Cultural Studies in the English Classroom

by

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of

Master of Education

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Abstract

The shift from a literary studies to a cultural studies paradigm of teaching English language arts was investigated from the perspective of a classroom teacher. The study was a hermeneutic inquiry examining the foundations of the paradigm of literary studies, the epistemological challenges to this paradigm, and the formation of a new paradigm of cultural studies. Employing elements of the cultural studies paradigm, including media studies, ideological critique, new historicism, semiotics, Marxist, feminist, and psychoanalytical criticism, and other postmodern discourses, five films were investigated: Frankenstein (1931), Mary Shelley's Frankenstein (1994), Romeo and Juliet (1968), Romeo + Juliet (1996), and The Edge (1997). This investigation also applied the methods of narrative inquiry to illustrate the personal transformation in thinking about text and representation undergone by the researcher throughout the course of the study. The study found that a cultural studies approach to the teaching of film provided insights not afforded by the more traditional paradigm of literary study while still drawing upon many of the same techniques used in traditional literary analysis.

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Introduction: Situating the Researcher and Research

Research Question

When I graduated as an English language arts teacher in 1982, I remember one of our instructors telling us that the children born that year would comprise the high school graduating class of the year 2000. The number seemed too distant to fathom at the time, but those children sit in my classroom today. Once they arrived, I realized that I had been waiting for them, wondering whether I'd be prepared to teach them what they need in order to negotiate meaning in a world so different from the one I grew up in only a generation ago, a world without VCR's, CD's or PC's. When I began my master's program, it was with these children in mind. Having taught for ten years, I couldn't help but sense a widening gulf between my generation and theirs. They didn't read the way I had at their age, they didn't think the way I thought, and the things I valued, no, cherished, did not appear to have much value for them. As I strove to make connections between our vastly different generations and the knowledge that served us, I wondered what value still remained in the things I cherished and the knowledge I served. I served literature, I served *up* literature to my students in the precise and particular ways in which I had been schooled. And I realized, with anxiety and alarm, that it simply didn't serve anymore.

The research question I chose to address for my thesis confronts this dilemma: How does an English teacher schooled in the close reading of great works of literature

transform herself into a teacher of the English language arts? According to Manitoba's new curriculum, these arts now consist of reading, writing, speaking, listening, viewing and representing. Although viewing and representing are relatively new additions, their inclusion as two of the language arts strands has been anticipated for several years by Ontario's introduction of a mandated media studies program in 1989. Although I had attempted several times to include viewing and representing in my classroom practice, I saw them as add-ons, more things to teach in an already crowded curriculum. I simply couldn't make all the pieces fit, for my students or for myself. I had reached a point of cognitive dissonance. Gradually it dawned on me that what I needed to do was nothing less than a total reconceptualization of my role as a language arts teacher, from a teacher of literature to a teacher of all signifying practices which constitute communication for my students.

With this as my goal, I set out to present a history of the discipline of English and its transformation into the paradigm of cultural studies, a more critical and inclusive study of the signifying practices of our culture, and then to demonstrate how this approach to film would differ from a traditional literary studies approach, using selected films I might normally show to my students: two adaptations of Frankenstein, and two adaptations of Romeo and Juliet. My purpose was to set aside, for the moment, actual questions of pedagogy, and to focus instead on what knowledge I would need in order to reframe my understanding of film before I could begin to teach it as something more than an add-on in the language arts classroom. Drawing on research in media studies, cultural studies,

postmodernism, semiotics, feminist criticism, Marxist criticism, psychoanalytical criticism, in short, on a wide range of current theory in the study of signifying practices, I revisited the films I thought I knew. What I discovered was a constant tension between my established ways of understanding text and the requirements of a cultural studies approach to film. While attempting to reconcile this tension, I met myself at every turn, the true subject of my research. The results here are not so much a product as they are a process, not so much an answer as they are a moving through questions about the nature of interpretation itself. At times throughout this process, I have felt like Laurence Sterne's infuriatingly funny Tristam Shandy, hopelessly, yet painstakingly, trying to set the stage for his own birth. It begins with the search for a method of inquiry.

Research Methodologies

My studies in curriculum and methods of inquiry into educational theory and practice prompted me to pursue a research question for this thesis that holds personal relevance and urgency to me as a teacher. Having determined to address this troubling question of my own transformation, I endeavored to find a model of authentic inquiry that would both satisfy the requirements of a research thesis and prove valuable to me in my professional growth. Happily, the very transformation in my own thinking which I was seeking to map coincides with a transformation in the way we think about research into education. A shift from quantitative to qualitative research methodologies, from numbers to words, from statistics to situated experiences, from abstract theory to grounded theory, and from a conception of knowledge as absolute to a recognition of knowledge as

conditional— all of these shifts have changed the nature of research into education as well as our concept of the researcher herself. Where once the researcher strove for a certain invisibility, that is, an absence of bias that could cloud the objectivity of her study, now it is acknowledged that the researcher never is or was invisible, and that our very idea of objectivity is, at best, an unattainable goal, at worst, a means of concealment and obfuscation. As Polanyi (1958) contended in his ground-breaking Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy, "complete objectivity as usually attributed to the exact sciences is a delusion and is in fact a false ideal" (p. 18). In its stead, Polanyi posited "the conception of personal knowledge" (p. 18) as a much needed humanizing element in the study of science. What is true of the ostensibly objective discipline of science must be even more valid in the field of educational research, where any claim, no matter how seemingly objective, is subject to the human element by the very nature of our discipline.

Short's (1991) Forms of Curriculum Inquiry celebrates the proliferation of research methodologies which have gained acceptance as valid forms of inquiry into education subsequent if not consequent to Polanyi's assertion that we recognize the importance of personal knowledge in all forms of research. Of the seventeen forms of inquiry outlined in his book, two were most helpful as models for my present study: hermeneutic and narrative inquiry. Both models acknowledge the subjectivity of the researcher and the pivotal role of personal knowledge as part of the inquiry process. As D.G. Smith (1991) states in "Hermeneutic Inquiry", "a clear split between subjective

thinking and objective thinking is ridiculous because my subjectivity gets its bearings from the very world that I take as my object" (p. 192). As a result, both models eschew the criteria and the language of quantitative research in favor of more authentic criteria and language which reflects the often intangible, unquantifiable, yet no less valid reality of human experience. As Connelly and Clandinin (1991) explain: "Like other qualitative methods, narrative relies on criteria other than validity, reliability, and generalizability. It is important not to squeeze the language of narrative criteria into a language created for other forms of research" (p. 134). Instead, they suggest the criteria of "apparency, verisimilitude and transferability as possible criteria"(p. 134), along with the criteria of authenticity, which comes from the specificity of language and attention to the particular rather than the general (p. 135). Smith concurs in his discussion of the language of hermeneutic research: "My language contains within it the evidence not just of the openness of my life, but, in a deep and subtle way, its anticipation of being transformed in the face of new lived realities" (p. 193). Neither model of inquiry aims at "Truth" as an absolute, but rather recognizes the exciting possibility of uncovering "truths" in the experience of living and writing and knowing our lives, as well as the transformative power this process can engender. These two models encouraged me to aim for honesty, allow for uncertainty, and hope for transformation in my own thinking about text and representation as a language arts teacher.

However similar these two research models are in their rejection of the empiricist paradigm of inquiry, each one informs aspects of this research in quite distinct ways. The

hermeneutic model provided the guidelines for authentic interpretation, not only of the aesthetic texts examined in this study, but also of the theoretical and critical materials I bring to bear in my examination of these aesthetic texts. Narrative inquiry provided precedents for situating my interpretations within the ebb and flow of my own learning and teaching life. And most importantly, perhaps, examples of narrative inquiry helped me to find a voice from which to speak my own particular truths as a reflective practitioner. What follows is a fuller explanation of these two forms of curriculum inquiry and their relation to specific chapters of my research.

The Hermeneutic Turn of Mind

According to D. G. Smith (1991), hermeneutic inquiry is "the activity of interpreting our lives and the world around us" (p. 187). Insofar as we all interpret the world in our everyday lives, hermeneutics is "the primordial condition of human self-understanding" (p. 192). Although interpretation as such has existed for as long as human beings have tried to understand their world and themselves, the recognition of hermeneutics as a legitimate field of research into education is a fairly recent phenomenon. Its necessity, according to Smith, is borne of a certain frustration with the limitations of empirical research techniques which tend to focus on isolated parts and thus fail to give an understanding of the whole. At times of social change and upheaval, the need is felt for hermeneutics as a means of reaching a deeper understanding of the whole in relation to its discrete parts. As Smith explains:

> The critique of "foundationalism" inherent in the current post-structuralist movements signals what many people already understand intuitively which is that... there is a crisis of value at work that cannot be resolved simply be appealing to traditional forms of logic and authority. It may be precisely the inability of traditional (Western) forms of discourse to deal single-handedly with the lived problems of modernity that makes interpretation or re-interpretation of contemporary paradigms and their institutional embodiments necessary. (p. 188)

The "crisis of value" alluded to here is faced every day by my colleagues and myself as we make educational choices for our students related to materials, classroom practices and evaluation procedures. The paradigmatic ground beneath us is shifting, and my need to understand this shift, from the inside out, seemed most appropriately addressed by the methods of hermeneutic inquiry.

Smith describes four requirements of the hermeneutic imagination which should guide inquiry of this type. First of all, one must "develop a deep attentiveness to language itself" (p. 199), and a sense of "its predispositions in terms of metaphor, analogy, and structure" (p. 199). The second requirement Smith describes as "a deepening of one's sense of the basic *interpretability* of life itself" which entails "taking up the interpretive task for oneself rather than simply receiving the delivered goods as bearing the final word" (p. 199). In this regard, Smith proposes that in a hermeneutic study one avail oneself not only of the grand narratives which he suggests may be

suffering from postmodern exhaustion, such as "marxism, psychoanalysis, or critical analysis" (p. 199), but also of "the more suffocated narratives of our time" (p. 199), or, "those concerning spirituality", "feminism, and the new discourses about north-south relations and global interdependence" (p. 199) which affirm that "good interpretation is a creative act on the side of sharpening identity within the play of differences" (p. 199). What follows from this is Smith's third requirement that "the mark of good interpretive research is not is the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated" (p. 201). Finally, then, "hermeneutics is about creating meaning, not simply reporting on it" (p. 201). This fourth requirement involves taking up one's subjectivity "with a new sense of responsibility" (p. 201). Taken together, a hermeneutic study becomes an ongoing conversation between the interpreter, the interpretive community, and that which is being interpreted, a process whose ends cannot always be predicted and certainly cannot be preordained, a process Smith likens to improvisational jazz. In addition to these four requirements of the hermeneutic imagination, Smith identifies one key requirement of hermeneutic research: "The conversational quality of hermeneutic truth points to the requirement that any study carried on in the name of hermeneutics should provide a report of the researcher's own transformations undergone in the process of the inquiry; a showing of the dialogical journey..." (p. 198). The interpreter, then, must remain visible and open to change as part of the process of hermeneutic inquiry.

The chapters which follow can be considered as set pieces or exercises in

hermeneutic inquiry as set out by D. G. Smith (1991). In the first chapter, I deconstruct the English teacher in an effort to understand the values and ideologies which have forged the traditional discipline of literary criticism and the contemporary forces which presently call this discipline into question. As Smith maintains, "deconstruction itself is an interpretive hermeneutical activity" (p. 194), and thereafter he uses the terms "deconstruction", "hermeneutics", and "interpretation" interchangeably throughout his article. For me, then, the process of "deconstructing" the English teacher became a conversation with the founders and critics of my profession in which I found myself deeply implicated as both accuser and accused. Consequently, tracing the historical developments which have transformed the role of the language arts teacher entailed more than simply reporting on these developments. This chapter represents a map of my own dialogical journey of transformation as a teacher. The remaining chapters constitute the actual journey through my interactions with the specific films.

Cultural Studies as Hermeneutic Inquiry

One of the major departures cultural studies makes from traditional literary interpretation involves the very choice of material deemed worthy of academic study. According to Antony Easthope (1991), the object of cultural studies "consists in part of texts-- films, television programmes, newspapers, advertisements, popular songs-- lived within the everyday, but then submitted to reconstruction in academic analysis alongside canonical texts treated in the same way" (p. 172). The films I have chosen straddle the high culture / popular culture divide, being popular cinematic adaptations of recognized

canonical works, Frankenstein and Romeo and Juliet. I chose adaptations of classics in order to see whether a cultural studies approach could apply, as Easthope asserts, to works of both high and popular culture. In addition, I have included a chapter on the film The Edge which stands somewhat apart from my analysis of the other four films because it is not an adaptation of a recognized classic and is therefore free of the literary/cultural associations adhering to the other films.

Throughout these chapters, I strove to apply the principles of hermeneutic inquiry to the individual films under consideration, employing the "deep attentiveness to language" required of hermeneutic study to the language of film. The term "media literacy" itself suggests that film and other visual media can be *read* in manners analogous to the reading of print. In order to decode film as a text, one must be attentive to such matters as narrative structure, characterization and theme, but also to all of the visual elements which comprise a director's *mise en scene* or composition of each individual frame, such as costumes, lighting, camera angles, etc. The study of semiotics demands this close attentiveness to each element of the visual composition of a frame of film, for every detail can be read as a signifier pointing to an idea beyond itself. Just as words on a page are signifiers of meaning, so too are the separate visual features of film. Therefore, one can apply the techniques of close reading common to the study of literary text to the study of film in the recognition that film is a construction of reality mediated through particular directorial choices. To this point, a cultural studies interpretation of film does not differ significantly from a more traditional literary analysis. Where cultural

studies departs from a more traditional analysis of film would be in its examination of the purposes to which such a close reading would be put.

Here the term "cultural studies" as a distinct, easily definable, interpretive methodology becomes somewhat complicated. In Doing Cultural Studies: The Story of the Sony Walkman, du Gay et al. (1997) propose a model for this approach involving five cultural processes which comprise the study of culture: representation, identity, production, consumption, and regulation, and then apply these processes to a case study of the Sony Walkman in terms of its social meanings. While some of these processes can apply to a study of film, the films themselves tended to ask questions that this model did not necessarily accommodate. Another more useful model was that outlined by Kellner (1995) in Media Culture:

> Thus, reading media culture politically involves situating it in its historical conjuncture and analyzing how its generic codes, its positioning of viewers, its dominant images, its discourses, and its formal-aesthetic elements all embody certain political and ideological positions and have political effects. (p. 56)

Kellner's definition of a cultural studies critique shows the ways in which cultural studies departs from traditional formalist approaches to the analysis of film or other literary forms. The key difference lies in the rejection of traditional conceptions of art as discrete and self-contained creations which can be analyzed independent of their historical or

political context or audience affect. In his analysis of film, Kellner is still concerned with "generic codes" and the effects of narrative, a close reading of a film's imagery, and other "formal-aesthetic elements", but not as ends in themselves, rather as the means through which a film's ideological meanings are conveyed. Aesthetic considerations are not taken up with the goal of judging the artistic worth of a film, then, but rather to make manifest its methods of rhetorical persuasion. Thus, a cultural studies approach to the interpretation of film engages the traditional repertoire of interpretive strategies one would apply to the study of any aesthetic text, the specialized strategies unique to the study of visual media, and the strategies of cultural criticism which seek to reveal the ideological positions assumed and transmitted through film.

Easthope's (1991) Literary into Cultural Studies elaborates on the model demonstrated by Kellner. Easthope maintains that recent developments in critical theory have seriously called into question the paradigm of traditional literary studies and made way for the emergence of cultural studies as a means of considering all forms of a society's signifying practices. He identifies six "theoretical interventions" which have occasioned a break with the traditional paradigm of literary studies and constitute the main terms of cultural studies: sign system, institution, ideology, gender, position, and the other (p. 137). By sign system, Easthope refers to the fact that any signifying practice can be analyzed according to its signifiers and what they signify, employing the techniques of semiotics to subject any text, (not specifically a literary one) to a close reading of its signs and what they signify. The term "institution" refers to a recognition

of the context within which signifying practices are produced and their meanings circulated, be they the academic institutions within which literary works are taken up, or other institutions such as that of Hollywood film realism. As Easthope says, "Though the institutions are different, analysis in terms of institution has come to apply in common to both literary and popular cultural texts" (p. 70). In this respect, the question of ideology becomes a key concern, as every signifying practice is informed by its ideology, which "always conforms to the interests of those from whom it comes" (p. 131). The concept of subject position proceeds from the understanding that "ideology works by interpellating the subject, by hailing the subject to see itself as a free individual" (p. 69), thus inviting the audience to identify themselves with the dominant ideology transmitted by the film. This confers an illusion of naturalness or taken-for-grantedness on the ideologies permeating any given signifying practice, an illusion cultural studies seeks to make manifest. By doing so, the process of cultural studies moves to a consideration of the "other" as that which is silenced and excluded from the dominant ideology expressed in any signifying practice. The concept of the other is "imbricated on the one side with ideology" but "also covers aspects and functions of gender" (p. 134). In short, the "other" is defined by Easthope as "the deviant, different, unknown", that which is generally excluded from the dominant discourses in any signifying practice. The work of cultural studies, then, is to employ traditional methods of literary analysis to all forms of signifying practice in an effort to uncover that which is left unsaid, and ultimately, to expose the power structures which stand behind our modes of discourse, be they literary

or popular. The project of cultural studies is a tall order because it addresses questions of value in society on the understanding that no form of signifying practice is ideologically innocent.

The methods of cultural studies defined and demonstrated by Kellner (1995) and Easthope (1991) have much in common with those of hermeneutic inquiry as laid out by D. G. Smith (1991). Both share a deep sensitivity to language, an independent and critical stance toward the material to be interpreted, the use of a range and variety of interpretive tools and critical theories, and finally, the ultimate purpose of the investigation. As Smith states in the conclusion of his description of hermeneutic inquiry, "the real work of our time may be defined by an ability to mediate meaning across boundaries and differences, whether those boundaries and differences be concerned with gender, race, or ideas" (p. 203). Smith concludes his discussion by suggesting that the pedagogical purpose of hermeneutics may well be to affirm "the way in which present arrangements always border on and open onto the space of an Other whose existence contains part of the story of our shared future" (p. 203). To a certain extent, then, hermeneutics and cultural studies share the same purpose and methodology.

