

ARTICLE

The Playwright as Filmmaker: History, Theory and Practice, Summary of a completed thesis by portfolio

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ABSTRACT

This paper summarises my doctoral research into the work of dramatists who became filmmakers – specifically Preston Sturges, Rainer Werner Fassbinder, David Mamet, and Neil LaBute. I began with the hypothesis that there is something distinctive about the work of filmmakers who have a background in writing for text-based theatre, an arena where the authorship is, on the whole, not a vexatious issue, as is the case in commercial cinema. Through case studies involving textual and contextual analyses of their films, I found common threads linking their work, in respect both of their working methods and their approach to text and performance. From this, I evolved a theoretical position involving the development of a tentative ‘dogme’ designed to smooth the path between writing plays and making films, and produced short no-budget videos illustrating it.

KEYWORDS

Theatre/film, Dogme, theoretical practice, Mamet, Fassbinder.

Introduction

The aim of this project – a thesis by portfolio, completed at the now-defunct Film Academy at the University of Glamorgan – was to contribute to that area within film theory where creativity is taken seriously as a field of study; an attempt to reconcile theory with artistry, without attempting to theorise artistry.

The ‘theatrical’ is often characterised as the ‘other’ of the cinematic, within both popular and scholarly discourse. My intention was to examine the interface between the two forms, and isolate those aspects of the theatrical aesthetic which can be profitably employed within cinema, looking at the issue from the perspective of the working dramatist – my background being as a writer for theatre, radio and television.

I began with the hypothesis that where playwrights – i.e. writers who have made their name with text-based work in the western theatrical tradition – have succeeded as film directors, it is as a result of building on those qualities which make them unique as authors within theatre, rather than through wholeheartedly absorbing formulaic cinematic values in terms of structure, dialogue, characterisation, and narrative resolution. My methodology involved examining the work of a number of

playwrights who have ventured into directing for film, and attempting to develop a theoretical practice based on what I discovered.

The first step was to demonstrate the existence of a body of work that I could draw on – playwrights who had become filmmakers. From the ‘Classical Hollywood’ period, I identified figures such as Ben Hecht, Clifford Odets and George S. Kaufman; on the European mainland, examples included Jean Cocteau, Sacha Guitry, and Marcel Pagnol; playwright-filmmakers from the UK include Peter Ustinov, David Hare and Christopher Hampton; post-classical American examples included Sam Shepard and Woody Allen (see *Filmography* for a more complete list).

I chose to focus on Preston Sturges (1898-1959), Rainer Werner Fassbinder (1945-1982), David Mamet (1947–) and Neil LaBute (1963–).

My literature review threw up very little work which addressed the concept of the playwright-filmmaker *per se*. In respect of individual dramatist-filmmakers, most of the work which exists appears to be dependent on their having produced a body of work in film which is sufficiently prominent to be worthy of study in its own right, without particular reference to the filmmaker’s theatrical origins. It was also difficult to find any work which examines these issues from the point of view of a creative writer hoping to develop different aspects of his/her practice. Furthermore, assuming that my approach to the development of a practice based on the investigation of film texts can be adequately described in terms of grounded theory, I also experienced some difficulty in finding studies within arts-based disciplines from which I could draw lessons in terms of methodology.

The next stage of my research involved analysing the work of selected playwright-filmmakers, attempting to isolate those distinctive aspects of their practice which might be attributable to their experience as writers working in live theatre.

The first filmmaker I looked at was Preston Sturges, who was at his creative peak in the 1940s, and virtually invented the concept of the writer-director within the Hollywood studio system. With particular reference to his film ‘The Palm Beach Story’ (1942), I identified his chief ‘theatrical’ hallmark as an identifiably unique authorial voice incorporating fast-paced comic dialogue, a propensity for embracing ambivalence in respect of themes covered (such as marriage, patriotism, Hollywood itself), and a disdain for facile narrative closure. He also retained creative control by drawing a close creative collaborative team around him, and asserted that the bulk of his ‘directing’ occurred during the screenwriting process.

My next case study was of David Mamet, possibly the most important American playwright of the latter part of the 20th Century. Focussing on his film ‘The Spanish Prisoner’ (1997), I argue that he imported into genre cinema his unique, profane, poetic, halting dialogue style, as well as a studied artificiality in terms of performance, his personal preoccupations (e.g. miscommunication, deception), and a playful, ambiguous approach to ‘issues’ such as capitalist ethics, sexual harassment and anti-Semitism. In terms of visual story-telling, he has counselled simplicity, an aesthetic whose central tenet is that the director’s job is to ‘point the camera at the story’; from which it follows that it is the function of writer, actors, et al to ensure that what is happening on-screen is inherently of interest.

These early case studies led to the tentative conclusion that the playwright-filmmaker, to a greater degree than a director who is not grounded in theatre, displays faith in the power of words rather than post-production processing to make an impact on the audience, faith in the power of skilful performance to break the fourth wall, and authorial individuality to the point of disruptive idiosyncrasy.

