually in conversation with a country doctor – especially as the exact target of the raid was kept secret even from the R.A.F. men who were to take part.’ (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20)
- <sup>788</sup> Archer, William - *Play-Making*, p.83.
- <sup>789</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, 24/10/52, p.48
- <sup>790</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 23/24.
- <sup>791</sup> *Ibid.*, p.33.
- <sup>792</sup> *Ibid.*, p.49.
- <sup>793</sup> It marks a significant change in the attitude of the British cinema when, in *The Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner* (Tony Richardson, 1962), the young working-class athlete played by Tom Courtenay chooses *not* to do his best, deliberately losing a race, to the chagrin of the governor played (not coincidentally) by Michael Redgrave.
- <sup>794</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 60.
- <sup>795</sup> Ramsden, p. 38.
- <sup>796</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, 24/10/52, p. 3.
- <sup>797</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>798</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 8.
- <sup>799</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 78.
- <sup>800</sup> *Ibid.*, p.65.
- <sup>801</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 42.
- <sup>802</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 82/3.
- <sup>803</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 114.
- <sup>804</sup> Rattigan, Terence - *French Without Tears*, in *Collected Plays: Volume I* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1950), pp. 1-82, p. 30. This trick has remained popular with dramatists in need of a strong curtain line: David Mamet, a Rattigan admirer, uses it in *Speed-the-Plow* while James Graham makes it a recurring plot device in *This House*. See Mamet, David – *Speed-the-Plow* (London: Methuen Drama, 1988), p. 46, and Graham, James – *This House* (London: Methuen Drama, 2013), p. 41 and *passim*.
- <sup>805</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, Screenplay 24/10/52, p. 23.
- <sup>806</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *The Dam Busters*, Finally Revised Script, 2/2/53, (BFI Archive, bfi S884), p.21.
- <sup>807</sup> Sherriff, R.C. *The Dam Busters*, screenplay 18/12/53, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/31/14), p. 19.
- <sup>808</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, 24/10/52, p. 11.
- <sup>809</sup> Sherriff, *The Dam Busters*, 2/2/53, p. 16.
- <sup>810</sup> Mycroft, Walter C. - Elstree Studios Inter-Departmental Communication, 26/5/54 (BFI S884)
- <sup>811</sup> Anon. - *Spectator* review of *The Dam Busters*, 20/5/55, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20).
- <sup>812</sup> Clarke, Dennis W., Review of *The Dam Busters* in the *Tatler*, 1/6/55 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20).
- <sup>813</sup> Verecker, Barbara - Review of *The Dam Busters* in *Queen*, 1/6/55. (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20)
- <sup>814</sup> Powell, Dilys - Review of *The Dam Busters* in the *Sunday Times*, 22/5/55 (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/5/2/20)
- <sup>815</sup> Quoted in Barr, Charles – ‘Against the Grain: Kenneth Tynan at Ealing’, in Duguid, Mark, Lee Freeman, Keith M. Johnston and Melanie Williams - *Ealing Revisited* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2012), pp. 206-216, p.210. Barr goes on to say that ‘Tynan thus played at least a minor part in easing out an experienced and now rather old-fashioned professional writer – a process comparable to the tendency of some of his more outspoken theatre criticism’ (*Ibid*)
- <sup>816</sup> Sherriff, R.C. - *Dunkirk*; Notes on Screenplay, 17/5/56, (R.C. Sherriff Archive, Surrey History Centre, 2332/3/6/38/4), p.2.

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- <sup>817</sup> *Ibid.*  
<sup>818</sup> *Ibid.*, p.5.  
<sup>819</sup> *Ibid.*, p.6.  
<sup>820</sup> *Ibid.*, p.8.  
<sup>821</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.  
<sup>822</sup> *Ibid.*, p.15.  
<sup>823</sup> *Ibid.*, p.16.  
<sup>824</sup> William Archer, *Play-Making*, p. 90.  
<sup>825</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 40.  
<sup>826</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 241.

## Conclusion

- <sup>827</sup> Tynan, *A View of the English Stage*, p.158.  
<sup>828</sup> Taylor, John Russell – *The Rise and Fall of the Well-Made Play*, p. 9.  
<sup>829</sup> See Gledhill, Christine – *Reframing British Cinema 1918-1928/ Between Restraint and Passion* (London: British Film Institute, 2003), *passim*, but especially Chapter 1, 'Theatricalising British Cinema', pp. 9-30.  
<sup>830</sup> Brown, Geoff – "'Sister of the Stage': British Film and British Theatre" in Barr, Charles – (Editor) *All Our Yesterdays: 90 Years of British Cinema* (London: British Film Institute, 1986), pp. 143-167.  
<sup>831</sup> Mayer, David – 'Learning to See in the Dark', *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, Vol 25, No. 2, Winter 1997, pp. 92-114, quoted in Gledhill, *Reframing British Cinema 1918-1928*, pp. 13-14.  
<sup>832</sup> Nelmes., p.1.