Application to Specific Films

As conscientiously as I tried to apply the purpose and methodology of both hermeneutics and cultural studies to the films under discussion, the films I chose for this study often evaded my attempts to interpret them according to any clearly prescribed strategy, eliding the questions I had initially posed and asking new questions I had not

anticipated. Here I am mindful of Smith's comment that "the mark of good interpretive research is not is the degree to which it follows a specified methodological agenda, but in the degree to which it can show understanding of what it is that is being investigated" (1991, p. 201). For example, in the case of the 1931 Frankenstein, my interpretation of the film led me to examine it within its "historical conjuncture" to see it as a parable on society's treatment of the "other". Taking my cue from Wood's (1979) definition of the "other" in horror movies as that which we oppress in others and repress in ourselves, I interpreted the monster as representing the victims of the Depression and the emergent pseudo-science of eugenics which saw its inevitable outcome in the Holocaust of WWII. My research took me somewhat far afield of my intended goal, but brought me closer to an understanding and appreciation of the other as a seminal value in any cultural critique as identified by both Easthope (1991) and Smith. James Whale's Frankenstein led me to consider the concept of the other as something more than a theoretical construct. By researching the production history of the film and the lives of those most closely involved in its creation, I came to see Frankenstein as a parable on the repression of the other in terms of race, class, gender and sexual orientation. For me, the film became a powerful reminder to appreciate differences within and among my students, and to recognize the ways in which contemporary society often marginalizes or "monsterizes" the very students I teach.

The more recent film adaptation of Frankenstein posed different questions for interpretation. In the 1994 version, directed by Kenneth Branagh, the creature has been

humanized, though still a product of scientific experimentation. Again, by considering this film within its historical conjuncture and looking closely at its visual imagery, I interpreted the creature as a model of the cyborg, a representation of the ways in which modern medical technologies have surrounded and inhabited us at the cusp of the new millennium. In the same way that De Niro's sensitive portrayal humanizes the creature, this film works to humanize the somewhat frightening technologies we have created. Likewise, Branagh's Dr. Frankenstein, no longer the mad scientist of the 1931 version, romanticizes the role of the doctor at a time of increasingly invasive and depersonalized medical procedures, and idealizes the role of the research scientist, perhaps helping to reconcile a contemporary audience with the ethical questions raised by the genetic modification of crops, livestock, and human beings. This film's ideological thrust is quite different from that of either Mary Shelley's original novel or the 1931 film. Instead of questioning the ethic of progress as a given good, this film tends to endorse it at the very time in our history when notions of progress in science and technology have come under close scrutiny.

In the chapter comparing the two versions of Romeo and Juliet, the 1968 Zeffirelli version and the 1996 Baz Luhrmann version, I set out to show how each film reflects the times in which it was produced, one from my generation, one from my students'. What began as a comparison between a neo-realist interpretation of the play and a postmodern one led to a reflection on the place of Shakespeare and Shakespearean language in the contemporary classroom and the sway of film as a new language and medium of cultural

expression. As Baz Luhrmann (1997) states, "Our chorus is the media; the media is the chorus of today" (p. 6). However different these two film treatments appear, they lie along the same continuum when considered in light of their displacement of Shakespeare's language from the play's dialogue to the films' visual imagery. This chapter led me directly back to my original dilemma and research question: How does an English teacher schooled in the close reading of literary texts transform herself into a teacher of all the language arts, specifically those of our dominant discourses— the media?

Although I approached each of these four films with the interpretive strategies of cultural criticism, I could not have anticipated where my interactions with these films might have led me. Each chapter, then, can be read as the raw data of this research, material to be interpreted in light of my original research question. In other words, have these chapters shown an understanding of what it is that is being investigated? If the films are the things that are being investigated, I believe my interpretations led me to understandings I would not have reached without a cultural studies approach, although I cannot be certain that they demonstrate *doing* cultural studies with the authority of a finished product. Taken as signposts on my own dialogical journey, however, each one shows an evolution of my thinking about film and the teaching of film afforded by the timing of this thesis in terms of my own teaching life.

In Literature as exploration, Rosenblatt (1976) addresses the concept of the reader's circumstances as a key element in the interpretative process. First of all,

Rosenblatt describes the literary experience as an active "transaction between the reader and the text" (p. 35) which is unique to each reader *and* to each particular reading of that text. Therefore, "the same text will have a very different meaning and value to us at different times or under different circumstances" (p. 35). Recognizing that reading is an active process of interpretation, Rosenblatt acknowledges that this process is conditioned by factors outside the work itself, such as the reader's own "personality traits, memories of past events, [and] present needs and preoccupations..." (p. 30). To a certain extent, then, the reading of any text will also be a reading of ourselves at the moment of reading that text. Or, as D. G. Smith (1991) puts it, "We find ourselves, hermeneutically speaking, always in the middle of stories" (p. 201). My chapters on the individual films in this thesis certainly bear this out, as each chapter reflects where I was when I wrote it.

The chapters on the Frankenstein films were written after I had completed my general reading and research for this thesis, toward the end of a sabbatical year from teaching. Although I had used these films in my classroom before, I had not, at the time of writing these chapters, had the opportunity to apply my newfound perspectives and strategies with my students. As a result, perhaps, these chapters feel somewhat speculative, focusing on a close reading of the films with a view to approaches I might use in the classroom. Once I returned to the classroom, I applied the new methods I had learned to my unit on Romeo and Juliet, and did not write this chapter until I had worked through some of this material with my students. Although I did not consciously discuss my classroom experience with these films in the chapter, my writing of it was,

nonetheless, informed by that experience. The final chapter on the popular action film, The Edge (Tamahori, 1997), was written while in the midst of my teaching year, and written under entirely different circumstances. I had been invited to write an article for Classmate magazine, and chose to describe my experiences with teaching a popular film from a critical perspective as a way of formalizing, for myself, some of the understandings I had reached in my research on cultural studies and film. The result serves as the proverbial finishing line of my dialogical journey. In it, I speak as a teacher to other teachers, first about film theory in general, then about my interpretation of the film, The Edge, and finally, about my actual experience of teaching this film in a manner which posed questions about its representations of gender, race and class. I do not believe I could have taught the film or written about the experience the way I did without having first researched and written the other chapters. I see, as I reread these chapters, that I can be found always in the middle of stories, defining myself within my interpretations and thus inching my way toward my evolution as a reflective practitioner.

The chapter on The Edge was modeled on a work of cultural criticism which I encountered early in my research, Henry Giroux's (1996) "Reclaiming the Social: Pedagogy, Resistance, and Politics in Celluloid Culture". In it, Giroux asserts "the importance of critical pedagogy as a form of cultural practice which does not simply tell the student how to think or what to believe, but provides the conditions for a set of ideological and social relations which engender diverse possibilities for students to produce rather than simply acquire knowledge" (p. 39). Giroux demonstrates his

concept of critical pedagogy with a class of preservice teachers by showing how the films Dead Poets Society and Stand and Deliver, while appearing to present positive teaching models, actually perpetuate the ideologies they initially seem to resist. Throughout the article, Giroux shows "how the mobilization of meaning and affective investments within the film's form and content functioned as part of a broader cultural and pedagogical practice that was neither innocent nor politically neutral" (p. 42). The film Dead Poets Society has presented a model of the ideal English teacher for myself and for many of my colleagues as well as for the preservice teachers who studied this film with Giroux. However, Giroux's dismantling of the ideologies embedded within this film shows how powerfully film can secure audience identification and thus how completely it can obscure the more questionable yet largely unquestioned values which tend to encourage teachers to engage in the act of cultural reproduction instead of critical pedagogy. This article showed me the limitations of Mr. Keating's pedagogy and reinforced my own desire to question my assumptions of what an English teacher should be. Further, it showed how a cultural studies approach to film can lift the veil and uncover the ideologies which drive the story and our response to it. When I initially proposed this thesis, I wanted to do with each film under consideration here, what Giroux had done with Dead Poets Society. My chapter on The Edge is the closest I have come to approximating Giroux's model of critical pedagogy.

Cultural Studies as Narrative Inquiry

Easthope (1991) maintains that "people do respond to texts and are affected by

them, and any analysis of signifying practice must be concerned with response, audiences, actual subjects in relation to texts" (p. 137). Perhaps the major difference between my analysis of the first four films and the final film relates to my concern with "actual subjects in relation to texts", or the experience my own students had with the film, The Edge, unlike the other films, where I confined my interpretations to my own consideration of their possible meanings. I believe its strength lies in the confidence I felt writing as a teacher about my own classroom practice. This chapter, then, might be seen as a hybrid of hermeneutic and narrative inquiry.

Although D. G. Smith (1991) gives credence to the interpretation of teacher narratives as an important hermeneutical activity (p. 200), the form of narrative inquiry as a model of curriculum research is explained more fully by Connelly and Clandinin (1991). Of key importance to my present study is the legitimization of the teacher as researcher or reflective practitioner made possible by the narrative inquiry model. As Connelly and Clandinin note, "Practitioners have experienced themselves as without voice in the research process and may find it difficult to feel empowered to tell their stories" (p. 126). Narrative inquiry into curriculum empowers teachers to tell their stories in the recognition that teacher knowledge is "event-structured" (Carter, 1993, p. 7), that is, narratives of our classroom experience have embedded within them the knowledge we bring to our profession in our daily working lives, and therefore, narrative inquiry seeks to uncover teacher knowledge as embedded in these narratives. A fuller understanding of teacher knowledge gained through narrative inquiry has allowed for a

reconceptualization of the teacher as someone possessing knowledge, not simply experience, about her profession (Clandinin, 1986, p. 3). The model of the reflective practitioner (Schon, 1983), wherein the teacher is not simply the object but the subject of research, has been an outgrowth of the narrative inquiry movement, as teachers feel increasingly empowered to name their own experience. In Pedagogy of the Oppressed, Paulo Friere (1970) speaks to the intimate connection between voice, agency and change: "To exist humanly, is to name the world, to change it.... Men are not built in silence, but in word, in work, in action-reflection" (p. 76). Friere sought to bring literacy to the oppressed and illiterate peasants of Brazil, but he knew that words alone would mean nothing to them unless they were the peasants' own words which came from their own experience and named their own reality. Only then are "teachers and students... both Subjects, not only in the task of unveiling that reality,... but in the task of re-creating that knowledge" (p. 56). Giroux's concept of a critical pedagogy aligns with Friere's in the sense that both teachers and students must become more than depositors and receptors of knowledge according to the banking model of education; instead, they must become the creators of knowledge through critical engagement with the very stuff of their daily lives. This can only happen in action-reflection, a process which becomes empowering for the student and teacher alike. In Critical Teaching and the Idea of Literacy, Knoblauch and Brannon (1993) draw a parallel between teachers and Friere's Brazilian peasants. Although they realize that teachers' oppression "isn't that of the illiterate Brazilian peasants of Freire's experience... it is...a subtler form of subjugation along lines of gender

and class" (pp. 179-180). As they define the parallel:

> ...[the] problem lies in the nature of educational discourse, where some people get to talk and others mainly listen, where the terms of talk, the assumptions about what makes for credible statement, and the public disposition to accept some representations over others lie fundamentally outside the control of 'ordinary' teachers. (p. 179)

Knoblauch and Brannon propose that teachers give voice to their own reality as teachers and become speaking Subjects through narrative inquiry. This process is a movement from silence to voice, to action, to change, a movement which describes the transformation I have gone through in the conduct of this inquiry. This study moves from the hermeneutic model toward a narrative inquiry model as I move from a theoretical reframing of my role as a teacher of the language arts to a point of reflection-in-action shown in the chapter on The Edge.

As Connelly and Clandinin (1991) note, the perspective of the "I" in narrative inquiry is a multiple one: "The 'I' can speak as researcher, teacher, woman, commentator, research participant, narrative critic, and as theory builder" (p. 140). The biggest challenge I have faced in the writing of this thesis involved the search for an authentic "I" from which to speak. Throughout, my "I" has shifted continuously from each of these different perspectives in a postmodern identity game of musical chairs, as I've tried to

find the right fit. So, I am at various points in this thesis a researcher, teacher, woman, commentator, participant, narrative critic, and theory builder. But it was only once I spoke from my own experience that I found my voice, here in my classroom with the graduating class of 2000, asking the kinds of questions I could not have imagined asking before I embarked on this journey.

Chapter 1: Deconstructing the English Teacher

I remember studying Ray Bradbury's (1953) Fahrenheit 451 in my grade ten English class and being strangely moved by the final scene in which the hero, Guy Montag, escapes the brutish society which has banned books and all those who read them, and meets a group of hobos living along the rusted railroad tracks on the outskirts of town. Each one has memorized a great work of literature for posterity, waiting for society to come to its senses and recognize the value of books. At the time, I was struck by the parallels between the world of this novel and our own. Although books had been banned in this futuristic society, there did not seem to be much popular resistance as literature had already fallen out of favour, people preferring instead to watch their "parlor walls". Indeed, the television screens had become so large that they covered entire walls in people's homes. Montag's wife, Millie, wanted a screen on all four walls so that she could actually live inside the television, so vacant of meaning had her life become. By the end of the novel, the entire city, consumed by television, consumed by consumerism, is consumed by the flames of a war its own benumbed citizens could not have anticipated or prevented. "Is it real life, or just another show?" they might have wondered as the bombs began to fall. Only the inheritors of the books on the fringes of society would survive to pass the torch of civilization to a new generation. "We'll pass the books on to our children," one of the hobos explains, "and let our children wait, in turn on the other people" (p. 165). As we discussed the ending of the novel, it occurred to me that this was

precisely what we were doing in my grade ten English class. The torch had been passed, and for the first time I considered the possibility of becoming an English teacher, not simply as a career, but as a mission.

Since then, the screens have only gotten bigger.

Bradbury's novel operates from a set of assumptions which polarizes the word and image, page and screen, in a manner that has characterized the study of literature from its inception as a discipline. These assumptions have also shaped the initial impetus behind the media studies movement. The main assumption is that "literature" represents the finest accomplishments of civilization, the study of which is believed to promote intelligence, imagination, tolerance, beauty and truth. These virtues stand in direct opposition to the corrupting influences of popular culture, of which television and the movies comprise a large part. This schism between the word and the image was anticipated even before the advent of film in the distinction made by Matthew Arnold between works of high and popular culture. In "The Study of Poetry," (1880), Arnold differentiates between "masses of a common sort of literature" which may satisfy "a common sort of readers" (p. 116) and "good literature", or, as he defines it in "The Function of Criticism" (1865), "the best that has been known and thought in the world" (p. 17). The study of literature as a discrete discipline was founded upon this arbitrary distinction between the whole range of a society's communicative practices and the select artifacts deemed fit for scholarly attention. In "Communications as Cultural Science", Raymond Williams (1976) addresses this distinction, noting that "in their concentration

on artifacts, the disciplines, especially as they develop in scholarly and historical ways, can convert all practices to artifacts, and in the shadow of this delusion suppose themselves absolved, in the name of the excellence and achievement of the past, from the comparable practices of their own time" (p. 30). According to Williams, the fossilization of the discipline of English literature has been the result "of a long process of narrowing down" (p. 32) which began well before Matthew Arnold and wherein our very definition of literature changed over time so as to encompass only certain isolated written artifacts of a particular time and place:

> Literature itself, as a concept, was a Renaissance specialization from the more general area of discourse in writing and speech: a specialization directly related to the printed book. In the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries there was a further specialization: literature, which had till then included all forms of writing, came to be specialized, ... to imaginative literature... As modern literary study entered the universities there was a further specialization; literature was the 'good' or 'serious' part of such work. (p. 32)

At each stage in this evolution, literature had been defined according to what it excluded: written vs oral communication, imaginative vs transactional writing, and finally, 'good' or 'serious' imaginative writing vs the merely popular or entertaining. What has occurred in the process does a disservice both to literature and to those "acts of expression and

communication" (Williams, 1976, p. 27) which the term 'literature' excludes. According to Williams, a communicative practice "has to become an artifact... of the kind that is conventionally found in libraries and museums, to deserve much attention" (p. 30). This conversion, however, severs the artifact from the context which occasioned its creation and causes it to lose "its touch with life" (p. 30). Those practices which are spared the conversion into artifacts do not fare much better, however, if they are not considered worthy of any academic interest at all. Cultural studies seeks to reclaim the territory which the discipline of literary studies has steadily and systematically excluded by broadening its subject to all "signifying practices" or communicative acts.

Media studies was designed to examine those signifying practices excluded from the discipline of English literature. As it was initially conceived, however, it simply reinforced the existing distinction between high and popular culture which formed the primary assumption behind literary studies. The 'inoculation' model of media studies was designed to inform young people of the dangers of the media— originally the cinema, then television-- as potent forms of ideological indoctrination. According to Alvarado, Gutch and Wollen (1987), "Anxieties about the moral influences and effects (invariably bad) of commercial films have been the strongest determinants of media teaching initiatives" (p. 15). They cite the 1933 publication of F. R. Leavis's Culture and Environment as one of the earliest statements to advocate this position. Due to Leavis's "Arnoldian assumptions" about the deleterious effects of the mass media, "media texts entered the classroom in order that they might be used in a defensive discriminatory

training *against* the media" (Alvarado et al, p. 16). This "know your enemy" rationale still informs the study of film and other media today. As cinema became more established and sophisticated as an art form, however, its practices were also converted into artifacts, engendering a school of criticism which coopted 'film' (as opposed to the Hollywood 'movie') into the corpus of artifacts considered worthy of academic attention. Although this development legitimized the study of film in the English classroom, neither this approach nor the inoculation model of media studies challenges the fundamental assumptions behind the paradigm of literary studies. Rather, they both reinforce the long-standing distinction made by Arnold between high and popular culture, one by teaching popular cultural practices as a defensive measure, the other by teaching film as 'art'.