It was at this point that I made my first short film, attempting to illustrate these points – a piece foregrounding authorial expressivity and performative presence :– 'The Beauty', whose screenplay follows:

THE BEAUTY

We are looking at the door of a men's public toilet, from the outside. We hear the sound of scuffling coming from inside. Suddenly, the door bursts open, and a flustered-looking young man rushes out. He looks at us in alarm, then pushes us out of the way as he makes his hasty escape. We hurry through the door, into the toilet. Immediately, we see a man, in late middle age, slumped on the floor, leaning against the wall. His hair is ruffled, his nose is bleeding. He looks up at us, a little embarrassed.

OLDER MAN:

No, no, I... it's not what it looks like. I... I fell. I slipped, and fell. I... I was simply asking the time. I asked him what time it was, and he... he must have misread my intentions. It... it happens more often than you might suppose.

He smiles, sadly.

I... I'll be alright. Tough as old boots, me. Tougher than I look. It takes a lot to beat me down. The things I've been through. The things I've seen.

We hand him a paper handkerchief, which he accepts, dabbing at his nose as he speaks.

Oh. Thank-you. People... people never cease to amaze. The presumptions they make. The judgements. People can be so judgemental. So cruel, so... merciless. And yet...

He sighs.

And yet, it seems to me, when I look around, as I go about my business from day to day... it seems to me that there have never been so many beautiful people. It's marvellous. Truly. So much variety, so much daring. So much beauty. And... well, it's a stereotype, isn't it? Truth is beauty. Beautiful is good. It makes me so sad, sometimes. It does. The sheer beauty of it all makes me want to cry. Or... or perhaps I'm crying because...

He clears his throat, and shakes his head.

But no. Mustn't give in to self-pity. The most destructive emotion of all. No. One must laugh in the face of that foul impostor.

He looks deep into our eyes.

A word of advice, my friend. Never grow old. Never, ever grow old.

He slumps back against the wall, and closes his eyes.

I... I think I'll rest for a while.

Recognising that 'The Beauty' appeared to share some of the features of films produced under the banner of 'Dogme-95', I was drawn to investigate the similarities between *Dogme* and theatre:– these included a concentration on the interpersonal rather than the generic or technological when choosing subject-matter, and the fact that the 'liveness' of the production process is perceived as a virtue. Furthermore, the fact that 'The Beauty' was shot, effectively, in one take led me to try and further explore the possibilities inherent in this in terms of exploiting the 'truthfulness' of the unedited performance, and utilising for dramatic effect the claustrophobic mood which this might engender.

Thus, I wrote a short play entitled 'My Enemy's Enemy'. This was a two-hander, set in a prison-cell in a Fascist dictatorship, designed to be an examination of a fraught relationship, with a clear narrative. I then performed a textual analysis of the piece, with the aim of avoiding visual stasis by ascertaining 'where' the story was located at any given moment, and producing a shooting-script detailing the movement of the camera throughout. This screenplay follows:

MY ENEMY'S ENEMY

Dark. Close-up on a man's hands, chained to a wall.

WE PAN OUT TO SEE...

The prisoner –in his forties, dressed in ragged prison fatigues.

LIGHT COMES UP.

We see that we are in a small prison cell. Sparse – there is a chair, and a bucket. The man slowly wakes up.

WE SLOWLY PAN ACROSS TO SEE...

The guard, standing in the doorway. She is in her thirties, dressed in a uniform. Not the fragile type. She stands for a while, looking at the prisoner, curious.

WE PAN BACK TO THE PRISONER.

The prisoner regains full consciousness. He looks at the guard.

SLOWLY ZOOM IN TO MEDIUM CLOSE-UP ON HIM.

PRISONER:

Is it that time already?

guard:

What time?

prisoner:

Food. Is it time to eat?

guard:

No food.

prisoner:

Oh. What time is it?

guard:

What's it to you?

prisoner:

What?

guard:

Why do you need to know what time it is? Urgent appointment?

prisoner:

Just interested. Just... trying to keep the mind active.

PAN TO GUARD.

guard:

Isn't that how you got here in the first place?

She chuckles, and keeps on staring.

PAN BACK TO PRISONER.

Several beats – he finally loses patience.

prisoner:

What are you looking at?

PAN BACK TO GUARD.

guard:

(sinister)

I've never seen a dead man before. *(pause. She frowns.)* Too much?

prisoner:

I'm frozen to my very core.

guard:

Really?

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS HER AS...

She slowly starts to approach him, until they are face to face, very close.

prisoner:

You've been practising. Not in a mirror, I hope.

guard:

That's not very nice.

prisoner:

I'm not a very nice person. Growing less nice by the day.

guard:

And I always thought you were a gentleman.

prisoner:

I was never a gentleman. I just managed to fool a few people.

guard:

Oh, yeah? Women? Bit of a shagger, in your time, were you?

prisoner:

I'm not going to answer that.

guard:

Ah. Clever. Maintain an air of mystery. Still – we all know what you lot are like.

prisoner:

My lot?

guard:

Academics.

prisoner:

I'm not an academic.

guard:

You're more academic than me.

The prisoner opens his mouth to speak, then closes it again. The guard chuckles.

guard:

I know, I know. Not exactly difficult.

WE ZOOM IN TO A CLOSE-UP OF THE TWO OF THEM.

prisoner:

It's not true, is it?

guard:

What's not true?

prisoner:

Your never having seen a dead man.

guard:

Never let the facts get in the way, et cetera.

She moves away.

SLOW ZOOM OUT TO MEDIUM, CENTRING ON THE GUARD.