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## **Talks**

Geoff Brown introducing *Caste*, Cinema Museum, Kennington, 9/11/17

Peter White on the Moehne Dam, BRE, 8/9/18

## **Television Documentary**

BBC Arena, *The Noël Coward Trilogy*, produced and directed by Adam Low, 1998.

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## Filmography

Country of production is the UK unless otherwise stated.

*Aces High* (Jack Gold, 1976)

*All Quiet on the Western Front* (US, Lewis Milestone, 1930)

*Arms and the Man* (Cecil Lewis, 1932)

*Astonished Heart, The* (Antony Darnborough/Terence Fisher, 1950)

*L'auberge ensorcelée/The Bewitched Inn* (France, Georges Méliès, 1897)

*Being There* (US, Hal Ashby, 1979)

*Bitter Sweet* (Herbert Wilcox, 1933)

*Blackmail* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1929)

*Blaue Engel, Der/ The Blue Angel* (Germany, Josef von Sternberg, 1930)

*Blithe Spirit* (David Lean, 1945)

*Bond Street* (Gordon Parry, 1948)

*Brief Encounter* (David Lean, 1945)

*Browning Version, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1951)

*Browning Version, The* (Mike Figgis, 1994)

*Caesar and Cleopatra* (Gabriel Pascal, 1945)

*Carve Her Name With Pride* (Lewis Gilbert, 1958)

*Cavalcade* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1933)

*Citizen Kane* (US, Orson Welles, 1941)

*Colditz Story, The* (Guy Hamilton, 1955)

*Comin' thro' the Rye* (Cecil Hepworth, 1923)

*Cruel Sea, The* (Charles Frend, 1953)

*Curse of Frankenstein, The* (Terence Fisher, 1956)

*Dam Busters, The* (Michael Anderson, 1955)

*Dandy Dick* (William Beaudine, 1935)

*Day Will Dawn The* (Harold French, 1942)

*Dead of Night* (Charles Crichton/Alberto Cavalcanti/Basil Dearden/Robert Hamer, 1945)

*Deadlock* (George King, 1931)



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*Design for Living* (US, Ernst Lubitsch, 1933)

*Dial M for Murder* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1954)

*Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (US, Reuben Mamoulian, 1931)

*Don't Take It To Heart!* (Jeffrey Dell, 1945)

*Dracula* (US, Tod Browning, 1931)

*Dracula's Daughter* (US, Lambert Hillyer, 1936)

*Dunkirk* (Leslie Norman, 1958)

*Easy Virtue* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1928)

*English Without Tears* (Harold French, 1944)

*Escape* (Basil Dean, 1930)

*Evergreen* (Victor Saville, 1934)

*Farewell Again* (Tim Whelan, 1937)

*Final Test, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1953)

*Foreign Correspondent* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1940)

*Forever and a Day* (US, Rene Clair/Edmund Goulding/Cedric Hardwicke/Frank Lloyd/Victor Saville/Robert Stevenson/Herbert Wilcox, 1943)

*Four Feathers, The* (US, Merian C. Cooper/Lothar Mendes/Ernest B. Schoedsack, 1929)

*Four Feathers, The* (Zoltan Korda, 1939)

*Four Feathers, The* (TVM) (Don Sharp, 1978)

*Four Feathers, The* (Shekhar Kapur, 2002)

*Frankenstein* (US, James Whale, 1931)

*Friday the Thirteenth* (Victor Saville, 1933)

*French Without Tears* (Anthony Asquith, 1940)

*Front Page, The* (US, Lewis Milestone, 1931)

*Good Companions, The* (Victor Saville, 1933)

*Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (US, Sam Wood, 1939)

*Goodbye, Mr. Chips* (Herbert Ross, 1969)

*Great Escape, The* (John Sturges, 1963)

*Heart to Heart* (TVM) (Alvin Rakoff, 1962)

*Henry V* (Laurence Olivier, 1944)

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*Home at Seven* (UK)/*Murder on Monday* (US) (Ralph Richardson, 1952)

*How He Lied to Her Husband* (Cecil Lewis, 1931)

*I Was Monty's Double* (John Guillermin, 1958)

*Ice Cold in Alex* (J. Lee Thompson, 1958)

*Importance of Being Earnest, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1952)

*In Which We Serve* (Noël Coward/David Lean, 1942)

*Inspector Hornleigh* (Eugene Forde, 1939)

*Invisible Man, The* (US, James Whale, 1933)

*Invisibility* (Lewin Fitzhamon/Cecil Hepworth, 1909)

*Journey's End* (US, James Whale, 1930)

*Journey's End* (Saul Dibb, 2017)

*Journey Together* (John Boulting, 1945)

*Juno and the Paycock* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1929)

*Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949)

*Lawrence of Arabia* (David Lean, 1962)

*Life and Death of Colonel Blimp, The* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1943)

*Lifeboat* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1944)

*Loneliness of the Long-Distance Runner, The* (Tony Richardson, 1962)

*Look Up and Laugh* (Basil Dean, 1935)

*Love on the Dole* (John Baxter, 1941)

*Loyalties* (Basil Dean/Thorold Dickinson, 1933)

*Lyons Mail, The* (Arthur Maude, 1931)

*Major Barbara* (Gabriel Pascal, 1941)

*Man Who Loved Redheads, The* (Harold French, 1955)

*Man Who Never Was, The* (Ronald Neame, 1956)

*Mikado, The* (Victor Schertzinger, 1939)

*Millions Like Us* (Sidney Gilliat/Frank Launder, 1943)

*Mrs. Miniver* (US, William Wyler, 1942)

*Mummy, The* (US, Karl Freund, 1932)

*Murders in the Rue Morgue* (US, Robert Florey, 1931)

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*Mutiny on the Bounty* (US, Frank Lloyd, 1935)

*Mystery of the Wax Museum* (US, Michael Curtiz, 1932)

*Nell Gwyn* (Herbert Wilcox, 1934)

*Night Mail* (Harry Watt/Basil Wright, 1936)

*Night My Number Came Up, The* (Leslie Norman, 1955)

*Number 17* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1932)

*One More River* (US, James Whale, 1934)

*One of Our Aircraft Is Missing* (Michael Powell/Emeric Pressburger, 1942)

*Piccadilly* (E. A. Dupont, 1929)

*Prince and the Showgirl, The* (Laurence Olivier, 1957)

*Private Life of Helen of Troy, The* (US, Alexander Korda, 1927)

*Private Life of Henry VIII, The* (Alexander Korda, 1933)

*Pygmalion* (Anthony Asquith, 1938)

*Quartet* (Ken Annakin/Arthur Crabtree/Harold French/Ralph Smart, 1948)

*Quatres Cents Faces du Diable, Les* (France, Georges Méliès, 1906)

*Queen Was in the Parlour, The* (Graham Cutts, 1927)

*Quiet Wedding* (Anthony Asquith, 1940)

*Rake's Progress, The* (Sidney Gilliat, 1945)

*Reach for the Sky* (Lewis Gilbert, 1956)

*Rembrandt* (Alexander Korda, 1936)

*Road Back, The* (US, James Whale, 1937)

*Rookery Nook* (Tom Walls, 1931)

*Rope* (US, Alfred Hitchcock, 1948)

*Scarlet Pimpernel, The* (Harold Young, 1934)

*Scrooge* (Henry Edwards, 1935)

*Secret of the Loch, The* (Milton Rosmer, 1934)

*Sensation* (Brian Desmond Hurst, 1937)

*Seventh Veil, The* (Compton Bennett, 1945)

*Show Boat* (US, James Whale, 1936)

*Sing As We Go* (Basil Dean, 1934)

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*Sixty Glorious Years* (Herbert Wilcox, 1938)

*Skin Game, The* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1931)

*Song of Ceylon* (Basil Wright, 1934)

*Sound Barrier, The* (David Lean, 1952)

*Storm Over the Nile* (Zoltan Korda/Terence Young, 1955)

*That Hamilton Woman* (US)/ *Lady Hamilton* (UK) (US, Alexander Korda, 1941)

*Things to Come* (William Cameron Menzies, 1936)

*This Above All* (Anatole Litvak, 1941)

*This Happy Breed* (David Lean, 1944)

*Those Were the Days* (Thomas Bentley, 1934)

*Toilers, The* (Tom Watts, 1919)

*Train of Events* (Sidney Cole/Charles Crichton/Basil Dearden, 1949)

*Tudor Rose* (Robert Stevenson, 1936)

*Twelve Angry Men* (US, Sidney Lumet, 1957)

*Uncensored* (Anthony Asquith, 1942)

*Victoria the Great* (Herbert Wilcox, 1937)

*V.I.P.s, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1963)

*Voleur Invisible, Le/The Invisible Thief* (France, Ferdinand Zecca, 1909)

*Vortex, The* (Adrian Brunel, 1928)

*Voyage dans La Lune, Le* (France, Georges Méliès, 1902)

*Waltzes from Vienna* (Alfred Hitchcock, 1934)

*Way Ahead, The* (Carol Reed, 1944)

*Way to the Stars, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1945)

*Werewolf of London* (US, Stuart Walker, 1935)

*Winslow Boy, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1948)

*Winslow Boy, The* (David Mamet, 1999)

*Wooden Horse, The* (Jack Lee, 1950)

*Yellow Rolls-Royce, The* (Anthony Asquith, 1964)

*Young Man's Fancy* (Robert Stevenson, 1939)

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