Cultural studies aims to mend the rift between high and popular culture, between page and screen, not simply by including other media as part of the existing English curriculum, but by actually challenging the assumptions from which our discipline operates. By placing the practices of both high and popular culture on an even footing and by applying the same critical stance to both, cultural studies radically alters the business of the English classroom. Within a cultural studies approach, one needs to recognize that no form of signifying practice is ideologically innocent or free of the prevailing social, political or cultural influences of its time. Thus, no form of signifying practice can be understood without considering its context within the culture that produced it. This recognition topples literature from its pedestal and frees teachers and

students to treat the classics in the same way they might treat a current movie or advertisement. Cultural studies also incorporates certain techniques of literary criticism and applies them to the entire range of a society's communicative practices in the recognition that all forms of signifying practice are worthy of close reading and serious study. When all forms of signifying practice are allowed an equal status in the classroom, other shifts inevitably occur, most notably in the student's relationship to the object of study and to the teacher. The cultural studies approach breaks down existing hierarchies and truly democratizes the English classroom by asking teachers and students to become equal partners in examining the cultural practices which surround us. In this chapter, I will trace the fissure which has traditionally isolated the study of literature from the rest of life, and show how its assumptions have been questioned and critiqued by the cultural studies movement. In the chapter which follows, I will describe the elements within media studies which have contributed to the practice of cultural studies, making this new paradigm a unique composite of traditional literary analysis and contemporary social criticism.

English As We Know It

The belief that the study of great works of literature can enrich our lives and inspire us to become our best selves is one of the founding principles of the discipline of English as we know it. This belief, along with our prevailing understandings of culture and literature, can be attributed to Matthew Arnold, Victorian poet, Oxford professor, and inspector of schools, whose essays on culture and poetry laid the foundations for our

discipline. In a time of increased industrialization which Arnold called the Iron Age, he articulated the belief that poetry could save society from the ethic of the machine which he saw as grinding the humanity out of humanity and leaving us as "on a darkling plain / Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight, / Where ignorant armies clash by night" (Arnold, 1867, p. 192). This final image from "Dover Beach" prefigures the apocalyptic vision which closes Fahrenheit 451 and illustrates a parallel between our age and his. In a world that Arnold described as having "neither joy, nor love, nor light / Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain" (1867, p. 191), in short, in a world increasingly mechanized, dehumanized, and bereft of traditional faith, Arnold envisioned poetry as our saving grace, our new religion which would redeem the brutish machinery of our natures and restore "sweetness and light" to our souls.

In Culture and Anarchy (1869), Arnold describes the value culture can have in a society that places all its faith in machinery. First of all, culture is something more than "a smattering of Greek and Latin" (p. 29), an acquirement to be "valued either out of sheer vanity and ignorance or else as an engine of social and class distinction" (p. 29). Rather, he defines it as nothing less than "the study of perfection" (p. 31) which "consists in becoming something rather than in having something, in an inward condition of the mind and spirit, not in an outward set of circumstances" (p. 33). If so, it ceases to be a "frivolous and useless thing" and instead, "has a very important function to fulfill for mankind" (p. 33). Its mission is to draw the individual "ever nearer to a sense of what is indeed beautiful, graceful, and becoming, and to get the raw person to like that" (p.35).

By drawing "the raw person" to "sweetness and light," culture "is of like spirit with poetry" (p. 37), thus for Arnold, culture and poetry are synonymous agents of social change, granted spiritual, transcendent and transformative powers through their transformation of the individual. Yet, how does culture induce "the raw person" to actually *like* what is beautiful, graceful and becoming? Arnold's implication here, is that the refinements of culture can mitigate against the brutishness of everyday life, but that a certain effort is involved. A striving for the beautiful, graceful and becoming, for "sweetness and light" becomes, then, an act of self-mastery wherein one must overcome the "raw person" within, a key element of any religious transformation. In fact, Culture and Anarchy provides all the necessary components of a religious faith: culture and poetry are the deities to be worshiped, conferring sweetness and light on their adherents, and within this religion, the English teacher becomes the secular clerisy whose mission is to spread the gospel to the masses, for "the sweetness and light of the few must be imperfect until the raw and unkindled masses of humanity are touched with sweetness and light" (p. 47).

As inspector of schools from 1851 to 1886, Arnold was in a position to implement his beliefs and institute the study of English literature as part of the curriculum for mandatory public education. From the outset, literature was to play a crucial role in the education of the working classes, not simply as a general antidote to the deadening ethic of industrialism, but more specifically, to the influences of political persuasion and popular entertainment. In an era that was to give birth to an educated and literate

working class, Arnold was deeply concerned with the role this class would play in public life. "Plenty of people will try to indoctrinate the masses with a set of ideas and judgements constituting the creed of their own profession or party," Arnold warns. But culture "does not teach down to the level of inferior classes... it seeks to do away with classes" (1869, p. 48). In his essay, "The Function of Criticism," he explains that such a radical aim was to be achieved through teaching "the best that has been known and thought in the world" (1865, p. 17) and by making this known, "to create a current of true and fresh ideas" (p. 17). Arnold also hoped the fruits of culture and civilization would help these masses resist the easy temptations of popular literature, the production of which was "becoming a vast and profitable industry" (1880, p. 116). Despite this trend, Arnold was sure that good literature "will never lose currency with the world," simply because of the "instinct of self-preservation in humanity" (1880, p.116). One can't help but admire Arnold's ardent faith in culture as a bulwark against self-serving political and corporate interests and his mission to defend the common man from their greedy machinations. As English teachers, we have inherited his raison d'etre, to help create an educated citizenry that cannot be easily manipulated or cheaply bought. From Arnold we have also inherited the belief that "studying literature was supposed to make you a better person, to develop your 'imagination' so you could enter imaginatively into the experiences of others, thus learning to respect truth and value justice for all," as Easthope explains (1991, p. 8). The study of great literature, the "capstone" of a liberal arts education (Brantlinger, 1990, p. 14), was to afford the general public not only with the

opportunity for intellectual development, but also with the moral grounding that religious training had once supplied.

In addition to inheriting Arnold's overall purpose, we have also inherited his subject matter and method. In "The Study of Poetry", he elaborates on the criteria and constituents of a canon of works to be studied and introduces a method of assessing the excellence of poetry according to its "matter and substance" and its "manner and style" (1880, p. 98). In this essay, he recommends "to always have in one's mind lines and expressions of the great masters, and to apply them as a touchstone to other poetry" (p. 95). As a demonstration, Arnold discusses exemplary lines from Homer, Dante, Shakespeare and Milton, and uses these lines to measure the relative "beauty, worth and power," "truth and seriousness" (p. 98), of such writers as Chaucer, Dryden and Pope (none of whom, according to Arnold, quite attain the standard). Arnold coyly refrains from applying his "touchstone" method of analysis to the work of his immediate predecessors, Byron, Shelley and Wordsworth, (who have been, nonetheless, canonized by subsequent generations), because his estimate of their greatness would be influenced by passionate personal bias. More than actually determining the content of a canon of great works of literature, then, "The Study of Poetry" establishes the *idea* of a canon, (that is, that only certain works and authors are worthy of study), and the criteria for inclusion within the ranks of the best that has been thought and known. Arnold draws the line quite narrowly and definitely around male writers of drama and poetry within the western European tradition. As to the method of study, an analysis of their literature was

to be conducted with dispassionate objectivity based on the seriousness of its content and the grace of its execution. With this essay, the foundations had been laid for the study of English as we know it.

Viewed from the perspective of our late 20th century, it is hard not to recognize the limitations of Arnold's vision, as earnestly well-intended as it may have been. Although he envisioned a culture which would "do away with classes," his writing betrays an elitism and paternalism that speaks directly from his own social position, more privileged by far than that of the "raw," "inferior" classes on whom he wished to confer the benefits of sweetness and light. This elitism also extends to the content of study— only the best according to whose standard and criteria? Those, we must infer, who, like Arnold, are in a position to know what is best. The line he draws around great literature severs it from the present day (even his own present day), and from the practical concerns of those who are to benefit from it. It also severs the link between imaginative writing and more prosaic or practical written expression, between works of high art and popular appeal, and between thought and emotion on the part of the reader, all of which can only serve to distance and alienate the reader from the very matter that was intended to enrich his or her life. Instead of literature serving the reader, then, the reader is placed in a position of subservience to the literature. After all, if the subject matter of the discipline of English is to be defined as the best that has been thought and known, one must venerate it and emulate it. If it is not, then it is not worthy of study at all. Within Arnold's conception of the discipline, there seems to be no other point of connection; the discipline of English

makes of its students disciples at the feet of great literature.

How then, is this secular religion to have any direct impact on the everyday lives of its adherents? How is it to further the cause of social justice or political reform, how is it to "do away with classes"? Despite his claim that the study of the best that has been thought and known will create a "current of true and fresh ideas", Arnold was not advocating any immediate action based on this these ideas. Rather, whatever social good is to be garnered from the study of literature can only occur through a drawing away from the "rush and roar of practical life" (1865, p. 22) in favour of a more contemplative dwelling on perfection. In a world full of "plenty of bustle and very little thought" (p. 24), Arnold envisioned only "a very small circle" (p. 22) who would engage in this strenuous intellectual labour. Like Bradbury's hobos, students of literature must, perforce, remain on the margins of everyday life, quietly honoring great works, attempting to be worthy of them, and then passing them on to their children. Whatever liberalizing or liberating function the study of literature might fulfill is thus always held in abeyance by the very nature of the discipline, the perpetuation of which inevitably becomes its own raison d'etre. As Arnold (1880) himself acknowledged in his conclusion to "The Study of Poetry", "Even if good literature entirely lost currency with the world, it would still be abundantly worth while to continue to enjoy it by oneself" (p. 116). Ultimately, then, the study of literature as Arnold conceived it becomes its own reward-- art for art's sake. Thus, the idea of a canon of great works, regardless of its actual constituents, falsely preserves literature in a state of timeless perfection and places

its guardianship in the hands of an intellectual elite. The antique we have inherited was already old when Arnold created it, and one wonders how he could have imagined it to have any direct relevance to the society for which it was made. Any immediate political consequences of Arnold's mission to bring culture to the masses are thus rendered somewhat suspect. At a time when political change (or "anarchy") could not come quickly enough for a largely disenfranchised British working class, would a striving after sweetness and light serve to calm the waters and prevent the working classes from demanding needed changes to the conditions of their daily lives? At the height of Britain's imperial power, would the decimation of sweetness and light among the colonies help to establish a belief in the moral fitness of all things English? If the civilizing function of literature comes down to that, to a focus inward on self-improvement or self-mastery instead of an active engagement with "the rush and roar of practical life", then the study of literature merely serves the status quo and becomes the worship of a false god.

The Science of English

Naturally, the antique we have inherited has undergone many alterations since Arnold's day, but only recently have its fundamental claims or epistemological moorings been seriously questioned. For most of its history, the discipline has been increasingly specialized, narrowed and refined without substantive changes to its central beliefs. As literary studies struggled to assert itself as a legitimate discipline in the early decades of this century, for example, its chief proponents continued to advance the belief that the

study of great works had social value, particularly in the face of increasing industrialization and technology which saw its most brutal manifestation in the carnage of World War I. As Samson (1992) explains with reference to members of the newly instituted Faculty of English at Cambridge University,

> The wartime experiences of many ... had roused in them a spirit of seriousness and idealism; a need to find point and value in human life and to work actively for a better society. This search, combined with long-held notions about the value of English Studies, invested many of the students of the new subject with an almost religious belief in its value as a civilising, humanising force outside the confines of the academy. (p. 11)

While maintaining an "almost religious belief" in Arnold's assumptions about the value of literature, his descendants also refined his actual method of study, building on the basic tenets set forth in "The Study of Poetry". One of the most influential figures of this period was I. A. Richards, whose book, Practical Criticism (1929) introduced the method of close reading, "so much an indispensable technique in English studies now that it is hard to imagine the constitution of the subject without it" (Samson, 1992, p. 18). More complex and sophisticated than Arnold's "touchstone" method of analysis, practical criticism provided an empiricist, quasi-scientific, objective approach to the analysis of literature that helped to validate the study of English as an actual discipline with a distinct

mode of inquiry and a demand for intellectual rigor on the part of its students. Richards based this method on a study of his university students' responses to anonymous poems which revealed an "astonishing variety" (p. 11) of interpretations. Based on these responses, Richards identified ten pitfalls of interpretation: 1) making out the plain sense of poetry, 2) sensuous apprehension, 3) imagery, 4) mnemonic irrelevances, 5) stock responses, 6) sentimentality, 7) inhibition, 8) doctrinal adhesions, 9) technical presuppositions, and 10) general critical preconceptions (pp. 12-15). Without detailing each of these "difficulties of criticism," one can note a few general points regarding the relationship between the reader and the poem which this catalogue suggests. First of all, Richards assumed that there exists one "correct" reading which the reader should manage to decipher if he stays clear of these ten pitfalls. Any deviations from the "correct" reading are not attributable to the literature itself, but rather to some fault in the reader, some stray reaction or association which "intervene[s]... between the reader and the poem" (p. 15). The implication here is that poetry has a particular intrinsic meaning independent of the reader's personal response and that the reader's job is to somehow "fit" himself to the poetry in a manner similar to the spiritual transformation of "the raw person" outlined by Arnold. Here, however, Richards advocated the careful study of poetry as a "strengthening discipline" (p. 328) or a form of mental conditioning. Using his students' "misreadings" (p. 183) to substantiate his claim that society is in a "cultural trough" (p. 301), Richards recommended, "if there be any means by which we may artificially strengthen our minds' capacity to order themselves, we must avail ourselves of

them" (p. 301). As Samson explains this process, Richards believed that a close reading of poetry demands that the reader "re-enact the processes by which the artist's impulses are conciliated," thus, "this re-experiencing of the artist's experience... changes the conditions of the reader's life, and this change can in turn lead to a change in values" (1992, p. 16). Although Richards stressed the importance of independent critical thinking as the aim of this process, stating that "we have nothing to rely upon in making our choices but ourselves" (p. 320), the technique of close reading all too often fosters a co-dependent relationship between student and teacher which places the poetry in a position of superiority to the reader/student, and the teacher in the privileged position of having the correct answers.

While Richards' classes in practical criticism were described as "hilarious, salutary and revealing" (Bennet quoted in Samson, 1992, p. 18), much of the laughter was undoubtedly provoked by Richards' disparaging comments about his students' sincere, if baffled, attempts to engage with the anonymous poems or excerpts presented for their consideration. "Here is God's plenty" (1929, p. 17), he noted sardonically in his introduction to the student-written responses, as though inviting the reader to laugh along. The elitism which underlies this humor returns us to Arnold's assertion that only a "small circle" can truly apprehend or appreciate poetry. Richards' method of close reading not only separates the reader from the poem by enforcing a well ordered, aesthetic response to poetry and by trivializing those responses or "misreadings" which do not conform, but it also separates the poem from the poet. Richards' intention in presenting students with

anonymous poems was to see what they could make of the poetry without relying on the history or reputation of the poet, but what may have begun as a control factor for the purposes of his experiment became incorporated and passed along as part of the actual method of close reading. The result is a conception of literature as free-standing and self-contained, independent of the poet who wrote it or the historical context which helped to shape it. Richards understood that the subject of language differs fundamentally from other subjects "which can be discussed in terms of verifiable facts and precise hypotheses" (1929, p. 5), but his wrenching away of the poem from the poet has the unfortunate effect of turning poetry into a specimen for analysis. Without denying the contribution made by Richards, most importantly, his strong conviction that language is complex and demands close and careful study, the legacy of close reading has been the further conversion of literature from a living practice of communication to a lifeless artifact for study.

The End of English As We Know It

While the conviction that the study of literature can improve the individual and society was intensified in the crucible of World War I— the more threatened our fragile sense of culture became, the more fiercely, it seems, this conviction was held— it could not possibly survive World War II. In fact, World War II has been identified as the historical turning-point for the entire project of a humanist, liberal arts education as initially articulated by Arnold. In Literary Into Cultural Studies, Easthope (1991) cites the recognition that "some of the men who devised and administered Auschwitz had been

trained to read Shakespeare and Goethe" (p. 8) as signaling the "ineluctable failure of the humanist project" (p. 8). To reply, as Ray Bradbury might, that any society that burns books is not above burning people, still misses the point that "culture" (i,e.. refinement, learning, "sweetness and light") does not necessarily mitigate against the brutality of human nature. Brantlinger (1990) concurs:

> Of course esthetic appreciation is central to those theories of the humanities which see them as in some manner "humanizing" or "civilizing" those who study them. But this traditional line of reasoning has been frequently called into question, not least by the events of the twentieth century which have belied the very idea of the progress of civilization. (p. 6)

Whatever benefits "the best that has been known and thought" might convey seem increasingly irrelevant or perhaps even damaging if their study breeds the elitism or rabid nationalism that would connect Goethe and Shakespeare, however tenuously, to the Nazi holocaust. Easthope maintains that the rationale for literary studies "is deeply embedded in ideology, concealed within the mode of the aesthetic" (1991, p. 13), which would suggest that the very manner of study, the treatment of literature as a transcendent repository of universal truths, does more damage than the literature itself.