She goes and sits in the chair. She stretches her legs.

prisoner:

What are you doing?

guard:

What does it look like?

prisoner:

Making yourself at home?

guard:

Hardly.

prisoner:

To what do I owe this inestimable honour?

guard:

What's the matter? Am I invading your personal space?

prisoner:

Nothing better to do?

guard:

Just passing the time of day. It's a free country. *(she claps a hand to her mouth)* Oops – what *am* I saying? *(long pause)* Tell me a poem.

PAN TO THE PRISONER – MEDIUM SHOT.

prisoner:

... A poem?

guard:

Yeah. You are a poet. Aren't you?

prisoner:

You must be confusing me with someone else.

guard:

You're not the poet?

prisoner:

No, I'm not the poet.

guard:

And you're not the academic.

prisoner:

No.

guard:

So who are you?

prisoner:

A question I ask myself every waking second.

PAN TO THE GUARD.

guard:

Now, that's not true. I've been doing this job long enough to know that. You aren't asking yourself 'who?' You're asking yourself 'why?' And occasionally, 'when?'

prisoner:

Very perceptive of you.

guard:

I'm not just a pretty face. Tell me a poem.

prisoner:

I'm not a poet.

guard:

No, but you must know a poem. You're an educated man. You must have memorised poems. For the purposes of obtaining a shag.

PAN TO THE PRISONER. SLOW ZOOM IN.

prisoner:

'Your eyes blue as stone. Your breasts soft as milk. Your skin warm as loneliness.'

Silence.

PAN TO THE GUARD.

guard:

That was shit.

prisoner:

I am not a poet. *(pause)* I need the bucket.

guard:

Well, I've sat down, now. You'll just have to do it in your pants.

PAN TO THE PRISONER.

prisoner:

Actually, there's something strangely liberating about doing it in your pants.

PAN TO THE GUARD.

guard:

I'll take your word for it. Still. Come the glorious day, eh?

prisoner:

What?

guard:

The glorious day. When we change places. The revolution! 'El Presidente is dead, long live the new order!'

prisoner:

We're not going to change places.

guard:

What? I thought you were a revolutionary.

PAN TO THE PRISONER.

prisoner:

We're not going to change places, because I'm not like you.

guard:

Of course not. You're better than me.

prisoner:

I just... it's just that I don't... don't believe in treating people the way I'm being treated. Even you.

guard:

What about El Presidente?

prisoner:

I'd... I'd at least give him occasional access to the bucket.

PAN TO THE GUARD.

The guard smiles to herself. She reaches into her pocket, and takes out a small, mostly eaten bar of chocolate. She starts to eat it, with every appearance of sensual relish.

SLOW ZOOM IN ON HER, TO CLOSE-UP.

She continues to eat the chocolate.

SLOW PAN TO THE PRISONER – CLOSE-UP

The prisoner watches her, mouth watering.

prisoner:

Nice?

guard:

Lovely, thanks.

prisoner:

Creamy?

guard:

Nah. It's melted, and been refrigerated, melted and been refrigerated – all the creaminess has been bugged out of it, by the laws of physics.

prisoner:

But it's still...

guard:

Gorgeous.

prisoner:

Oh. Good. *(pause)* Strange. I could always take or leave chocolate. Before.

PAN TO THE GUARD. SLOW ZOOM OUT TO A MEDIUM SHOT.

guard:

I've always loved it. Could never afford it. Before. I suppose you'd say I've been corrupted by power.

prisoner:

Power? This isn't power. This is an illusion.

guard:

Really?

THE CAMERA FOLLOWS HER AS...

She gets up, and starts to strut around in front of him, brandishing the bar of chocolate, taking a bite, licking her lips, licking her fingers, waving the chocolate in front of his face, etc. Teasing. He follows the chocolate with his eyes. She swallows the last chunk.

guard:

Mmm. Mm-mm-mm. Heavenly.

prisoner:

A heavenly illusion.

guard:

Yeah?

She whips back her fist, and punches the prisoner very hard in the stomach.

guard:

What about that? Is that an illusion, too?

She watches as the prisoner, in his weakened state, takes some time to recover.

ZOOM OUT TO A LONG SHOT.

Eventually, he regains enough strength to speak.

prisoner:

Thank-you. I was losing touch with my humanity.

guard:

You're full of shit.

prisoner:

Well, thanks to you, not for very much longer. *(pause, as he regains more strength)*
What was that for?

guard:

I don't appreciate being patronised.

Prisoner:

You love it, really. It gives you an excuse to... act the way you do.

guard:

Here... I've got something to show you!

She reaches into her back pocket, and takes out a crumpled sheet of newspaper. She waves it in his face.

guard:

They're marching!

prisoner:

What?

guard:

The enemy! They're marching!

prisoner:

Hah! Yes! Good! Good! Serve you bastards right!

The guard starts to laugh.

prisoner:

See how you like it on the front line! See how you like it when the boot's on the other foot! We'll see what you're really made of, then! Away from this cushy, fucking... what... what are you laughing at? How... how many? Where are they? Which direction are they coming from? How far from the border are they?

guard:

Oh, they're a good distance from the border. Here.

ZOOM IN, TO CLOSE-UP, ON THE PRISONER AS...

She holds up the newspaper in front of the prisoner's eyes. He reads. He needs time to take it in. He sighs.

prisoner:

Oh.

SLOW ZOOM OUT TO TWO-SHOT.

guard:

... 'Oh'? 'Oh'? Is that all you can muster up? Millions of your beloved socialists are marching in their own capital, in support of El Presidente, and all you can say is 'oh'?

prisoner:

They're not marching in support of El Presidente. They... it's... complicated.

guard:

It's not complicated at all! They don't have the balls!

prisoner:

It's not about that.

guard:

I've seen them. On the television. Arriving at the airport, with their delegations, and their camera crews. Who do they come to visit? Not you! Not the prisoners, the poets,

the academics, the dissidents! Oh, no! Your beloved socialists head straight for El Presidente's palace!

prisoner:

You fail to grasp the subtleties of revolutionary thought.

guard:

Oh, excuse me – I don't see them instructing him in the ways of Marxism! I don't see them bundling him, blindfolded and trussed like a turkey, into the back of a jeep, and making the call to Commie Central. I see them crawling up his immaculate arse. 'We honour you, El Presidente, we kiss you, El Presidente, we're not worthy, El Presidente.' Now, I'm no expert, but this isn't the kind of behaviour I've been led to expect from revolutionaries.

prisoner:

You don't understand. In that part of the world, the struggle has entered a new phase. They're... retrenching. They're adjusting their worldview. They're confronting their guilt.

guard:

They're scared shitless.

prisoner:

Surely that's the correct response to the prospect of war.

guard:

They've got no balls.

prisoner:

And the only way to denote one's possession of external genitalia is to cause the deaths of thousands of innocent people?

guard:

Well, it seems to do the trick for El Presidente.

ZOOM OUT TO LONG SHOT.

She folds the newspaper up, and stuffs it back into her pocket. She goes to sit in the chair. She seems depressed. Despite himself, the Prisoner reaches the point where he can no longer ignore this.

prisoner:

Time of the month?

guard:

What?

prisoner:

You seem a little... down.

SLOW ZOOM IN ON GUARD, TO MEDIUM CLOSE-UP.

guard:

I'm not like this. Do you think I enjoy being like this?

prisoner:

I refuse to answer that question, on the grounds that you might hit me again.

guard:

If it wasn't for people like you, there wouldn't have to be people like me.

prisoner:

All I did... all I did was write the truth about El Presidente.

guard:

Well, what did you have to go and do something stupid like that for?

prisoner:

Careful – you're dangerously close to incriminating yourself.

guard:

We all know that El Presidente isn't a good man. That's what makes him a great man.

prisoner:

I know. He protects us from the forces of chaos.

guard:

Exactly. And scum like you... scum like you put ideas in people's heads.

prisoner:

Ah. People like... your cousin.

Startled, she looks up at him.

guard:

What the fuck do you know about my cousin?

PAN TO PRISONER.

prisoner:

I don't know anything about your cousin. It's just... there's always a cousin. Or a long-lost lover. Or a friend of a friend. In your case, I figured that the cousin was the most likely option. What happened to him?

guard:

Pretty much what's happening to you.

prisoner:

Oh.

PAN TO GUARD.

guard:

Although they tell me that with his last breath, he was expressing his undying devotion to El Presidente.

prisoner:

That must be very comforting for you.

SLOW ZOOM OUT TO MEDIUM TWO-SHOT.

The guard smiles, gets up and goes over to him.

guard:

I never liked my cousin. When I was small, he used to sit on my head, and fart in my face. So, when he eventually turned out to be a socialist, I wasn't surprised.

prisoner:

I wouldn't have thought there was necessarily a connection. Although, off the top of my head, I'm unable to recall the specifics of the Marxian perspective on flatulence, so don't quote me.

guard:

You know the trouble with people like you?

prisoner:

Of course. The trouble with people like me, is that we acknowledge the fact that we are troubled.

guard:

The trouble with people like you... the thing is... I don't know why El Presidente bothers. I mean... if there's anything your foreign friends have taught us... I mean, we all know what you lot are like. If you're not knifing one another in the back, you're shagging one another's women up the arse. All the time and energy he's wasted trying to destroy your sort. When you're perfectly happy to destroy one another.

She takes a key from her pocket, and unlocks the prisoner's chains.

prisoner:

Wh... what... what are you doing?

guard:

I'll give you three guesses.

prisoner:

I... I don't understand.

guard:

I don't think you're supposed to.

ZOOM OUT, TO LONG SHOT.

The prisoner is free. The guard stands back and watches, as he rubs his wrists.

prisoner:

Well, I won't pretend to know what you're doing, but... thank-you.

guard:

Don't thank me. Thank El Presidente.

prisoner:

... What?

guard:

He's freeing all the prisoners. In his infinite mercy.

prisoner:

He... he's what? I don't understand.

guard:

Maybe he's finally realised he has nothing to fear from you. Maybe he's realised you're the least of his problems.

prisoners:

He's freeing... *all* the prisoners? All of us? Thieves, murderers, rapists?

guard:

In his infinite wisdom.

prisoner:

But... but... I... I don't get it. I mean, the only time he's ever done this before... the only time he... oh!

guard:

And the penny finally drops.

prisoner:

But... the newspaper.