Easthope (1991) identifies five features of the paradigm of literary study which summarize many of the ideas put forward by Arnold and Richards. These are "a

traditionally empiricist epistemology," "a specific pedagogic practice, the '*modernist*' reading," " a *field* for study discriminating the canon from popular culture," "an *object* of study, the canonical text," and "the assumption that the canonical text is *unified*" (p. 11). Thus "the concept of 'literature in itself' is theoretically constructed" (p. 16) through particular "methods and procedures for reading" (p. 11) which elevate certain works as being almost divinely inspired instead of situating them within their very human, temporal, social, political and ideological context. As Easthope explains:

> Far from being neutral, the prescription for literary value advanced in the claim that literature expresses 'imaginative powers' lends almost supernatural justification to specialized and controlling definitions of class, gender, nation, empire... If literature is universal and a particular institution its guardian, then that institution can claim to be of universal value... (p. 44)

When we accept "mode of the aesthetic" as an ideology which simply serves to reproduce prevailing definitions of "class, gender, nation, empire," other uncomfortable realizations about the social function of the English teacher inevitably follow. In "Artistic taste and cultural capital," Bourdieu (1968) explored the role of the educational system in the perpetuation and naturalization of class distinctions. First of all, Bourdieu defined "the work of art... as a symbolic asset" for those who have the "means to appropriate it, or in other words to decipher it" (p. 206). Bourdieu suggested that those

who have acquired this symbolic asset or "cultural capital" (p. 210) tend to view their ability to decipher works of art as a natural inclination instead of a learned acquirement: "Since their art competence is the product of an imperceptible familiarization and an automatic transferring of aptitudes, members of the privileged classes are naturally inclined to regard as a gift of nature a cultural heritage which is transmitted by a process of unconscious training" (pp. 21-21). By the same turn, they are apt to concede "to the work of art a magical power of conversion capable of awakening the potentialities latent in a few of the elect" (p. 211). Thus the school, "through its outwardly irreproachable verdicts, transforms socially conditioned inequalities in regard to culture into inequalities of success, interpreted as inequalities of gifts which are also inequalities of merit" (p. 212). In order for this to occur in a manner which sustains the illusion of irreproachable motives on the part of our system of education, "to enable culture to fulfill its primary ideological function of class cooptation and legitimation of this mode of selection, it is necessary and enough that the link between culture and education, which is simultaneously obvious and hidden, be forgotten, disguised, and denied" (p. 212). According to Bourdieu, within the mode of the aesthetic, the "relics of an aristocratic past" (p. 215) are appropriated by the middle classes under the misapprehension that within a democracy, these relics are available to all. As English teachers, members of a class which takes its acquirement of "cultural capital" for granted, we are implicated in this process of cultural reproduction. Arnold's initial disclaimer that culture is not an acquirement to be used "as an engine of social and class distinction" but rather "an

inward condition of the mind and spirit" is shown by Bourdieu to amount to essentially the same thing. Likewise, Richards' belief that a re-experiencing of the poet's imaginative processes can lead to an ordering of the mind and a change of values is a benefit of culture that only a select few can claim, among them, English teachers.

In the opening scene of Fahrenheit 451, Guy Montag meets a young girl who questions his assumptions about the society they live in: "Is it true that long ago firemen put fires *out* instead of going to start them?" (Bradbury, 1953, p. 8) For Montag, himself a fireman charged with the responsibility of burning banned books, the question is laughable. "No," he replies. "Houses have *always* been fireproof, take my word for it" (p. 8). Yet, no longer "assured of certain certainties," Montag begins to interrogate the conditions he has always taken for granted as natural and immutable, and once he realizes they are not, finds he cannot go back to the old dispensation. One tends to assume, like Montag did, that traditions we have grown up with, for good or ill, have a naturalness about them which belies their very human origins and development. The term "reification" describes this phenomenon. When we reify an institution, we forget its human construction and, therefore, its amenability to change, granting it powers of permanence it need not necessarily have. "Of course," as Brantlinger (1990) observes, "to note the historical origins of literature is already a challenge to its status as an absolute category having a timeless, transcendent role in human affairs" (p. 68). This is the challenge cultural studies presents to the traditional paradigm of literary studies, the challenge English teachers need to take up if they are to be more than merely purveyors

of received and unquestioned knowledge.

Having taken up the gauntlet, however, how is one to proceed? In Cultural Studies and Cultural Value, Frow (1995) acknowledges his place as a "cultural intellectual" (p. 131) with his due share of cultural capital as defined by Bourdieu, and asks the agonizing questions which follow when one can no longer go back to the old dispensation:

> It is clearly no longer possible to hold on to a universalist aesthetic, but a fully relativist model of aesthetic judgement seems to me equally impossible. If this is so, some crucial pedagogic questions follow: What do we teach? High culture, low culture, or some mix of the two? And what basis can there be for our decision? Do we teach a canon, or expand the canon, or dispense with a canon altogether— and how would this be possible? Are some texts better than others— it is possible for us *not* to believe this, but if we do, what grounds do we have for such a judgement? Is it possible to give a fully descriptive account of value (historical or sociological)-- where would that lead us, and where would our own cultural position be found in relation to this description? And who are 'we', who agonize over such questions? (p. 15)

What knowledge is most worthwhile? Why is it worthwhile? How is it acquired or created? According to Schubert (1986), "These are three of the most basic curriculum

questions" (p. 1). When we abandon the "mode of the aesthetic" as our criteria for value within the English classroom, we are thrown back to these basic questions as though asking them for the first time.

Symptoms of a Greater Malaise

The toppling of false gods has become a one of the main preoccupations which characterizes our postmodern era. Eagleton (1996) defines postmodernism as "a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation" (p. vii), of just about everything, it would seem. Although a healthy scepticism of traditional institutions and ways of thinking is not in itself a bad thing, the danger lies in criticizing the ground beneath one's very feet, for from what position, then, can one speak with any certainty at all? When we interrogate the notion that literature can make us better people, we also question the entire project of humanism, the value of a liberal arts education, the inheritance of Western thought which forms the basis of that education, history itself, a belief in progress, objective truth, universal verities and individual identity. The entire ground shifts and one is left "Wandering between two worlds, one dead, / The other powerless to be born" (Arnold, 1867, p. 216). I take this rather apt description of our postmodern malaise from Arnold's "Stanzas from the Grande Chartreuse," to make the point that Matthew Arnold was responding to a similar malaise in his own time as Darwinism supplanted religion and the forces of political reform threatened the security and privilege of the British aristocracy.

His solution has in turn become one of the grand narratives or universal verities that can no longer withstand critical interrogation. As we examine the ideology which informs Arnold's religion of the aesthetic, we see that his claims to objectivity and the standards of value based on those claims, his judgement of what constitutes the best that has been thought and known, are inevitably a product of his own ideological position. Yet if the entire concept of objectivity is thrown into doubt in our postmodern age, what claim to objective truth do *we* have? Are we not also subject to the ideology of our own time, place, and social position? Even if we abandon any cherished pretenses to objectivity and attempt to speak as individuals, do we not find that individualism is also a grand narrative which has dissolved with all the others? If we are indeed socially constructed beings, subject to the ideology of our own social conditioning, then the "I" from which I speak might present only an illusion of autonomy and individuality— in other words, my language may be speaking me. Topple one god, it would appear, and the others fall in their turn. And yet, from what other vantage point can a person speak? In Illusions of Postmodernism (1996), Eagleton addresses this dilemma: "Since our interests, beliefs and discourses are what constitute us as subjects in the first place, we would simply disappear were we to try to hold them at arm's length for critical inspection. If we *were* able to examine ourselves in this way, there would be nobody left over to do the examining" (p. 36).

At the risk of disappearing altogether, I felt it was important to pursue this line of thinking to its inevitable conclusion to demonstrate what happens when the foundations

we have placed our faith in are suddenly pulled away. For to question Arnold's assumptions and beliefs is tantamount to questioning my own. And to dislodge the belief that the study of great literature actually fulfills a social function necessitates the unraveling of an entire skein of assumptions and beliefs which all must be readjusted and re-knit. This point of uncertainty signals the shift in paradigms identified by Easthope (1991), wherein the old paradigm of traditional literary studies has "collapsed" and a "fresh paradigm" of cultural studies is establishing itself: "'Pure' literary study, though dying, remains institutionally dominant in Britain and North American while the more comprehensive analysis of what I shall prefer to call *signifying practices* is still struggling to be born" (p. 5). The English teacher in me can't help but note the allusion Easthope makes to Arnold in his characterization of this paradigm shift, only now it is Arnold's paradigm which is dying. In the following chapter, I will trace some of the major developments in the birth of the new paradigm of cultural studies.

Chapter 2: Reconstructing the English Teacher

> The role which English teachers can play within media education,... is an important one. They can restore to the discipline a much needed experience and facility in textual analysis, though, to be sure, this will be, in certain crucial respects, a very different kind of activity from their normal stock-in-trade. They will need to *unlearn*, that is, many of their most cherished assumptions and approaches, and unload a great deal of the critical baggage acquired during their literary training. They will also need... to step outside of their own discipline and explore the contributions which other subject areas have made to media studies. Above all, they must regard the media as significant and important areas of study in their own right, and worthy of serious consideration on their own terms, rather than as subordinate to and recuperable by English. If they can achieve this and, in addition, restore to the discipline a clarity of language and thought which has too frequently eluded it in the past decade, then English teachers will have an important and honourable role to play in the future of media education.
> (Masterman, 1985, p. 256)

This passage from Masterman's Teaching the Media spells out the metamorphosis that English teachers must undergo in order to progress from purveyors of knowledge in their chosen discipline to facilitators of knowledge in the broader matrix of our culture's

dominant signifying practices. Not only does this imply a change in subject matter and a recognition of "the media as significant and important areas of study in their own right"; the changes in pedagogy required to teach media studies might profitably be applied to the teaching of traditional literary texts as well. As Masterman notes, the one area of traditional English study which we can bring to the field of media studies is a "facility in textual analysis," which we might regard as the stepping stone from our traditional paradigm to the new paradigm of cultural studies.

Education as Inoculation

The idea that media studies should fall within the purview of the English teacher was first articulated by Leavis and Thompson in their 1933 Culture and Environment. However, their introduction makes plain the Arnoldian assumptions underlying their proposal:

> Many teachers of English who have become interested in the possibilities of training taste and sensibility must have been troubled by accompanying doubts. What effect can such training have against the multitudinous counter-influences— films, newspapers, advertising— indeed, the whole world outside the classroom? (p. 1)

Like Arnold before them, Leavis and Thompson blame the machine for destroying "the organic community" and "the living culture it embodied" (p. 1) and imply that mass

production and the mass media it has engendered have contributed to an "exploitation of the cheapest emotional responses" (p. 3) which the training of literary taste alone cannot ameliorate. It must be "supplemented by something more" (p. 4), that is the training of "critical awareness" (p. 5) through the study of popular cultural forms: Leavis and Thompson suggest that "a great deal can be brought in under English. Practical Criticism— the analysis of prose and verse— may be extended to the analysis of advertisements... followed up by comparison with representative passages of journalese and popular fiction" (p. 6). The book, designed for classroom use, contains numerous examples of contemporary advertising to show how one might analyze their rhetorical strategies of persuasion to uncover the dishonesty and condescension which many of these ads reveal. The purpose of inviting the "whole world" of signifying practices into the classroom, then, was to inoculate young people against an essentially sick culture: "We cannot, as we might in a healthy state of culture, leave the citizen to be formed unconsciously by his environment; if anything like a worthy idea of satisfactory living is to be saved, he must be trained to discriminate and resist" (p. 5).

This passage provokes certain questions about the nature of culture and the public. First of all, when have we ever lived in a "healthy state of culture"? It certainly wasn't when Arnold wrote Culture and Anarchy. Leavis and Thompson, like Arnold before them, present a nostalgic longing for a simpler time of individual craftsmanship, rural living, and an "organic community", but one wonders when in England's, or for that matter, the world's past, a healthy state of culture actually existed, particulary if one

equates change with disease. The other assumption we might question is the notion that people are subconsciously affected by this unhealthy state of culture. While the attainment of taste, sensibility and refinement through the study of literature is an arduous process, it seems that the formation of one's character through the effects of the immediate environment of movies, ads and journalese is produced on an entirely unconscious level. The positing of a citizenry which is basically unconscious, or at best, passively malleable, to the deleterious effects of the mass media is as condescending an attitude as that revealed in some of the advertising Leavis and Thompson quote for discussion in their book. Yet the inoculation model of media studies born here holds sway to the present time. One only needs to recall the media spin surrounding the shootings in a Colorado school in May of 1999 to see how much currency the idea of subconscious media influences, particularly on the young, still maintains in public debate.

Leavis's philosophy was supported by the concurrent emergence of media effects studies in the United States. As Boyd-Barret (1992) notes, effects studies arose from the "prevailing belief that individuals are easy prey to media influences..., fed in part by growing conviction in and concern about the increasingly sophisticated uses of media for propaganda, as in the First World War, in helping to establish the rise of the Nazi party, and in advertising" (p. 177). Concern over the effect of the media on its audiences was certainly warranted, particularly in terms of state propaganda or attempts at mind control within totalitarian regimes. The first psychological effects studies were designed around a stimulus-response model, however, which suggested a one-way communication between

audience and media wherein the media acts upon the audience who respond like inert sponges soaking up, uncritically, whatever messages are relayed to them. In fact, the relationship between media and audience is far more complex and subject to more variables than this model of inquiry allowed. Moreover, effects studies, while "frequently based on simplistic linear hypodermic models of communication ... all too often serve the reactionary purpose of scapegoating the media in order to distract attention away from more deeply rooted social injustices" (Masterman, 1985, p. 68). In the case of the Columbine shootings, for instance, attention focused quickly on the effects of violent video games, racist web-sites on the internet, and movies like Scream and Basketball Diaries, instead of on an examination of the social pressures exerted by the shooters' school environment or the easy access these young men had to firearms. The presumption of such a simplistic connection between media and audience is upheld, according to C.W.E. Bigsby (1976), by a mistaken understanding of culture which began with Arnold and Leavis. Because they had defined culture "in terms of authority", they saw the "manipulators of the new consumer society" as constituting a "new authority" which the authority vested in high cultural forms was almost powerless to resist (p. 14). Thus, "the cultural critic had missed his aim, which should in truth have been directed at the changing basis of his society and not at the products which it generated, in curing the disease and not merely in recognizing the symptoms and prescribing an emetic" (Bigsby, p. 14). What Leavis saw as an unhealthy state of culture, then, was actually a symptom of a more deeply rooted social unease (or dis-ease) which his attacks on popular culture

did little to remedy.

Nonetheless, Culture and Environment was an influential book for English teachers, because it was the "first to make the discussion of media texts in the classroom an acceptable and intellectually respectable activity for teachers" (Masterman, 1985, p. 40). Also, the recommended method of analysis, close reading, granted the English teacher in particular, the requisite skills needed to foster critical awareness of the media in our students. The missing element which the English teacher must seek beyond our own discipline is a more comprehensive understanding of the connection between society and the products it generates. This requires a broader definition of culture beyond the high culture / popular culture dichotomy within which we have traditionally worked. It also requires a rejection of Leavis's elitist assumption that "ordinary people are fools" (Easthope, 1991, p. 79).

Ordinary People and Popular Culture

As if in response to Leavis and Thompson's Culture and Environment, Richard Hoggart (1957) stated in The Uses of Literacy, "There may be some prophetic truth in discussions about 'the vast anonymous masses with their thoroughly dulled responses'. But so far working-class people are by no means as badly affected as that sentence suggests" (p. 33). Hoggart's study of the working classes in northern England has been cited as one of the ground-breaking books of an emergent cultural studies movement in the 1950's (Hall, 1980, p. 16). It re-framed the debate about the effects of popular culture by describing the everyday lives and conditions of the so-called "masses" to show that

even as late as the 1950's, much of their lives was still strongly embedded in past traditions and values, and that the process of change was a slow one. Hoggart pointed out that social change, including the effects of urbanization and industrialization, had brought both material benefits and possible dangers. Hoggart's opinion of the working classes derived from his own working-class background which he hoped would prevent him from patronizing or romanticizing the subjects of his study (p. 17). The book is divided into two halves, first, a detailed ethnographic description of the daily lives of working class people, and then an analysis of the popular literature which members of this class read and enjoyed. The book was a departure from the position of Leavis and Thompson in that Hoggart employed the techniques of "close reading" of popular culture with a different aim, not to teach people to "discriminate and resist", but rather, to understand the uses and pleasures of popular entertainment as part of the fabric of working people's lives. As Hall (1980) explains:

> The Uses of Literacy refused many of Leavis's embedded cultural judgements. But it did attempt to deploy literary criticism to 'read' the emblems, idioms, social arrangements, the lived cultures and 'languages' of working class life, as particular kinds of 'text', as a privileged sort of cultural evidence. (p. 18)

Hoggart's approach to popular culture was an important break from Leavis's position because although it granted that much of the popular reading of the day was as bad or

worse than Leavis had characterized it, it merited analysis and understanding within the uses to which it was put by the masses of people who were reading it. Hoggart's study took account of the real audience for popular culture in a manner that was balanced, respectful, and altogether new. His conclusions set the parameters for a new way of discussing people and culture:

> As we study popular publications we insensibly tend to give them, so great is their mere bulk, a larger prominence in the whole pattern of people's experience than, in fact, they have... People are not living lives which are imaginatively as poor as a mere reading of their literature would suggest....There are wars and fears of war; there is the world of work, of the relations, the loyalties and tensions there; there are the duties of home and the management of money; there are neighbourhood ties and demands; there are illness and fatigue and birth and death; there is all the world of local recreation. That is why I tried much earlier to describe the quality of ordinary working-class life, so that the closer analysis of publications might be set into a landscape of solid earth and rock and water. (p. 324)

Although neither Leavis nor Hoggart discussed the effects of the cinema in great detail in their respective studies, their opinions of the cinema showed the same shift in perspective. Where Leavis feared that the motion picture was inculcating people "into types of vivid experience which they come to take for granted as parts of their lives, yet

have no training to handle" (1933, p. 114), Hoggart saw their "cheerful debunking" of the popular media "in the laughter which is caused by the script or by the tones of voice used in some short advertising films and some cinema news-reels" (p. 325). Because he had set his analysis into "a landscape of solid earth and rock and water," Hoggart was able to present a more balanced view of the effects of the media and the uses to which it was being put by the "common man".

The departure from Leavis's conception of people and popular culture to Hoggart's parallels a shift in emphasis that was occurring in mass media effects studies in the period between 1945 and 1968. According to Boyd-Barrett (1992), post-war empirical research suggested that "media do not generally account for major changes of attitude; they more often reinforce people's attitudes than change them, through people's exercise of selective attention, perception, and retention" (p. 177). As Hoggart had argued in The Uses of Literacy, media researchers were now seeing that the "processes of selection are often mediated by the membership of an individual within the family, community, or social class" (Boyd-Barrett, p. 177) to which they belong. This model became known as the "limited effects" model, which "helped generate the 'uses and gratifications' approach to the study of audiences, one that asked how and for what purposes people used the media rather than what was done to them by the media" (Boyd-Barrett, p. 177). This important shift in focus allowed for a broader and more positive study of culture than that prescribed by Leavis.