MEDIUM ZOOM IN ON GUARD.

guard:

That's your precious democracy for you. You're free to say what you like, but they're free to say you're wrong. And they don't even get the privilege of killing you. It'll never catch on.

She leaves.

THE CAMERA DOES NOT MOVE AS SHE LEAVES THE FRAME.

SLOW PAN TO THE PRISONER.
WE FOLLOW HIM AS...

Shaken, the prisoner staggers over to sit in the chair.

prisoner:

Oh!

ZOOM OUT TO LONG SHOT.

He stares into space.

FADE TO BLACK.

While I was only able to shoot a rudimentary version of this piece, I felt that making both *'My Enemy's Enemy'* and *'The Beauty'* were valuable exercises in the collection of data in relation to the filmmaking experience. The next phase of the study, therefore, involved developing a theoretical position in respect of the discoveries made. This entailed the creation of a list of principles with regard to the particular form of 'playwrights cinema' which I was aiming to explore. The 'rules' which I derived as a result of my work are as follows:

THE 'LIVE CINEMA' MANIFESTO:

1. The piece should be rehearsed and blocked as would a stage-play.
2. Each scene should be shot in one take (or appear to be so).
3. Each scene should contain narrative progression, such that a non-speaker of the language should be able to discern that the lives of the protagonists are changing.
4. The dramatic context of the piece, naturalistic or otherwise, should be convincingly rendered via decor and performance.
5. To the extent that they do not utterly undermine the intentions of the script, minor errors by the actors should remain in the finished piece.
6. The role of the director is to ensure that, at all times, the eye of the audience is focussed on the story.
7. The role of the editor is to enhance sound, image and mood, and to preserve the integrity of text and performance.
8. The writer's vision is paramount.

As with the Dogme 95 manifesto, these 'rules' are not meant to be read not as prescriptive with regard to cinema as a whole. Rather, they refer specifically to work which aims, whatever themes it chooses to address, to resonate on a humanistic level

by replicating the intensity of live theatre, and to achieve its effects through potent writing and performance rather than post-production processing. The intention is that they should provide a focus for the discussion of the filmmaking process, particularly from the viewpoint of the dramatist, and constitute a fertile basis for further practical investigation.

The next stage was to make a third film, in accordance with the manifesto. First, however, I felt it necessary to carry out further case studies, collecting more 'data'. I looked at the work of Rainer Werner Fassbinder in terms of what he brought from theatre, with special reference to his piece 'Ali – Fear Eats The Soul' (1974):– the humanisation of political issues through creating complex characters to embody them, the use of language to illuminate characters and their predicaments rather than simply to propel the narrative, his habit of dividing his films into clear 'acts', his employment of 'truthful' long takes, and an ambivalence towards issues such as left/right politics, sexuality, patriotism and capitalism.

I then examined the work of Neil Labute, in respect of his view of theatre as a 'contact sport'. In films such as 'In The Company Of Men' (1997), he confronts the audience with loathsome characters, making direct points about sin and morality; he presents characters who say the unsayable, and appears to revel in this, even as he expects the audience to condemn them.

I discerned commonalities between the four dramatist-filmmakers whose work I subjected to case study. The contextual factors which linked them included a scrupulousness in respect both of making the best of limited resources, and building effective collaborative teams. In textual terms, they have created a body of work which tends to foreground performance and language, to make intellectual demands in a manner which does not alienate the audience, and to embrace an ambiguous rather than a propagandist perspective on 'issues'. These are all factors which, I argue, have their genesis, at least in part, in their having developed a consciousness of and respect for live theatre audiences, this giving their work an organic, humanistic edge.

The next stage of the project involved attempting to create, as my third film, an example of 'Playwrights' Cinema'. This was 'I'm Not Like That' – the story of about a young man who becomes involved with a prostitute:– the screenplay is reproduced below.

'I'M NOT LIKE THIS'

SCENE 1. INT. DAY. TOMMY'S LIVING-ROOM.

Close-up of Tommy's face. He is in his twenties.

TOMMY:

They say you never feel the pain from the smack on the head that knocks you out. That's what they say, anyway.

He smiles sadly.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 2. EXT. NIGHT. A STREET CORNER.

Soundtrack music is all we hear. Sky, a girl in her late teens, stands on the corner, provocatively dressed, arms folded, looking bored, restless. Tommy appears, dressed smartly. Drunk, swaying, swigging from a bottle of beer. He wanders past Sky, glancing curiously at her. She ignores him. A few seconds later, he wanders back. They exchange a few words, which we do not hear. They walk away, Tommy closely, sheepishly following Sky, looking around him to make sure he is not being watched. We follow them as they disappear down a back-street.

Opening credits.

SCENE 3. INT. NIGHT. A PUB.

A few weeks later. Tommy sits, alone, leafing through a set of A4 sheets. A half-finished glass of beer is on the table next to him. Sky approaches. She is carrying a bottle of white wine and a glass. She pauses, and looks at him before sitting in the empty seat on the other side of the table. She sighs, pours herself a glass of wine, and puts the bottle on the table. Tommy looks up, briefly, then returns to his reading. Sky takes a sip of wine. She looks over at what Tommy is reading.

SKY:

That looks exciting.

Tommy looks up at her.

TOMMY:

I'm sorry?

SKY:

Looks like a right barrel of laughs, that.

Tommy smiles politely and returns to his reading. Sky takes another sip of wine.

SKY:

So this is a night out for you, is it?

Tommy looks up again.

TOMMY:

I'm sorry?

SKY:

Sitting in the pub, reading your school report?

TOMMY:

Presentation.

SKY:

What?

TOMMY:

It's a presentation.

SKY:

Oh.

Tommy returns to his reading. Long pause.

SKY:

Important?

TOMMY:

(not looking up)

I'm sorry?

SKY:

Is it important?

TOMMY:

In terms of saving Western civilisation, no. In terms of me keeping my job, yes.

SKY:

Fair enough.

She takes another sip of wine. Long pause.

SKY:

You've been on that page for a long time.

TOMMY:

It's a difficult page.

SKY:

Oh.

Long pause.

SKY:

So what's it about? Your presentation?

TOMMY:

It's really not that interesting.

SKY:

Try me.

TOMMY:

Trust me. You're not missing anything.

Long pause.

SKY:

You don't remember me, do you?

Tommy looks up.

TOMMY:

Yes. I do. I do remember you.

SKY:

Oh. That's nice.

Tommy sighs.

TOMMY:

So, this is what you do, is it?

SKY:

What?

TOMMY:

When you see somebody? When you're out, and you see somebody. A bloke that you... someone you've... is this what you do?

SKY:

Is what what I do?

TOMMY:

Are you trying to embarrass me?

SKY:

Just having a quiet drink.

TOMMY:

Money? Is it money?

SKY:

Oh. Now I'm offended.

TOMMY:

... Oh. I'm sorry.

SKY:

That's okay. Happens all the time.

(she looks at his sheets)

Sales projections, Western region. Scintillating stuff.

TOMMY:

I told you.

SKY:

So you did.

Tommy returns to his reading. Sky continues to drink. When he can take it no longer, Tommy looks up again.

TOMMY:

Look... erm... I'm sorry, I don't know your name.

SKY:

Sky.

TOMMY:

Sky. I... really? Sky?

SKY:

What's wrong with it?

TOMMY:

Nothing. It's a very nice name.

SKY:

Too nice, eh?

TOMMY:

Listen... Sky... I just want to say... what happened... that night... what... what we did... it wasn't me.

SKY:

Your twin brother, maybe? A hologram?

TOMMY:

No, I... I mean, it was me, obviously. But it wasn't... I was drunk.

SKY:

Yes. I remember.

TOMMY:

I mean... that's not the kind of person I am. I'm not the kind of person who does... that kind of thing.

SKY:

I believe you. Thousands wouldn't.

TOMMY:

I was... it was a moment of... weakness. I just... well, it's been a while since... and... I saw you, and I... well, I just felt... you looked so... and I thought...

Long pause. They look at one another.

SKY:

Married?

TOMMY:

No.

SKY:

Girlfriend?

TOMMY:

No.

SKY:

Boyfriend?

TOMMY:

I... still haven't found that special guy.

SKY:

There you are, then. No harm done.

TOMMY:

It's just... I'm not the kind of man who does that kind of thing.

SKY:

Relax, kid. You didn't actually do a lot. You just kind of stood there. While I did... my kind of thing.

TOMMY:

(looking around him, hoping that no-one heard)

Yes, alright, I remember.

SKY:

You really were very, very drunk.

TOMMY:

Yes, yes, thank-you, I get the picture.

Sky chuckles. Long pause. Tommy looks away.

SKY:

Sorry. I'm making you feel bad about yourself.

TOMMY:

Sure. That's what people do. Some people. Some people, that's the only way they can get to feel good about themselves.

SKY:

Ouch. Stabbed in the heart.

TOMMY:

Sorry.

He takes a large swig of his beer.

TOMMY:

Look, I'll be off. Leave you to... whatever.

SKY:

You don't have to go. Not on my account.

TOMMY:

I... I need to get back. Good night's sleep.

SKY:

Ready for your presentation, first thing in the morning.

TOMMY:

That's about the size of it.

(he grimaces)

So to speak.

He smiles, and starts to get up.

SKY:

Anyway, good talking to you. Thanks for being nice.

Tommy freezes, then sits back down.

TOMMY:

Nice? I wasn't nice! How can you say I was nice? I ignored you, I accused you of trying to blackmail me, and... well... you know... there was the other thing...

SKY:

Ah. And nice boys don't do the other thing.

TOMMY:

Well, I... I... do they?!

SKY:

You don't get out much, do you?

She sighs and refills her wine-glass.

TOMMY:

Expecting company?

SKY:

I'm having a night off.

TOMMY:

I meant... that whole bottle? All to yourself?

SKY:

I like wine. It's the nectar of the gods, you know.

TOMMY:

Oh? It gives me wind.

Sky chuckles. Tommy holds out his hand.

TOMMY:

Tommy. I'm Tommy.

Sky takes his hand.

SKY:

Sky.

TOMMY:

I'll believe you. Thousands wouldn't.

They smile at one another.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 4. INT. NIGHT. SKY'S BEDROOM.

Sky is lying in bed, unclothed, but covered with a sheet. She stares into space. A middle-aged man is doing up his trousers. He sits on the bed. As he speaks he puts on his socks, shoes, tie, etc.