Hoggart (1957) redefined the idea of culture that had for so long been limited by

the high culture / popular culture dichotomy which had premised Arnold's and Leavis's arguments. Instead, he viewed the term ethnographically or anthropologically to include all of the beliefs and practices of the British working class. At the same time, he distinguished his study at the outset from sociological surveys of the working classes which tended to "construct an image of working-class people only from adding together [a] variety of statistics" (p. 17). His was a qualitative study based on lived experience and close observation. And because he attended to the artefacts of popular culture with the same respectful analysis as that which had formerly been accorded only to works of established literary value, Hoggart's The Uses of Literacy broadened the field of social and cultural inquiry which signaled the beginning of the cultural studies movement. According to Hall (1980), cultural studies is not a 'discipline', per se, but rather, "an area where different disciplines intersect in the study of cultural aspects of society" (p. 7). Drawing on anthropology, sociology, communications and traditional literary studies, the field of cultural studies seeks to recover "'neglected' materials drawn from popular culture and the mass media, which... provided important evidence of the new stresses and directions of contemporary culture" (p. 21). Hoggart's book may be seen as a model for a movement that was initially considered as neither fish nor fowl because it refused to adhere to the established methodologies of the disciplines from which it derived. Sociologists felt the cultural studies movement was "crossing the territorial boundary" which had traditionally encompassed their discipline (Hall, p. 21), while the humanists (like Leavis) "regarded 'culture' as already inscribed in the texts they studied and in the

values of liberal scholarship" (p. 21). Accordingly, "cultural studies... was either hopelessly unscientific or a product of the very disease it sought to diagnose— either way, a treason of the intellectuals" (p. 21). Because the cultural studies movement defined culture in such a broad and inclusive manner, "from texts and representations to lived practices, belief systems and institutions" (Hall, p. 23), its field of inquiry was bound to tread on some academic toes. Far from simply usurping material from the established academic disciplines, however, the cultural studies movement sought to legitimize the study of popular culture within the academic community, a move that is still fraught with controversy, possibly equaling that generated by the establishment of literature as an academic discipline at the beginning of this century. In the same way that the study of English literature gradually supplanted the study of the classics of Greek and Latin at the university level, cultural studies is now drawing from students who might, in my generation, have studied literature (Whelehan & Cartmell, 1996, p. 1). The lesson for the English teacher seems clear— we need to move away from Leavis's conception of the discipline to something approaching Hoggart's. Our attitude toward our students could emulate Hoggart's toward the working classes by showing respect for the popular cultural forms which they use and enjoy, and by employing an approach toward these forms that seeks to understand rather than to "discriminate and resist."

"Reeling into Relevancy": Coopting Film in the English Classroom

In Teaching the Media, Masterman (1985) notes that "the increasing use of popular texts was paralleled during the 1960's by a significant movement away from

Leavis and Thompson's position. For a new generation of teachers actually *liked* popular cultural forms, could see value in them and were unwilling to discuss them as *inevitably* corrupting influences... Discrimination, however, now became something to be exercised not *against* the media, but *within* them" (p. 49). As film became more sophisticated and critics began to take it seriously as an art form with its own critical history and theories of aesthetics, English teachers came to see its potential and began to assimilate the study of film within the traditional framework of their classes. Richard Maynard's Classroom Cinema (1977) identifies the two most common uses of film in the English classroom at the time as 1) motivation for reading and 2) reinforcement of works of literature under study (p. 82). But Maynard, representative of the new generation of teachers who actually liked popular cultural forms, recommended their use not simply as "visual aids" but as "primary classroom sources" (p. 7), which, at a time when schools were increasingly under attack for being out of touch, held the promise of reinvigorating staid classroom practices and making education "relevant" to students. His book, based on his own teaching experience with film, is representative of the enthusiastic endorsement many of the radical 60's educators gave to the study of film. The illustration on the cover of his book, a 16 mm movie projector, serves as a reminder in our age of VCR's, of how dedicated a teacher would have to have been in order to master even the logistics of acquiring and showing current films to his students.

The 1970 publication, Films Deliver, is another representative teacher resource of this period which wholeheartedly advocated the use of film in the classroom because of

its relevance to young people's lives: "Film gets through because it's an emotional and sensuous medium... Film delivers experience..." (Culkin, p. 20). The primacy accorded relevance, immediacy, and "getting through" is certainly indicative of the spirit of the 60's, and films were seen as having the power to do this: "One way to send kids reeling into relevancy is to study excellent films" (Culkin, p. 22). Culkin's definition of a "great teacher" as "a relevant person, one who understands, communicates, gets through" (p. 21) has a quaint charm some thirty years later, but its message still holds some "relevance" today. The teaching of media demands a different style from the traditional transmission model, where the teacher functions as a "listening post" rather than an authority figure (Carrico, 1970, p. 104). Carrico's article in Films Deliver, "Film and the Teacher of English" suggested that the new attitudes teachers needed to adopt in order to teach film might signal a sea change in their approach to traditional classroom materials as well: "Often it will demand a new posturing, a re-formation of perhaps encrusted attitudes about the arts. Indeed, the discovery of film as a synthetic though distinctive art form, has made necessary the re-examination of all systems of aesthetics" (p. 115).

While the eager appropriation of film study in the English classroom was seen as a "hip" challenge to the status quo and a means of prying loose "encrusted attitudes" toward the arts and established power relationships between teachers and students, its ready assimilation into the existing modus operandi of the English classroom might also suggest that attitudes toward film had changed more than attitudes toward teaching had. Because movies had, in a sense, grown up, they now could be introduced into the

classroom as legitimate art, worthy of the same consideration as other forms of literature. Culkin's comments on the status of film show how the attitude had changed since Leavis's time:

> The schools had a go at the movies once before back in the 1930's. The crusade started fast and faded fast since it was built on a negative approach to film. The second surge of the movement is based on a respect for film rather than a fear of film. It regards film as one of the humanities... (p. 25)

Although Culkin warned against film "becoming new grist for the elite culture" (p. 25), one can understand how easily this would have happened given that there were only two lines of argument possible for introducing media into the schools: "make the media seem so *respectable* that the schools have to recognize them as worthy of inclusion within the curriculum," or "make their impact seem so *lethal* that the schools feel forced to deal with them as a tactic of survival" (p. 25). Film had now become "respectable" and hence easily adaptable into the English teacher's preexisting hard-wiring. Though Culkin warned against this possibility, many of the practical strategies recommended in Films Deliver are admitted "carry-overs from the days [media teachers] taught literature" (Carrico, 1970, p. 107). Were we now simply doing "lit crit" on movies? As Masterman (1985) explains, "the popular arts movement... led to the increasing exclusivity and... ultimate separation of film... from the study of other media... [and] contributed to the

scandalous neglect of television and press studies" (p. 58). In a sense, we were back to Leavis's distinction between high and popular culture, except that movies had somehow managed to slip rank.

One other danger can be seen in Culkin's description of movies: "Films deliver experience" (1970, p. 20). While recognizing its legitimacy as art, film teachers of the 60's and 70's were won over by its instant appeal to students because it seemed not only to present unmediated experience, but to actually recreate that experience in its audience through their act of viewing the film. This phenomenon is addressed by Stephenson and Debrix (1966) in The Cinema as Art:

> Like that of photography, the compelling realism of a film depends on the fact that there is, or seems to be, less human intervention than in other arts. We think that we can rely on a machine to be faithful in reproducing an original in a way that is not possible with human agency alone, and consequently we *believe* in the reality of a machine reproduction.(pp. 35-36).

Because of its seeming transparency and believability, film "gets through" to kids (and adults) in a way other art forms apparently do not. But what exactly is it that gets through? Stephenson and Debrix maintain that it is the artist's or director's personal vision, for whereas nature or reality is basically neutral— it is just there, "film as a work of art is deliberately made to attack us, to force its way into our feelings and our beliefs"

(p. 37). Could film be both a respectable art form and a lethal weapon? Is there a way to talk about film without either coopting it into the tradition of literary study or reverting to the fear and suspicion that prompted its study in the first place?

The Ideology that Speaks Us

The separate strands of traditional literary study, film studies, media effects studies and cultural studies all converge at the word "ideology", a concept which helps to explain the relationship between society and its signifying practices and dismantles the high art / popular culture dichotomy that continues arbitrarily to divide these practices. Althusser's "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses" (1971) outlined a theory for understanding how a social order or state power is supported by various apparatuses which assist in its daily functioning and in its maintenance of power and control. Speaking within the Marxist tradition, Althusser asks how a capitalist economy ensures the ongoing exploitation of its labor, and answers that "it is in the forms and under the forms of ideological subjection that provision is made for the reproduction of the skills of labor power" (p. 128). Not only are people governed or ruled by the State Apparatus which includes the "Government, the Administration, the Army, the Police, the Courts, the Prisons, etc" (p. 136), but we are conditioned to accept our position within society and our subjugation by the State by Ideological State Apparatuses which support the more overt forms of control. Some of these include the institutions of religion, education, family, law, the political system, communications (press, radio, and television, etc), and culture (literature, the arts, sports, etc.) (pp. 136-137). These institutions "function by

ideology" (p. 137), that is, by promoting the ideology of the ruling class and by creating consensus or agreement within society to accept the status quo as the natural order of things. Althusser identifies education as the chief Ideological State Apparatus which "drums into" children "a certain amount of 'know-how' wrapped in the ruling ideology" so that when they are "ejected", they are "practically provided with the ideology which suits the role [they have] to fulfill" (p. 147). Because the ideology of the school "represents the School as a neutral environment purged of ideology" (p. 148), Althusser explains that teachers themselves often do not recognize the role they are playing in reproducing the ruling ideology, so effectively have we been inculcated. For Althusser, then, "ideology represents the imaginary relationship of individuals to their real conditions of existence" (p. 153), and so pervasive is this "imaginary relationship" that we function within it as though it were simply natural. Althusser's central thesis is that "ideology hails or interpellates individuals as subjects" (p. 164), meaning that our very sense of individual identity is created by the ideology we inhabit through our beliefs and practices. There is simply no place to stand outside of the ruling ideology. Ideology "hails us" as individual subjects and speaks us even as we believe we are speaking for ourselves.

If we return to Leavis's concerns about the effects of mass media on audiences in the context of Althusser's argument, we see that Leavis had a point. Advertising, part of the Communications Ideological State Apparatus, helps to interpellate the masses as workers and consumers. And movies, whether they are part of the Communications or

Cultural Ideological State Apparatuses, serve to reinforce the ruling ideology through their powerful rendering of reality and their unique ability to force their way into our feelings and beliefs. But Leavis's conception of literature as ideologically innocent, as somehow standing above ideology, is countered by Althusser's claim that culture itself, including literature, is simply another ideological state apparatus which interpellates its subjects as humanists, cultural workers whose role it is to perpetuate the distinctions between classes while believing that we are educating them in taste, sensibility, and aspirations to the finer things in life.

Gramsci's (1990) concept of hegemony supports Althusser's explanation of ideology by suggesting the complexity with which our social and cultural institutions negotiate consent for the ruling ideologies of the day. All forms of representation, be they works of high or popular culture, help to present arbitrary hierarchies and inequalities of power as the natural order of things. As Brantlinger (1990) describes Gramsci's concept of hegemony, "Common sense is the ideological glue or cement that legitimizes and binds a social formation together by making its institutions and arrangements of power seem natural and wise" (p. 96). Within the complex workings of hegemony, both works of high and popular culture are equally complicit in the creation of a social consensus through common sense by helping to naturalize arrangements of power within society; thus, "all culture, all representation, is political or ideological" (Brantlinger, 1990, p. 64). The application of Marxist theory to both literature and other media has an equalizing or leveling effect because it presents the possibility of bringing

all forms of representation under the umbrella of ideological critique.

The shift in perspective afforded by ideological critique affects our understanding of both literature and popular culture. Brantlinger (1990) notes that while "any attempt to think about literature in relation to something external to itself... undermines its status as an independent, free-standing category, any attempt to buttress that independence has the paradoxical effect of diminishing or denying its relevance to 'real life'" (p. 70). In this regard, he credits Marxist theory as being "the one tradition in which the relations between literature and society have been vigorously and continuously thought" (p. 22). By acknowledging its role in the process of negotiating hegemonic consent, we allow for a discussion of literature that accords it a relevance it can not otherwise achieve. In terms of media studies, an understanding of the complex ideological role of the media provided by Althusser and Gramsci supplanted more simplistic models of direct influence (Hall, 1980, p. 117) by showing the subtlety with which works of popular culture can shape society's assumptions about arrangements of power within that society. Hegemony, particularly in complex societies like our own, is not simply a monolithic imposition of a particular ruling class ideology; the process of creating social consent is a fluid and dynamic one. And because it is "complex, multiple, contradictory, hegemony always carries within it the seeds of resistance and rebellion" (Brantlinger, p. 97). This model allows the possibility for works of high and popular culture to probe and challenge society's dominant ideologies, not simply to transmit them without question. The concepts of ideology and hegemony also permit the analysis of all forms of representation

in order to reveal the ideological positions latent within them, thus demystifying their effects.

Semiotics and Ideological Critique

Roland Barthes's (1957) Mythologies provided this means of analysis of all of society's representations through the study of semiology. Drawing on the traditional study of linguistics, Barthes showed how myth (or ideology) is "a type of speech" or "mode of signification" (p. 14) which consists of "the normally hidden set of rules, codes and conventions through which meanings particular to specific social groups (i.e. those in power) are rendered universal and 'given' for the whole of society" (Hebdige, 1993, p. 361). Or as Barthes stated, "myth is a type of speech chosen by history" (p. 15). He continued by explaining that myth "can consist of modes of writing or of representations; not only written discourse, but also photography, cinema, reporting, sport, shows, publicity" (p. 15). Barthes maintained that all social practices or representations can be called language or discourse, "if they mean something" (p. 15). To this degree, they are all amenable to a semiotic reading which is done by breaking each representation into three parts, the signifier or the object, the signified or the idea it stands for, and the sign, which comprises the relation between signifier and signified. To make the point that "pictures become a kind of writing as soon as they are meaningful" (p. 15), Barthes used the example of the cover of a Paris-Match magazine to demonstrate the process of semiological analysis: "On the cover, a young Negro in a French uniform is saluting, with his eyes uplifted, probably fixed on a fold of the tricolour" (p. 19). To Barthes, this

signified "that France is a great Empire, that all her sons, without any colour discrimination, faithfully serve under her flag, and that there is no better answer to the detractors of an alleged colonialism than the zeal shown by this Negro in serving his so-called oppressors" (p. 19). With this oft-cited example, Barthes rather deftly showed how the picture imposes a certain ideological stance while at the same time allowing itself to be deconstructed or demythologized. As Barthes concluded, "myth has in fact a double function: it points out and it notifies, it makes us understand something and it imposes it on us" (p. 19). This statement suggests that semiotic analysis can be a means of breaking through the seeming naturalness by which various signifying practices create hegemonic consent.

As Hebdige (1993) explains, Barthes's Mythologies ushered in a common language for discussing the ideologies latent in any form of signifying practice:

> Barthes's application of a method rooted in linguistics to other systems of discourse outside language... opened up completely new possibilities for contemporary cultural studies. It was hoped that the invisible seam between language, experience and reality could be located and prised open through a semiotic analysis of this kind. (p. 361)

In Literary into Cultural Studies, Easthope (1991) describes Barthes's method as "a system of 'deep' or 'close' reading previously only practiced on works in the literary

canon" (p. 141). The difference, according to Easthope, is that Barthes's version of close reading "does not aim to seek out and substantiate the unity of the text, it is not heading into the same ideological corral as literary study" (p. 141). Instead, its purpose is to "draw attention to ideology, gender meaning, subject position and the sense of the other as these are presented thematically and through the operation of the signifier" (p. 141). Basically, then, Barthes's Mythologies presents the working method of contemporary cultural studies. It also illustrates the main role of the media teacher according to Masterman (1985), which is make students aware of the ideologies latent in all forms of signification: "Simply by problematising media representations, by refusing to accept the naturalness of an image, or the neutrality of a particular point of view, each student is undercutting the potency and influence of dominant ideologies as they are naturalized by the media" (p. 198). Ultimately, the role of English teachers as teachers of all signifying practices is to help students to problematise the representations we would otherwise take for granted as given or natural, be these representations in the media or in the canonical texts that have been our traditional source of study.

Both Easthope (1991) and Masterman (1985) speak to this point in their conclusions. In Teaching the Media, Masterman provides a stern warning to the English teacher who wishes to incorporate media studies into the traditional working method of the English classroom, rather than the other way around: "For whilst any further moves to recuperate media study to an English whose eternal verities remain largely unquestioned would have little credibility, literature itself is becoming increasingly seen as simply one

signifying practice amongst many, and as amenable to the kind of critical approaches outlined in this book as any other symbolic form" (p. 255). Easthope maintains that "cultural studies— as the study of signifying practice— gives a better analysis of its object than literary study, not only a better account of the texts of popular culture... but almost certainly a better account of all those canonical texts as well" (p. 175). The paradigm of cultural studies brings a critical edge to the study of all of a society's signifying practices that challenges both teacher and student to stand outside the language that speaks us and consider the ways in which we are presented to ourselves through the language of our culture. As film is increasing becoming the language of our culture, the chapters which follow will apply the methods of cultural studies to an examination of five representative films.

Chapter 3: Frankenstein: The Face of the Monster

> Over the years, thousands of children wrote expressing compassion for the great, weird creature who was so abused by its sadistic keeper that it could only respond to violence with violence. These children saw beyond the makeup and really understood.
>
> - Boris Karloff

What accounts for the tremendous popularity and longevity of Boris Karloff's monster? Since its debut in 1931, the face of Frankenstein's monster has haunted our century through an endless proliferation of images and artifacts. His face has been described as "a cultural mascot" (Tropp, 1976, p. 2), "one of the icons of our time" (Manguel, 1997, p. 19), "the face of our subhuman self" (Manguel, p. 19), and "the perfect failure of a face" (Manguel, p. 19). Critics have seen in this face every travesty of modern science and technology, every evil society is capable of, and every outcast who has been denied the warmth of human sympathy and social acceptance. It is the face of the "other" in the mirror of our times.