CUSTOMER:

The deepest green, they were. Quite startling, utterly beguiling. One really doesn't come across green eyes all that often. Oh, a vague turquoise, sometimes, common-or-garden blue with the merest hint of green. Then there's that hazel colour, which is basically... well, it's not much of anything, really. But hers were bright green. I mean... not grass-green, that would be silly. Emerald-green, that's it. Not that I've ever actually seen an emerald, come to think of it. Not a sizeable one, in any case. They looked... her eyes looked like the sea. On a wondrous, cloudless day. 'I could swim forever in those eyes', I used to tell her. And she'd giggle. A beautiful, tinkling laugh she had. A laugh like a mountain stream. 'Tell me again', she'd say. 'Tell me again about my beautiful eyes'. And I would. And she'd kiss me. Her lips so soft, so warm. When she'd kiss me, and pull away, and gaze into my eyes, with me lost in hers... I could almost forget how ridiculously fat she was.

He chuckles to himself and pats Sky's bottom.

CUSTOMER:

Ah, the eternal mystery of woman. Do you know who else you remind me of? Although, these days, I suppose I could be accused of being politically incorrect for saying it. You remind me of my daughter. In an entirely innocent way, of course. I mean, I could never... well, obviously.

He looks at Sky.

CUSTOMER:

Depressed? Yes, I imagine you would be. Still. It's the way of the world. The man feels as though he's conquered a mighty empire. To the woman... it's as though yet another shred of her secret soul has been torn away.

(a sudden thought)

Are you... are you going to take drugs?

(pause)

Can I watch?

Sky remains expressionless.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 5. EXT. NIGHT. THE CITY CENTRE.

Soundtrack music is all we hear. Sky and Tommy walk together, not arm in arm, but chatting, laughing, sharing chips.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 6. INT. NIGHT. THE PUB.

Tommy sits with his mate Dave. Both are quite drunk.

TOMMY:

I mean, don't get me wrong, she's a lovely kid. Lovely. And when I say 'kid', I mean... she's not actually a kid, I mean, to look at her, she... she could be anything from, like, fifteen to thirty, but... all I mean is she's younger than me. But, you know, legal. Not that we've... you know. Not after that first... thing. She's young, and... no, not naïve, I mean, of course she's not naïve, look what she... look at all the shit she puts herself through. She's just... you just see in her face that she's someone who still has... dreams. Hopes, and that. I mean, I do like her, I like her a lot, but... what can you do? It's like... Marilyn Monroe.

Dave looks at him, incredulous.

DAVE:

Marilyn Monroe? Are you serious?

TOMMY:

I mean in the sense that... you look back at Marilyn Monroe, or... or Princess Di, or someone like that, and you think... if I'd been there. If I'd been there I could have done something. I could have saved her. Saved her from Them. Saved her from herself. But I couldn't have saved her. A, because she wouldn't have looked twice at an insect like me. And B, because... because women like that don't want to be saved.

They're addicted to the excitement, to the drama of being unsaveable. Do you know what I'm saying?

DAVE:

Oh yeah. The drama. They love the drama.

Both Tommy and Dave sigh, and drink from their pints.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 7. INT. DAY. THE HALLWAY OF TOMMY'S HOUSE.

Knocking at the door. At first tentative, then more and more insistent. Tommy rushes to open it.

TOMMY:

Yes, yes, alright, don't bust the bloody thing down!

He opens the door. Sky is standing there. One side of her face is virtually obscured by a large dressing – someone has cut her with a knife. We see that she has been crying.

TOMMY:

Sky?! Shit! What's happened!

SKY:

It doesn't matter.

TOMMY:

Who did this?! Who did this to you? I'll kill him.

SKY:

Can I come in?

Tommy stands back to let her in. He closes the door. His hands on her shoulders, he looks at her face.

TOMMY:

But this is... who did it?

SKY:

It doesn't matter who did it.

TOMMY:

I'll kill him! I'll kill the bastard!

SKY:

No you won't. Because you're not that kind of person. That's why I like you.

TOMMY:

But... you can't... he can't...

SKY:

Yes he can. He can because he can.

(she sighs)

Hold me. Please? Just hold me.

Tommy kisses her forehead, and they embrace, platonically.

DISSOLVE TO:

SCENE 8. INT. DAY. TOMMY'S LIVING-ROOM.

Tommy and Sky are seated together on the sofa, hand in hand. They stare at us.

SKY:

They say you never feel the pain from the smack on the head that knocks you out. Well... they're liars.

Tommy and Sky continue to stare at us.

FADE TO BLACK.

The effectiveness of the piece as realised was compromised by financial constraints. Nevertheless, I felt that it successfully achieved my dramatic and theoretical aims; the adoption of an unadorned visual style, including much use of the unbroken long take, enabling focus to be placed squarely on the text and performances, and allowing the bleakness of the characters' personal circumstances to be reflected.

The thesis concludes with a summary of my findings in respect of the impact of dramatist-filmmakers on the development of film form. I also assess the feasibility of viewing the 'manifesto' as an effective tool for filmmakers – or at least a starting-point for further research – and discuss the extent to which any playwright might be considered a filmmaker-in-waiting, especially given the high degree of visual, verbal, political and emotional literacy which dramatists have exhibited when crafting works for the cinema.