The 1931 James Whale Frankenstein in which Karloff first appeared as the monster is a very appropriate choice for a cultural studies analysis. First of all, the Mary Shelley (1818) novel on which it is loosely based has always occupied the no man's land between popular entertainment and canonical literature, contested territory in the culture

wars. As J. M. Smith (1992) points out in "A Critical History of Frankenstein", a serious academic study of the novel called The Endurance of Frankenstein was not published until 1979, and even then, its editors appeared somewhat apologetic in their attempts to apply the "high seriousness of the Arnoldian literary critic" (Levine & Knoepflmacher, 1979, pp.xi-xii) to a work of such low-brow popular appeal. According to Smith, The Endurance of Frankenstein "attempted to establish the novel's high seriousness so as to 'rescue' it from the abyss of popular culture" (p. 190). Since then, however, the advent of cultural studies has "revised this dismissive idea of low culture, in part by relocating Frankenstein in traditions of popular literature and taking those traditions seriously" (Smith, p. 190).

Not surprisingly, the critical history of the film parallels that of the novel. As Tropp (1976) pointed out, "Now that movies are studied in universities, the Karloff films have been accorded the deference given 'serious' art. But one of the refreshing qualities about Frankenstein is that it blurs such distinctions" (p. 2). The same might be said of the entire genre of the horror film. Horror movies had traditionally stood beyond the margins of serious film study until the late 70's (Cook, 1985, p. 99), at which time the 1979 publication of American Nightmare: Essays on the Horror Film established the outcast genre as a subject worthy of academic interest. In his introduction to the volume, Wood (1979) applied the critical theories that have become the tools of cultural studies to the genre of the horror film, implying that until the development of Marxist and psychoanalytical theory, it was not possible to grasp the import of the horror film in terms

of its social meanings. These theories give us a language and open up a new territory it was not previously possible to map. As Wood explained,

> The most significant development— in film criticism... of the last few decades has clearly been the increasing confluence of Marx and Freud... From Marx we derive our awareness of the dominant ideology— the ideology of bourgeois capitalism... It is psychoanalytic theory that has provided... the most effective means of examining the ways in which that ideology is transmitted and perpetuated. (p. 7)

Wood drew on the distinction between Marx's theory of oppression and Freud's theory of repression to explain the way these terms operate in our understanding of the horror film: "In psychoanalytic terms, what is repressed is not accessible to the conscious mind... We may also not be conscious of ways in which we are oppressed, but it is much easier to become so: we are oppressed by something 'out there'... What escapes repression has to be dealt with by oppression" (p. 8). According to Wood, the concept of the "other" embodies what is both oppressed and repressed in our culture: "Its psychoanalytic significance resides in the fact that it functions not simply as something external to the culture or to the self, but also as what is repressed (but never destroyed) in the self and projected outwards in order to be hated and disowned" (p. 9). The face of Frankenstein's monster is our century's iconic "other", everything we oppress and everything we repress.

Wood (1979) identified eight versions of the "other" which are found in our culture and embodied in the monsters of the horror film. Among them are women, the proletariat, other cultures, ethnic groups within our culture, alternative ideologies, sexual deviations, and children (pp. 9-10); in short, "the true subject of the horror genre is the struggle for recognition of all that our civilisation represses or oppresses" (p. 10). Wood saw the horror film as "the return of the repressed" (p. 17), and as such, one of the most progressive of film genres because it "offers the possibility of radical change and rebuilding" in times of "extreme cultural crisis and disintegration" (p. 17). In Mary Shelley's Monster, Tropp (1976) maintained that "examining some of the films inspired by Frankenstein shows us how the basic elements of the story repeat almost ritually, while details change to suit a changing culture" (p. 9). Each successive version of the Frankenstein story, then, mirrors the times in which it was produced to show the plight of the other in its particular cultural and historical context.

Historicizing Frankenstein: The Other in the '30's

The 1930's, the golden era of the horror film, certainly qualifies as a time of "extreme cultural crisis and disintegration". The era looks back to the Great War, "a conflict which only succeeded in destroying a generation and destroying belief in progress and the nobility of man" (Tropp, 1976, p. 89), and forward to World War II and an even more "terrifying conflict" (Tropp, p. 88). Between the wars, a long depression plagued an increasingly insular, isolationist America. More than providing a simple diversion for their troubled audience, the horror films of the 30's created a face for their

amorphous fears. As Tropp explained:

> The Monster as outcast... has contemporary political overtones. In one sense, it is a creature of the thirties, shaped by shadowy forces beyond its control, wandering the countryside like some disfigured veteran or hideous tramp. The special pathos of the Monster, never really recaptured in most of the later films, is due in part to its affinities with the refugees from political and economic disaster cast out from a society that can find no place for them. In many ways, the 1931 Frankenstein plays upon the particular collection of fears that haunted the thirties. (p. 93)

In "Society and the Monster", Denne (1972) discussed the connection between a society's attitude toward evil and the monsters which characterize that society's horror films. Denne described the movie-going public of the thirties as conceiving of its antagonist as "an impersonal force, able to disrupt and potentially destroy society" (p. 126). He correlated this view with the socio-economic class typical of this era's movie-going audience: "Whereas drama and literature have usually been associated with society's intellectual group (which has generally upper-class values), the motion picture has appealed most to the masses. Thus, the typical feelings of the culturally deprived— that forces of evil, Fate, and the un-understandable can and do bear them down— is shown" in what Denne defined as the atmospheric horror film (p. 126). In the figure of Frankenstein's monster, the audience of the thirties saw the inexorable evils that

threatened their fragile security, but they also saw themselves. As Wood (1979) pointed out, "Frankenstein *could* have dressed his creature in top hat, white tie and tails, but in fact chose labourer's clothes" (p. 11). Paradoxically then, the monster represents both the victim and victimizer, the embodiment of the formless horrors that stalk the unwary, and the prey of those self-same horrors.

This paradox, monster as evil, monster as victim, might account for the complexity and emotional power of the 1931 film, for the face of the monster is so hideous and frightening, we hate to recognize it as our own. This dual nature of the monster's "otherness" reveals itself in almost every aspect of the film's production, beginning with Universal Studio's founder, Carl Laemmle. Laemmle was a German Jewish immigrant who had come to America in 1884 (Manguel, 1997, p. 9), set up a clothing business in Oshkosh, Wisconsin, and then, in 1912, founded Universal Films Manufacturing Company in New York (Mank, 1981, p. 8). According to the television documentary, Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies, and the American Dream, Laemmle was one of several Jewish immigrants who sought a future in the new movie industry in California after feeling excluded from opportunities in New York's more established film community. Hollywood's studio bosses were the outcasts, the others, who had fled persecution in Europe and hoped to find refuge in California. The documentary builds a case for seeing the Hollywood film as a projection, both literally and figuratively, of the Jewish immigrants' longing for a society free of discrimination and religious persecution, and puts forward the thesis that the Hollywood film created the myth of the American Dream

out of Jewish immigrants' hopes for peaceful assimilation in a new world. On the flip side of the American dream, many films also played out the history of the Jewish persecution in Europe by transplanting and disguising these experiences in altered contexts— the razing of homesteads in the early Westerns, for example, replaying the burning of villages during the nightmarish pogroms of eastern Europe. Universal Studios, one of the minor companies, chose to play out this nightmare through the horror film, the genre with which Universal became widely identified throughout the 30's and 40's (Cook, 1985, p. 23). In It's Alive!: The Classic Saga of Frankenstein, Mank (1981) characterized Laemmle as the "5'3" ever smiling 'Uncle Carl'" (p. 9), so named because over 70 of his relatives were employed by his studio. The documentary, Hollywoodism states that "even in appearance, Carl Laemmle was an outsider. He resembled an elf. Not surprisingly, Universal films often championed marginal beings who were persecuted like the Jews of Europe" (Jacobovici, 1979). Accompanying this narration is a scene from Frankenstein.

Following the successful release of Dracula in early 1931, Laemmle's son, Carl Laemmle Jr., hoped Frankenstein would bring similar profits to a struggling studio threatened with "financial Armageddon" (Mank, 1981, p. 9) at the beginning of the Depression. Both Dracula and Frankenstein are set in Europe, which, according to Wood (1979), is a typical feature of the horror genre of the Thirties: "In the Thirties, horror is always foreign... it is always external to Americans, who may be attacked by it physically but remain (superficially, that is) uncontaminated by it morally" (p. 18). Wood provided

two plausible explanations for the foreignness of horror in this era: "as a means of disavowal" and "as a means of locating horror as a 'country of the mind,' as a psychological state" (p. 18). I would add a third explanation, that the foreignness of Universal's horror films relates back to the Bavarian village of Laemmle's birth, the origin of his family's collective nightmare. One of the most charmingly incongruous sets on the Universal lot was a little Bavarian village built for the 1930 production of All Quiet on the Western Front, then used again for Frankenstein. Universal City, 230 acres in California's San Fernando Valley, was dubbed "Little Europa" by the Hollywood film community (Mank, p. 8). One might consider it as Carl Laemmle's "country of the mind", the roots of his sense of otherness and social dislocation.

Another notable outsider associated with the production of Frankenstein was its director, James Whale. In The Men Who Made the Monsters, Jensen (1996) creates a portrait of Whale as "an outsider who hovers on the sidelines of life and society, shadowed by the prospect of doom and destruction" (p. 56), a portrait discerned through the four horror films he directed in his Hollywood career and confirmed in his personal history. James Whale was born into a working-class family that "struggled against poverty in the grim industrial Midlands of England" (Jensen, p. 5). Jensen maintains that as a result, "he spent his adult life obsessed with refinement and class" (p. 6). Like Carl Laemmle, Whale distanced himself from his country of origin and transplanted himself in California, where he strove to cultivate the persona of an upper-class Englishman. An outsider by virtue of country, social class, and artistic temperament, Whale was also

openly homosexual. For all of these reasons, he could well sympathize with the plight of Frankenstein's monster, the other in a society with a restricted definition of normalcy (Manguel, 1997, p. 36). After establishing a successful reputation directing stage and film, Whale, the "boy wonder" at Universal, was in a position to pick and choose his projects. Although Robert Florey began the project as Frankenstein's writer and director, adapting the screenplay from a stage play by Peggy Webbling, James Whale "snatched the picture away" (Mank, 1981, p. 16) from Florey and created a somewhat different characterization of the monster from the Webbling conception. The fact that he chose to direct Frankenstein suggests that he saw possibilities for self-expression in the story, an opportunity, perhaps, to create a monster that evoked both the horror and pathos of his own position as the other in society. Mank quotes Boris Karloff in this regard:

> I don't think the main screenwriter, Bob Florey, really intended there to be much pathos inside the character. But Whale and I thought that there should be; we didn't want the kind of rampaging monstrosity that Universal seemed to think we should go for. We had to have some pathos, otherwise our audiences just wouldn't think about the film after they'd left the theatre, and Whale very much wanted them to do that. (Karloff, quoted in Mank, p. 17)

For his own part, Whale felt the Frankenstein story "dealt with a subject which might go anywhere" (Mank, p.16), suggesting the evocative nature of the monster as other—

foreigner, Jew, homosexual, oppressed, the perennially shunned and misunderstood, the voiceless.

How to Create a Monster

James Whale chose the face of Boris Karloff for his monster. Although Bela Lugosi had originally agreed to play the part, he turned it down when he realized that, unlike his role as the charming Dracula, the part of Frankenstein's monster would require hiding his face under layers of hideous makeup and, worse still, not being allowed to talk. "Anybody can moan and grunt" (Mank, 1981, p. 17), he explained, dismissing the part as unworthy of his acting abilities, as a role better suited to a stunt man. For similar reasons, the part was also turned down by John Carradine (Mank, p. 18). It seemed that even taking on the role of Frankenstein's monster, wearing his face, walking in his shoes (asphalt-spreader's boots, actually, 13 pounds on each foot), would require such a sympathetic effort of will that no one wanted to do it. except Boris Karloff, in whose sensitive and cadaverous face, Whale saw "startling possibilities" (Mank, p. 18).

The task of transforming Karloff's face into "the perfect failure of a face" fell to make-up artist Jack Pierce, who spent three months in preparation studying "anatomy, surgery, medicine, criminal history, criminology, ancient and modern burial customs, and electrodynamics" (Pierce, quoted in Mank, 1981, p. 25). He learned there are six ways to cut the skull in order to remove the brain, and chose to model Dr. Frankenstein's surgical results on the simplest procedure, which would be to "cut the top of the skull off straight across like a potlid, hinge it, pop the brain in and then clamp it on tight" (Mank, p. 25).

This accounts for our monster's flat-topped head and scarred brow. "A Neanderthal slope over the eyes, done with putty, suggested the desired lower intelligence" (Lavalley, 1979, p. 263) ascribed to the criminal mind. The eyes, which were otherwise too "normal and natural" were veiled with mortician's wax on the lids (Mank, p. 25). The metal studs on the neck betrayed the monster's reanimation from the dead through electric galvanization. Karloff's body was padded, his legs and spine braced with steel struts so as to confine his movements to the lumbering gait of the not-quite-alive. Pierce also read that ancient Egyptians used to bind the hands and feet of criminals and bury them alive, which elongated their limbs and enlarged their hands, feet and faces. "I thought this might make a nice touch for the Monster, since he was supposed to be made from the corpses of executed felons" (Mank, p. 25), Pierce explained. In full makeup and costume, Karloff stood over seven feet tall and carried an extra 48 pounds, (Mank, p. 26), his hands and feet dangling pathetically from his too-short sleeves and pant legs. Pierce's creation of the monster may be considered metaphorically as a comment on the fictional creation of Frankenstein's monster, or indeed, as an allegory for society's creation of its monsters. For four to six grueling hours a day, Karloff reenacted this transformation from normal to monstrous; through Pierce's makeup artistry he was criminalized, killed, exhumed, stitched together, then jolted back to a kind of life. Ironically, Karloff was treated by others in a way which parallels the treatment accorded the monster he portrayed. Lest he frighten the young secretaries who worked at Universal, he was forced to wear a blue veil over his face when walking from the makeup bungalow to the

soundstage, led by the hand like a helpless child by his creator, Jack Pierce (Mank, p. 29). Karloff was paid $500 for his part in Frankenstein (Mank, p. 34), and was not even invited to the film's West Coast premiere along with its other stars (Mank, p. 36). He was, after all, a monster.

Again, this huge, frightening, monstrous body represents not only our society's victims, but is a symbol of society itself. In Bride of Frankenstein, Manguel (1997) comments on the "curious reciprocity, noted by anthropologists and historians, between the images of our personal body and those of our body politic" (p. 9). Summarizing an argument put forward by Helman, Manguel describes this reciprocity in terms of the Frankenstein monster:

> For Helman, the society that produced Frankenstein (either Shelley's early nineteenth-century England or Whale's America and Europe of the 1930's) is "a purely male society, violent and inarticulate, that emerges against a background of feudalism and peasant life. It is a collage of ancient elements, gathered from different pasts, and sutured together within the same body politic. It is animated by science, and by electricity, but it has the brain of a criminal." (p. 9)

The criminalization of the other, it would follow, is a feature of a criminal society, regardless of its pretensions to civility or claims of advancement through science and technology. It is in this regard that the figure of Frankenstein's creation takes on its

most hideous and frightening aspect. The beginnings of this century were a time of great scientific and technological progress, but like the dream of Frankenstein, the results were monstrous, betraying the barbarism that hid under a veil of noble sentiment. Although we need look no further than the atom bomb for our century's version of Frankenstein's monster, the pseudo-science of eugenics has an even closer application to the Frankenstein story in the 1930's and may well account for much of its emotional resonance in both the Europe and America of that era.

The Mad Science of Eugenics

One of the earliest books published on the subject of eugenics was Nearing's The Super Race: An American Problem in 1912. The book opens with a rhapsody on progress which sounds like it could have been lifted directly from Mary Shelley's novel:

> As a very small boy, I distinctly remember that stories of the discovery of America and Australia, of the exploration of central Africa and of the invention of the locomotive, the steamboat, and the telegraph made a deep impression on my childish mind, and I shall never forget going one day to my mother and saying:--"Oh, dear, I wish I had been born before everything was discovered and invented. Now, there is nothing left for me to do." (p.13)

Nearing described how his childish disappointment changed to excitement when he realized that "the successive steps in human achievement, from the use of fire to the

harnessing of electricity, constituted a process of evolution creating 'a stage where every man must play his part'-- a part expanding and broadening with each succeeding generation". Finally, he realized, "the forward steps of the past need not, and would not prevent me from achieving in the present— nay, they might even make a place, if I could but find it, for my feet; they might hold up my hands, and place within my grasp the keen tools with which I should do my work" (p. 13).

Nearing's grandiose ambitions sound alarmingly similar to those of Dr. Frankenstein, who, in the film, asks Dr. Waldman, "Have you never wanted to do anything that was dangerous? Where should we be if nobody tried to find out what lies beyond? Have you never wanted to look beyond the clouds and the stars or to know what causes the trees to bud and what changes darkness into light?" Frankenstein's scientific curiosity leads to the creation of a human life, as did Nearing's, who hoped to "mold the human clay of the present that the future may boast a society of men and women possessing the qualities of the Super Race" (1912, p. 19). Although Nearing's methods were not as macabre as those of Dr. Frankenstein, the results were as inhuman and inhumane as anything produced in the horror film of 1931. Nearing advocated eugenics as a means of molding the human race "by the application of the laws of heredity to human mating" as a "logical fruition of the progress in biologic science made during the nineteenth century" (p. 26). Asking the rhetorical question, "What intelligent farmer sows blighted potatoes?" (p. 27), Nearing made the leap from potato to human: "The studies which have been made of eye color, length of arm, head shape, and other physical

traits show that the same laws of heredity which apply in the animal and vegetable kingdoms apply as well to the kingdom of man" (pp. 26-7). The eugenic belief in the correlation between a man's physical attributes and his intelligence or tendency toward criminality are given form in the "length of arm, head shape and other physical traits" of Frankenstein's creation, a grotesque mockery of the eugenic ideal.. Nearing listed six attributes of the "the Super Man", most of which are sadly lacking in Frankenstein's monster: "physical normality", "mental capacity", "concentration", "aggressiveness", "sympathy", and "vision" (p. 20). The belief that such traits are genetically determined frames the scientific context of the 1931 film. As (1992) Heller points out, one of the major differences between Shelley's novel and the James Whale film relates to the development of character. Omitting the "autobiographical education narratives" (p. 338) which explain the personalities of Walton, Frankenstein, and his creation in the original novel, the film takes a more materialist stance on the determinants of human personality: "...as the film's Waldman claims in his medical lecture, personality and action are inscribed in the very physical folds of the brain" (p. 338). As such, Waldman's sample brains are "classified into normal and abnormal, socially upright and criminal, inherently virtuous and innately evil" (p. 338). It is an unhappy accident that the monster receives an criminal brain, as Fritz, Dr. Frankenstein's hunchbacked assistant, drops the "normal" brain and is forced to steal the "abnormal" brain from Waldman's laboratory. The main goal of eugenics was to avoid such unhappy accidents.