Filmography

PRESTON STURGES

The Great McGinty. (1940)

Christmas in July. (1940)

The Lady Eve. (1941)

Sullivan's Travels. (1941)

The Palm Beach Story. (1942)

The Miracle of Morgan's Creek. (1944)

Hail the Conquering Hero. (1944)

RAINER WERNER FASSBINDER

Katzelmacher. (1969)

The Merchant of Four Seasons. (1971)

Die Bitteren Tränen der Petra von Kant. (1972)

Bremer Freiheit. (1972)
Ali – Fear Eats the Soul. (1974)
Fox and his Friends. (1975)
The Marriage of Maria Braun. (1978)

DAVID MAMET
House of Games. (1987)
Things Change. (1988)
Homicide. (1991)
Oleanna. (1994)
The Spanish Prisoner. (1997)
The Winslow Boy. (1999)
State and Main. (2000)
Heist. (2001)
Spartan. (2004)

NEIL LABUTE
In the Company of Men. (1997)
Your Friends & Neighbors. (1998)
Nurse Betty. (2000)
The Shape Of Things. (2003)
The Wicker Man. (2006)

OTHER DRAMATIST-FILMMAKERS

‘CLASSICAL’ HOLLYWOOD

Crime Without Passion. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, 1934
The Scoundrel. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, 1935
Once in a Blue Moon. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, 1935
Soak the Rich. Ben Hecht and Charles MacArthur, 1936
Angels Over Broadway. Ben Hecht, 1940
Spectre of the Rose. Ben Hecht, 1946
Actors and Sin. Ben Hecht, 1952
The Senator Was Indiscreet. George S. Kaufman, 1947
None But the Lonely Heart. Clifford Odets, 1944
The Story on Page One. Clifford Odets, 1959

THE EUROPEAN MAINLAND

Le Sang d'un poète. Jean Cocteau, 1930
La Belle et La bête. Jean Cocteau, 1946
Les Parents terribles. Jean Cocteau, 1948
L'Aigle à deux têtes. Jean Cocteau, 1948
Orphée. Jean Cocteau, 1950
Le Testament d'Orphée. Jean Cocteau, 1959

Le Roman d'un Tricheur. Sacha Guitry, 1935
Napoléon. Sacha Guitry, 1955

La Fille du Pussatier. Marcel Pagnol, 1940
Topaze. Marcel Pagnol, 1951

Un Chant d'amour. Jean Genet, 1950

Three Fugitives. Francis Veber, 1989

Le diner de Cons. Francis Veber, 1998

Kuhle Wampe. Bertolt Brecht and Slatan Dudow, 1932

GREAT BRITAIN

In Which We Serve. Noël Coward and David Lean, 1943

School for Secrets. Peter Ustinov, 1946

Vice Versa. Peter Ustinov, 1947

Private Angelo. Peter Ustinov, 1949

Romanoff and Juliet. Peter Ustinov, 1961

Billy Budd. Peter Ustinov, 1962

Lady L. Peter Ustinov, 1965

Hammersmith Is Out. Peter Ustinov, 1972

Memed My Hawk. Peter Ustinov, 1984

Butley. Harold Pinter, 1974

Bleak Moments. Mike Leigh, 1971

High Hopes. Mike Leigh, 1988

Naked. Mike Leigh, 1993

Secrets & Lies. Mike Leigh, 1996

Vera Drake. Mike Leigh, 2004

Wetherby. David Hare, 1985

Paris by Night. David Hare, 1988

Strapless. David Hare, 1990

Hidden City. Stephen Poliakoff, 1987

Close My Eyes. Stephen Poliakoff, 1991

London Kills Me. Hanif Kureishi, 1991;

Rosencrantz & Guildenstern are Dead. Tom Stoppard, 1990

Decadence. Steven Berkoff, 1994.

Henry V. Kenneth Branagh, 1989

Peter's Friends. Kenneth Branagh, 1992

In The Bleak Midwinter. Kenneth Branagh, 1995

Carrington. Christopher Hampton, 1995

Imagining Argentina. Christopher Hampton, 2003

Up'N'Under. John Godber, 1997

Rancid Aluminium. Ed Thomas, 2000

Mojo. Jez Butterworth, 1997

Birthday Girl. Jez Butterworth, 2001

Peaches. Nick Grosso, 2000
Nasty Neighbours. Debbie Isitt, 2000
Confetti. Debbie Isitt, 2006

POST-CLASSICAL HOLLYWOOD

Take the Money and Run. Woody Allen, 1969
Annie Hall. Woody Allen, 1977
Hannah and Her Sisters. Woody Allen, 1986
Crimes and Misdemeanours. Woody Allen, 1989
Sweet and Lowdown. Woody Allen, 1999
Match Point. Woody Allen, 2005

Cotton Comes to Harlem. Ossie Davis, 1970
That Championship Season. Jason Miller, 1982
The Goodbye People. Herb Gardener, 1983
I'm Not Rappaport. Herb Gardener, 1996
Joe Versus the Volcano. John Patrick Shanley, 1990
The Evening Star. Robert Harling, 1996
Far North. Sam Shepard, 1988
Silent Tongue. Sam Shepard, 1994
You Can Count On Me. Kenneth Lonergan, 2000
Mrs Harris. Phyllis Nagy, 2005
Madea's Family Reunion. Tyler Perry, 2006

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