As Nearing (1912) explained, there are two fields of eugenics, negative and

positive:

> Through the establishment of Negative Eugenics the unfit will be restrained from mating and perpetuating their unfitness in the future. Through Positive Eugenics the fit may be induced to mate, and by combining their fitness in their offspring, to raise up each new generation out of the flower of the old. (p. 31)

In the eugenicists' dream of selective human breeding, the category of the "unfit" was a broad one indeed, encompassing a variety of human ills believed to be transmitted through heredity, among them not only physical disease, deformity and incapacitation, but also, and most importantly, "feeble mindedness, idiocy, insanity and certain forms of criminality" (Nearing, p.31). It is no wonder, then, that Karloff's monster is decidedly "feeble-minded" and inarticulate, reduced to grunts and moans, unlike Shelley's original creation who was endowed with reason, sympathy, and the capacity for speech. With his "unbalanced walk and his speechlessness," he seems, as Nestrick (1979) remarked, "subhuman rather than superhuman"(p. 295). However, although Karloff's monster has the brain of a feeble-minded criminal, his actions are not necessarily genetically predetermined. As Jensen (1996) argues, the changes Whale made to Florey's original screenplay allow us to sympathize with the "unfit" in the figure of Frankenstein's monster and to see the humanity beneath. In the scene that introduces us to the monster, for example, our initial shock and fear is almost immediately tempered by the image of

the creature's wonder and awe when he first discovers the warmth of the sun through an open skylight in the otherwise darkened laboratory. One can literally read the sign language of this scene in a semiotic analysis of the creature's hand gestures which parallel the gestures of a young child and thus establish his essential innocence. When he sees the sun for the first time, for example, he raises his arms as though asking to be lifted up by his mother. When commanded to sit down, the creature obeys, but holds out his hands to his creator as if to ask, "Why?" Jensen notes that "Florey had dropped the Monster's encounter with sunlight, which appeared in Balderston's play, but Whale restored the scene and, in the process, gave the character dignity. The result is one of the film's finest moments" (p. 15). Whatever the creature is at his inception, he is not a monster. He is an argument for environment in the nature/nurture debate.

Jensen (1996) points out further, that "script alterations give the Monster motives for killing other than innate destructiveness. Fritz, himself a deformed outcast, vents his pent-up hatred on the confused Monster, taunting him into a frenzy with whip and torch" (p. 15). The sight of the hapless creature chained and cowering in the corner, baited with a torch, tells us much about our need for scapegoats and whipping boys . As Manguel (1997) eloquently puts it, "since society must define itself by that which it excludes, every social definition carries implicitly— or explicitly— the definition of its reverse. Normality requires abnormality, common bonds circumscribe the notion of the alien, appropriate behavior reflects the inverted mirror of unacceptability" (p. 8). In order for Fritz to feel normal, he projects the fear and hatred of his own deformity onto the

monstrous deformity of Frankenstein's creation. It is what we all do, according to Wood's (1979) theory of the other, and it is what the eugenicists sought to do in the name of progress and social engineering

"It's a Monster!" Dr. Waldman exclaims in horror after discovering that Frankenstein's creature has killed the sadistic Fritz, and thus the two scientists decide that for society's good, the creature must be killed. The eugenicists were not initially as blatant in their goals; they merely wanted to sterilize the "unfit". As Nearing (1912) argued:

> The Greeks eliminated unfitness by the destruction of defective children; though we may deplore such a practice in the light of our modern ethical codes, we recognize the end as one essential to race progress. By denying the right of parenthood to any who have transmissible disease or defect, our modern knowledge enables us to accomplish the same end without recourse to the destruction of human life. (p. 31-2)

Although Nearing claimed to deplore the idea of murder, even of "defective children", he rationalized the eugenicists' aim of full-scale sterilization of the "unfit" by stating that "the perpetuation of hereditary defect is infinitely worse than murder" (p. 39), for a murderer kills only one person, but "the feeble-minded parent passes on to the future the seeds of racial decay" (p. 40). Waldman's attempted murder of Frankenstein's creation is

similarly rationalized— it is, after all, a monster— and the deed is dressed in the guise of a surgical procedure. The creature is strapped to an operating table, the instruments laid out with scientific precision... a chilling portend of the crimes against humanity that would soon be committed in the name of eugenics.

But the monster has other plans; he breaks free and kills the doctor in self defense. Then our "defective child" flees the scene and finds himself outside in the sunshine, where he meets a little girl by the shores of a lake. This pastoral moment among the flowers and sunshine shows the creature's need for communion with nature and with his fellow human creatures, which the innocent Maria happily provides. But even before the scene turns tragic, we see the incongruity of the monster's unnatural existence in these natural surroundings. The sun shines a little too harshly, and this creature is meant for darkness. Although he smiles at his young playmate, the effort appears painful. His killing of Maria is not as easily justified as his first two murders, but could be construed as proof of the utter impossibility of his existence, another unhappy accident which demonstrates yet again how the best laid schemes initiated with the most advanced scientific forethought, can still go horribly wrong. The two play a childlike game, tossing the heads of flowers into the lake and watching them float. When our creature runs out of flowers, he throws the flower of a girl, only she doesn't float, which leaves the monster to stumble away in anguished confusion. Karloff is said to have hated this scene, the only part of the script on which he and Whale had a serious difference of opinion (Mank, 1981, p. 32). Whale understood, however, that there could be no happy

experiences for the hapless outcast. "It's all part of the *ritual*," (Mank, p. 32), he explained. Whale saw that the drowning of Maria was a very necessary plot device, for how better to bring the crimes of Frankenstein's creation to light than to have Maria's outraged father disrupt the dancing villagers in the midst of their pre-nuptial celebration on the marriage of Dr. Frankenstein, by bringing into their midst the lifeless body of his drowned daughter? Here was indisputable proof that the creature was indeed a monster, a horrible mistake of science.

Under the Guise of Science

So, too, was eugenics a horrible mistake of science that used people's naive faith in progress and technology to mask more sinister motives. This is seen, for instance, in the following claim by Nearing (1912):

> Investigations of thousands of feeble-minded families show that, in such a case, every one of the offspring may be and probably will be feeble-minded— a curse to himself and a burden to society. Pauperism, crime, social dependence, vice, all follow in the train of mental defect, and the mentally defective parents hand on for untold generations their taint... (p. 39)

Nowhere in his book is it explained how such investigations were conducted, how the criteria for "feeble-mindedness" was determined, or how "pauperism" became associated with genetically transmitted disease. The true motives behind eugenics, however, can be

determined in the following passage:

> The price of six battleships ($50,000,000) would probably provide homes for all of the seriously defective men, women and children now at large in the United States. Thus could the scum of society be removed, and a source of social contamination be effectively regulated. Yet with tens of thousands of defectives, freely propagating their kind, we continue to build battleships, fondly believing that rifled cannon and steel armor plate will prove sufficient for national defense. (Nearing, p. 40)

At bottom, Nearing was not talking "science"; he was talking about dispensing with "the scum of society", employing the language of science to justify class warfare and racial persecution. One would like to believe that Nearing's book was an isolated aberration, the ravings of a mad scientist whose "Frankensteinian" ambitions were not given much social credence. However, this was not the case. Throughout the teens, twenties and thirties, eugenics had a surprisingly popular appeal in the U.S. and in Great Britain. Major Leonard Darwin, son of the famous Charles Darwin, was at one time president of the British Eugenics Society. In What is Eugenics? he promoted the shaky science as a logical extension of his father's research in evolution. In order to enhance our natural evolution as a species, indeed, in order to prevent what he saw as a dangerous "devolution", Darwin Jr. (1928) advocated denying the right of parenthood to "the

criminal, the insane, the imbecile, the feeble in mind, the diseased at birth, the deformed, the deaf, the blind, etc., etc." (p. 25). He also cited epilepsy and consumption as genetically transmitted diseases and suggested consulting one's doctor before having children when an individual, "though apparently sound in mind and body, has many defective relatives" (p. 32). Although Darwin insisted that "Eugenics rests on pure science for its foundations of fact" (p. 88), his arguments, like Nearing's, reveal a classism and racism that are hard to disguise. Claiming that "reliable estimates show that out of every 1000 persons in this country there are between four and five who may be described as feeble in mind, imbeciles, or idiots" (p. 44), he suggested reducing their numbers for the economic good of society, and, ostensibly, for their own good as well:

> There is no way of getting rid of the burden cast on their neighbours by the unfit and the inferior, except by getting rid of them altogether. This, of course, cannot be done with those now with us. But...vast numbers of these classes lead suffering lives, and if they were to be replaced in the coming generations by healthy and capable citizens, the amount of sorrow and pain which would thus be wiped off the slate would be enormous. (p. 60)

The flyleaf of Darwin's book contains an endorsement by the Eugenics Society and an appeal for subscribers to the Eugenics Review. However, the publishers of What is Eugenics? also include a disclaimer: "It should be clearly understood that each writer in

this series of little books is alone responsible for the opinions expressed." Although the eugenics movement was far more popular and widespread than one might care to believe, it did have its detractors.

H. S. Jennings (1925), one of the founders of the American eugenics movement, split from this movement with his publication of Prometheus or Biology and the Advancement of Man, in which he refuted eugenics for the bad science it was. Although he acceded that "the encouragement of reproduction among the feeble-minded, the criminal, the insane" was a practice that should "obviously be stopped" (p. 78), he also argued that human engineering could not possibly reproduce the perfect duplicate of the ideal human being, as though people could be cultivated like fruit:

> This is what the eugenicist desires to do in man. But in man and other higher animals no combination is permanent. None ever last beyond the life time of the single individual. No individual can be multiplied in such a way as to retain the same combination of genes. (p. 84)

Somewhat prophetically, Jennings stated that "if uniparental reproduction could be brought about in man, as it is in apples and oranges, this could be done" (p. 88), citing the haphazard occurrence of identical twins as an example of the "eugenic ideal", were it only subject to scientific controls: "What the eugenic plan requires is that the adult, after he has shown his value, should be multiplied without change of genetic combination. If

this could be done, man would have his fate in his own hands. He could multiply the desirable combination until the entire population consisted of that type" (pp. 88-9). Here, Jennings predicted the future of genetic research, which, some seventy-five years later, has finally come to pass.

But Jennings (1925) also saw the dangers such science could serve. What, exactly is the "desirable combination" of genes that should be allowed to populate the earth? "There is little doubt that... the ruling class, whatever its character, would be the one allowed to prevail. As they now attempt to suppress the opinions that do not agree with their own, so with this efficient weapon in hand they would radically wipe out types holding other ideals" (p. 89). Jennings felt confident, however, that under the current scientific dispensation, such a nightmare could never happen: "The variety, the surprises, the perplexities, the melodrama, that now present themselves among the fruits of the human vine will continue. Capitalists will continue to produce artists, poets, socialists, and labourers; labouring men will give birth to capitalists, to philosophers, to men of science, fools will produce wise men and wise men will produce fools..." (p. 93).

G. K. Chesterton (1922) was not quite so sanguine in his dismissal of eugenics. His publication of Eugenics and Other Evils was a witty and relentless attack on the dubious motives behind the passing of the "Feeble-minded Bill", Great Britain's first Eugenic Law, which would apply the same treatment accorded the insane to anyone considered feeble-minded; that is to say, they would be institutionalized and sterilized. Chesterton called it "The Feeble-Minded Bill" "both for brevity and because the

description is strictly accurate" (p. 19-20). As for what constitutes feeble-mindedness, "Since there is scarcely any human being to whom this term has not been conversationally applied by his own friends and relatives on some occasion or other... it can be clearly seen that this law, like the early Christian Church... is a net drawing in of all kinds" (p. 20). After exposing the rather slippery scientific foundations for the application of eugenics to social reform, Chesterton addressed the sad state of economic affairs that led to the adoption of eugenics in the first place. Chesterton blamed cutthroat capitalism for the plight of the poor in England. Relying on a large and desperate pool of cheap labour only works for so long, but once this pool multiplies and becomes even more desperate, the rich are faced with too much of a good thing: "The time came at last when the rather reckless breeding in the abyss below ceased to be a supply, and began to be something of a wastage; ceased to be something like keeping foxhounds, and began alarmingly to resemble the necessity of shooting foxes" (p. 131). But how to tidy up this gross surplus, this wastage of humanity? Such questions can only be asked when people are reduced to the status of animals. Darwin (1928) rationalized the adoption of "the methods of the stockyard" (p. 21) to the control of human breeding by stating, "if you inspect any good establishment you will find that the animals are well housed, that they are fed with suitable food in quantities neither too small nor too great, and that they are carefully guarded against infection. Should not we be glad if the same could be said about our slums?" (p. 21). Again, this argument can only apply once the poor have been sufficiently dehumanized. Chesterton was alarmed by the social madness that could find

logic in the likes of Darwin's twisted arguments when the truth was really much more straightforward. England's class structure had created a monster:

> Under the hedges of the country, on the seats of the parks, loafing under the bridges or leaning over the Embankment, began to appear a new race of men—men who are certainly not mad, whom we shall gain no scientific light by calling feeble-minded, but who are, in varying individual degrees, dazed or drink-sodden, or lazy or tricky or tired in body and spirit. (p. 131)

This new race of men were the unemployed, the oppressed, the other, whom Chesterton saw as returning to haunt their creators:

> Men who had no human bond with the instructed man, men who seemed to him monsters and creatures without mind, became an eyesore in the marketplace and a terror on the empty roads. The rich were afraid. (p. 132)

Destroying the Monster

Frankenstein's monster is the social outcast created by monstrous individualism, and like the new race of men Chesterton described, he, too, comes back to torment his maker. In the only scene where he exhibits true menace, the monster comes to the Frankenstein mansion and attacks his bride on their wedding day. The scene was so

frightening that Mae Clarke, who played Elizabeth, could barely keep her composure throughout the take. Finally, Karloff told her to watch his little finger which he would wiggle for her. "Then you'll know it's only Boris underneath all this makeup" (Mank, 1981, p. 32). What makes this scene so frightening is not only the open malevolence of the monster, but also the fact that he is now in the bedroom of the Frankenstein home. Like the return of the repressed theorized by Wood (1979), the creature has come back to torment his creator. The scene also has obvious sexual overtones— the monster spies Elizabeth through an open window, draped provocatively on the bed. She is dressed in her white wedding gown; he is dressed in black. He growls salaciously. The image of this repulsive creature attempting to violate such a beautiful woman was the ultimate racist nightmare in the America of the 1930's.

The stage has thus been set for the inevitable conclusion; the monster must be hunted down and destroyed: "In Frankenstein... the villagers— as in most traditional horror films— band together to rid society of a threat to its stability, an abnormal intrusion, and to reestablish a condition of balance and consistency" (Jensen, 1996, p. 54). With the mob of angry villagers in pursuit, torches in hand, the creature confronts his creator and carries him to an abandoned windmill. There, with the machinery grinding between them, Frankenstein and his creation come face to face, and in the "flickering shot alternating between both faces" (Tropp, 1976, p. 96) we see the mirror image of the monster; it is Frankenstein himself, and this creature is his abandoned child. In a desperate fight between the two, the monster hurls his creator from the top of the

windmill to the crowd below. Just in time, for they have set the windmill ablaze, trapping our monster and burning him alive. As Jensen notes, "the Monster has become a nightmarish menace, but Whale treats the villagers like a lynch mob,... [l]ost in their anger and hatred, caught up in a mass compulsion to destroy" (p. 54). In a full shot of the burning windmill, Tropp discerns "the image of a burning cross, which must have had strong associations in the thirties when the Klan was at its height" (p. 97), a visual reminder of "the mob mindlessness that does the Monster in" (p. 97). We are forced into heart-rending sympathy for the creature as Whale "again and again cuts not to the triumphant villagers but to their frightened, helpless, and agonized victim" (Jensen, p. 54). The flames of the windmill are the flames of persecution, the crosses of the Klansmen, and the ovens of Auschwitz. Their victims are the blacks, the Jews, the gypsies, the homosexuals, the crippled, the criminalized, the mentally infirm, the aged, the children, the other. Those are the tortured faces we see when we look into the face of Frankenstein's creature one last time.

Although this film predates the world's reckoning with the horrors of Nazi genocide by 15 years, these horrors were as inevitable as the windmill scene of Frankenstein, their seeds sown long before in the demented notions of racial purity called eugenics. It was really but a short goose-step from Nearing to Darwin to Adolf Hitler. In The Nazi Connection: Eugenics, American Racism, and German National Socialism, Kuhl (1994) traces the route. Struck by the fact that the support of the American Eugenics movement for Nazi Germany "had received little attention and tended to be

obscured" (p. xiv), Kuhl researched the connections and found startling evidence of support, indeed, mutual admiration between the eugenicists of these two countries, which was disavowed by the Americans upon discovery of the Nazi horrors of W. W. II. Kuhl's research shows that "the entire German sterilization discussion prior to the implementation of the Law on Preventing Hereditarily Ill Progeny, passed on July 14, 1933, was strongly influenced by American models" (p. 23), for the Americans had been sterilizing their "unfit" since 1907, when Indiana legislators enacted a law "allowing for sterilization of the mentally handicapped" (p. 17). California, Connecticut, Nevada, Iowa, New Jersey, New York, Kansas, Michigan, North Dakota, and Oregon soon followed suit (p. 17). The numbers reveal the frightening extent to which the mad science of eugenics was actually put into practice:

> In the thirteen years from 1907 to the beginning of 1920, 3,233 persons were sterilized, while in the four years from 1921 to 1924, 2,689 persons were sterilized— a much higher annual rate than in the 1910's. The average rate of 200-600 sterilizations per year before 1930 shot up in the 1930's to 2,000-4,000 sterilizations per year. (p. 24)

Kuhl reports that "by 1930 the United States and Germany had surpassed Great Britain as the leading forces of the international eugenics movement" (p. 21). This may account for Darwin's rather envious admiration for the fine progress being made in California:

"Luckily, there is one place in the world, though only one place, to which we can look when seeking for practical information in regard to sterilization, and that is the State of California in the United States" (1928, p. 42). Darwin related that "over 5,000 operations for sterilization were performed in California in the eighteen years ending in 1926" and that "about one insane person in twelve of those admitted to the California State Asylum was sterilized" (p. 42). Not only were the "insane" sterilized, but also the numerous "feeble-minded", none of whom, according to Darwin, were allowed to leave the asylum in the years prior to 1928 without first being sterilized. In fact, "a considerable number of girls have been sent by their parents to this institution in order to be sterilized, and have then been allowed to return home" (p. 42).

Disowning the Child

It seems a sad irony that sunny California, home of the Hollywood dream factory, should also be the birthplace of such horrors. Again, as Wood (1979) noted, the foreignness of the horror movie in the thirties was a means of disavowal, of locating the evil elsewhere and denying its parentage. But it was there all along, an anomaly like the little Bavarian village nestled in the back lots of Universal Studio. Not only did the Nazis admire the sterilization laws and racially motivated marriage restrictions enacted by the United States, but "the American Immigration Restriction Act of 1924 was applauded by German racial hygienists," who, according to Kuhl, "praised the measure for its joint approach of prohibiting both degenerate individuals and entire ethnic groups from entering the United States" (1994, p. 25). In this regard, Kuhl notes the admiration of

one "important German figure, in a famous book from 1924, who "was full of praise for the fact that the Immigration Restriction Act excluded 'undesirables' on the basis of hereditary illness and race. His name was Adolf Hitler; the book was Mein Kampf" (p. 26).

The documentary, Hollywoodism: Jews, Movies, and the American Dream, characterizes the Jewish movie moguls as frightened refugees who never quite managed to put their fears behind them, try as they may to deny their Jewish roots and wrap themselves in the American flag. Many changed their names and hid their Jewishness from their children and grandchildren. As the film states, "Jews who tried to pass as Gentiles made movies about blacks who tried to pass as white," (Jacobovici, 1997), retelling their own history in sympathetic portrayals of the black experience in America, as though to disguise themselves in black face. "They believed that if you were prepared to pay the price and shed your identity, then America should be prepared to accept you," but the Hollywood Jews never quite felt accepted. Still, while they denied their parentage, "It was difficult for the Hollywood moguls to ignore the suffering of their European brethren" as Hitler's intentions became more and more clear. The documentary notes that Laemmle actively sponsored Jewish immigrants to America during this time. But the films themselves were silent on the evils of Nazi Germany. Jews in Hollywood were afraid of warning Americans of the Nazi menace, lest their concerns be misunderstood as merely parochial or motivated by self-interest. The documentary contends that the Jews didn't want to stand out, and certainly didn't want to be blamed

for dragging the U. S. into another war. After Pearl Harbor, however, the Hollywood film industry cranked out patriotic films that inspired America to fight for democracy, freeing the Jewish studio heads to subsume their fears for the Jews of Europe into the broader concerns of a country at war. After it was all over, the American government sponsored a trip to Europe for six movie studio executives so that they could visit the concentration camps where six million of their relatives had died. Strangely, the documentary observes, not a single film was created from that visit, and no public gestures or reflections are recorded. Such is the complex psychology of the other, that which we oppress in others and repress or deny in ourselves.

A similar disavowal can be noted in the changes made to the original cut of Frankenstein before its release to the general public. When it was initially screened for the trade press, it was greeted with "numb shock" (Mank, 1981, p. 34), and Laemmle "refused to release the picture until cuts were made to soften the blasphemy and horror" (Mank p. 35). One of the most famous cuts occurs during the creation scene, when Dr. Frankenstein, in a mad frenzy declares, "It's alive! It's alive! In the name of God, now I know what it feels like to be God!" This last statement was bleeped by a peal of thunder, the notion of mere mortals usurping God's prerogative being considered too blasphemous to stand. Simply bleeping out the reference to playing God, however, did not alter the face of Frankenstein's creation, described by Manguel (1997) as "a face dreamed up by someone who knows what a face should be but cannot quite manage to recreate it, a mistaken face..." (p. 19). The entire film is about the monstrous consequences that occur

when man presumes to play God, and one can't imagine that deleting one line from the script could make much of a difference to its overall theme. Yet, so concerned was Laemmle that the intentions of the film would be misunderstood as blasphemous, that he also insisted on a prologue wherein Edward Van Sloan, who played Dr. Waldman, warns the audience: "We are about to unfold the story of Frankenstein, a man of science who sought to create life after his own image, without reckoning on God." Another contentious scene concerned the drowning of Maria. This was cut, but the cut seemed to cause more harm than good, leaving to the audience's imaginations far worse horrors than those actually perpetuated against her. (The scene was restored in later video releases of the film.) The ultimate effect of these changes was to soften the audience's judgement of the doctor and to mitigate against their natural sympathy for his creation. A final scene was added to the film which emphasized this effect. Whereas originally, we are to assume that Frankenstein dies after being thrown from the windmill, a standard Hollywood ending finds him married and recuperating at the baronial Frankenstein home. Although we don't see him, as Colin Clive, the actor who played Frankenstein, had already left the country, his father, Baron von Frankenstein, drinks a toast with his maids to the future heirs of the Frankenstein estate, indicating that his son's next creation will be conceived in the more traditional manner. The recuperative happy ending serves to claw us back from the abyss of the burning windmill, to reestablish the status quo, and to somehow patch over the wounds this film exposes. The marriage is a restoration of the upper class and a reassertion of their inherent claim to superiority, and Baron von

Frankenstein's friendly drink with the hired help reinstates the conventional relationship between master and servant that had been disrupted by the creature's monstrous embodiment of the unruly lower classes. According to Wood (1979), "the Other [is] that which bourgeois ideology cannot recognize or accept but must deal with... in one of two ways: either by rejecting and if possible annihilating it, or by rendering it safe and assimilating it, converting it as far as possible into a replica of itself" (p. 9). The slap-dash happy ending manages to put some distance between ourselves and the monster; not only has he been annihilated, but he has been symbolically converted into the pretty and compliant maids who tolerate the curmudgeonly Baron von Frankenstein and drink a toast to his family's continued lineage.

Even with its changes and deletions, Frankenstein stirred up controversy. As related by Mank (1981), "The Kansas State Board of Censors banned the film until some four minutes of cuts were made; in Providence, Rhode Island, some newspapers refused to run the advertisements" (p. 37). Manguel (1997) reports that "the Quebec censor board— one of the strongest in North America— had objected to its Faustian theme" (p. 18). Parent and civic groups declared the film "unfit for children" (Mank, p. 37), yet, as Karloff was reputedly fond of saying, it was the children who "saw beyond the makeup and really understood" (Mank p. 39). The face of Frankenstein's monster stamped the decade and our century with its terrible, indelible, lovable features. The film was a critical and financial success, costing only $250,000 to make, yet grossing over $12,000,000 (Glut, 1973, p. 12) and transforming Karloff into a star. And in a cinematic

slap in the face to the eugenicists' aim of stamping out the unfit by preventing them from propagating their kind, Frankenstein claims a lineage which extends to the present day. Among its "children": The Bride of Frankenstein, The Son of Frankenstein, Ghost of Frankenstein, Frankenstein Meets the Wolf Man, The House of Frankenstein, and Abbott and Costello Meet Frankenstein. This only brings us to 1945 and the Frankenstein sequels produced by Universal. Britain's Hammer Films carried on the tradition in the 1950's and 60's with The Curse of Frankenstein, The Revenge of Frankenstein, The Evil of Frankenstein, and ending with The Horror of Frankenstein in 1970 (Glut, pp. 189-202). Frankenstein films have been produced in other countries and languages, and his monster has been taken up by our culture in almost every conceivable way, in comic books, at baseball games, in campy spin-offs, in comedic spoofs, in songs, advertisements, Halloween costumes, and wind-up toys. Perhaps one of the monster's most endearingly feeble-minded progeny would be Fred Gwynne's Herman Munster in the 1960's sit com, The Munsters. Here our outcast other is finally and thoroughly assimilated into the American mainstream, complete with a wife, family, house, car, job and mortgage. At long last rehabilitated and permitted his share of the American dream, the monster is one of us.

Chapter 4: Branagh's Frankenstein:

Romanticism, Individualism, and the Politics of the Body

Film Maker as Mad Scientist

It seems inevitable that Mary Shelley's novel would be so widely adaptable to the screen, for it is cinematic in every respect. The first screen adaptation of Frankenstein was a ten minute reel produced in 1910 by Thomas Edison, whose harnessing of electricity made possible, among other things, the invention of film. Since then, film makers have returned to the story again and again. Critics have commented on the affinities between the creation of Frankenstein's monster and the cinematographer's art (Nestrick, 1979; Heffernan, 1997; Manguel, 1997). In a sense, both attempt to do the same thing, to thwart nature and create artificial life. Like Victor Frankenstein, the film maker attempts to animate dead matter, the bits and pieces of film stock. These are sutured or stitched together, and, through the galvanization of electricity, are brought to life and made to move. According to Nestrick (1979), the term "animation" best captures the essence of this analogy, for in cinematic terms, movement is life (pp. 294-295). The earliest movie-going audiences were rapt in amazement and fear at this miraculous recreation of life. And like the creature who defies death, the life captured on film has an immortality that has outlived its creators. Since the beginning of our century, incredible progress has been made on both sides of this analogy, i.e. in the techniques of film making and the broader communications technologies of which they are a part, and in

biotechnology, a term encompassing the entire field of medical/technological development which has characterized our age. In his introduction to Understanding Media, McLuhan (1966) described technology as an extension of man, which in the last century has shown itself capable of "abolishing both space and time" (p. 19). As Woodward (1994) observes, our "two narratives of technological change" (p. 49), one based on communications, the other on biotechnology, have managed to extend our reach through space and time in a manner that "ultimately displaces the material body" (p. 50). One could say that the progress we have made in both communications and biotechnology in the last century has allowed us finally to realize the fiction first envisioned by Mary Shelley.

A comparison of the 1931 and 1994 film recreations of the Frankenstein monster shows how far we have come. Boris Karloff's 1931 monster is a clunky, ungainly creature, brought to life through electric charges in the nodes on his neck. More robot or automaton than human, he appears at times unbalanced and in danger of tipping over. By contrast, the 1994 De Niro creature, though no less hideous, has a far more human appearance and origin. Though still jolted to life by electricity, his creation is a closer simulation of the actual birthing process. Instead of seeming robotic, he might be seen as something of a cyborg, a far more sophisticated and integrated form of artificial life. I believe the figures of the monsters themselves tell us much about the societies which produced them, not only in terms of the medical technology available at the time, but more symbolically as visions of the "body politic", embodiments of the values of the

societies which bore them.

Likewise, the films themselves mirror the times which produced them. To a modern audience, James Whale's 1931 film appears stagy, fake, and hopelessly funny. Filmed in black and white, this movie was among the first generation of "talkies," and one can see that parts of it could have easily been produced as a silent film. Karloff's monster is himself silent, or at best, reduced to a vocabulary of grunts and moans, as if the technology had not been perfected which could allow him to approximate human speech. Often the camera remains stationary, the spectacle of the monster being the focus of the audience's attention. And though Whale's camera work and editing were hailed as rather sophisticated for the time, to a modern audience, the film, too, seems to jerk along with obvious cuts and abrupt transitions, much like the awkward movements of the creature it portrays. In contrast, the 1994 version avails itself of the full resources of the cinema in the last decade of our century, including a lush, at times almost ear-splittingly hysterical score, swirling camera action, dizzying angles, visually arresting sets and costumes, and the requisite blood and gore which a contemporary audience expects from its horror movies. Because of its heightened realism, its verisimilitude and life-likeness, it seems truer to life than the 1931 version, truer to the novel, and, paradoxically, truer *than* the novel.

A cultural studies approach to these two films asks us to look beyond our initial responses, surface comparisons between the films, or even between the films and the original novel, and to interpret the films within the context of the times which produced

them. Because it is so obviously a product of another era, the 1931 film version provides opportunities to practice new historicism, a critical approach which demands "a high degree of historical consciousness" (J. M. Smith, 1992, p. 351) in order to unveil the ways in which the film "mirrors and influences the ideology of its time and place" (J. M. Smith, p. 351). As a key element of cultural studies, new historicism is interdisciplinary in nature, requiring that certain boundaries be crossed between what we traditionally conceive of as English and the disciplines of history, science, politics, or economics. The more we are attuned to cultural and historical influences, the better we can recognize a film or other signifying practice as a voice in the social discourses of its time. Because the 1931 film is set in a time so foreign from our own and so very charged with historical import, it might be easier to recognize and appreciate its social, political, and scientific context. It is perhaps more difficult to historicize a film produced in our contemporary era, when a certain amount of distancing is required in order to reflect critically on the values and ideology in which we ourselves are immersed and have a personal stake. But because rapid developments in biotechnology are ever-present in the news, drastically altering our assumptions on key matters of life and death, an exploration of these developments through the lens of Branagh's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein can enhance our critical awareness of issues which have a direct impact on our own lives.

Although films are the product of their times and the ideologies which speak through them, they are also the visions of particular film makers who, though challenged to produce a commercially successful product, also view their films as individual

statements. So, where films may at times unquestioningly or even cynically convey certain ideological positions, some film makers use the medium to interrogate or resist these positions. Auteur theory seeks to analyze a director's entire corpus of films to reach an understanding of common themes, assumed to be often unconsciously latent within the films, which nonetheless stamp each film with that director's personal vision (Giannetti, 1996, pp. 445-450). A cultural studies approach recognizes that there are multiple influences at work and sometimes competing authorities within which the director must operate. A film can seldom claim to be the sole statement of one director's personal vision, but neither is it simply the product of unconsciously transmitted ideological assumptions or commercial imperatives. A cultural studies perspective allows us to consider the director as a key influence within the broader matrix of social and economic influences which determine the final cut of the movie.

Because cultural studies shifts the criteria of value from aesthetic considerations to social or ideological concerns, a starting point for a cultural study of film would be to ask to what extent the film confirms existing social conditions and validates systems of inequality as "normal" or "natural", or the extent to which it challenges those prevailing assumptions. Within a cultural studies praxis, films can open spaces for critical reflection, whether they comply with or indeed resist these prevailing ideological assumptions. Branagh's Frankenstein opens spaces for discussions of social class, patriarchy, notions of progress and science, and discourses about the body. Although Frankenstein is ultimately a cautionary tale and a critique of science, Branagh's version

also tends to glamorize the context in which this critique takes place. The challenge when viewing this film is to see behind the gothic romanticism of the story to the ways in which the film both resists and confirms our grand narratives of individualism and scientific progress.

Recreating the Creator

After having read the novel and seen the 1931 film, one of the first things one notices about the Branagh version is its faithfulness to Shelley's original text. Not only does it restore the narrative flashback structure, but it also reestablishes the novel's sympathetic portrayal of Frankenstein's creature. As well, one can note a dramatic difference in the conception of Victor Frankenstein, as though the film goes the novel one better by glossing over the more passive or cowardly aspects of his personality and rendering him far more courageous, noble and heroic than he appears in Shelley's original novel. For example, whereas Victor's mother dies from scarlet fever in the novel, in the film she dies in childbirth, a change which provides a somewhat more pointed motivation for Victor's desire to prolong and recreate life. His motives become more pure, more noble, and somehow more "romantic" because of this change. "It doesn't have to be this way," he vows at his mother's grave before leaving to pursue his medical studies in Ingolstadt. Another notable change reflects the demands of the medium while also amplifying Victor's heroic nature. In the novel, we are not given any specifics as to the actual secrets of Victor's creation of artificial life, a mystery Frankenstein keeps hidden from his listener, Robert Walton, on the pretext that such

knowledge is too dangerous to reveal. A contemporary audience would feel quite cheated were the same ruse attempted in a film. In this sense the film is more "real" than the novel because of the somewhat graphic detail with which the creation is rendered. Film is, after all, a visual medium which would dictate that events such as this be shown, not simply related. The creation scene also provides one of the most dramatic and heroic moments for Branagh's Victor, where we see the compelling evidence of his intelligence, ambition, and courage. In places in the novel, Shelley portrays Victor's cowardice and lack of conviction. For example, he simply abandons his creature in fear and disgust, hoping it will wander away by the time he returns to his rooms. Branagh solves this problem in the film by creating an accident whereby Victor actually believes his creature is dead. When he realizes it is still alive, he pursues it aggressively, but it manages to escape. Similarly, when the creature frames Justine for the murder of Victor's brother, William, Victor does little to prevent her death. He lacks the authority to convince the judge to set her free or the courage to admit that he knows who has really killed his brother. This appearance of wimpy inaction is corrected in the film. A lynch mob abducts Justine before Victor even finds out that she has been falsely arrested, and by then it is too late to save her despite his valiant efforts. The ending of the novel is also somewhat frustrating. It simply takes too long for Victor to construct a mate for his creature, abandon the project, prepare for his wedding with Elizabeth, and then suffer the inevitable consequences of his failure to comply with his creature's request. In the film, these events are compressed into a matter of days. The ending heightens the drama and

romance of the story through Victor's refusal to reanimate the dead Justine for his creature's mate, the death of Elizabeth, and his subsequent decision to bring her back to life. It is more satisfying, more romantic, and oddly, more realistic that he should try to reanimate his own true love, since he has the technology to do so. The fact that both Frankenstein and his creature should compete for the love of the pathetically reborn Elizabeth also gratifies one's notions of high drama and romance in a way that the ending of the novel does not. The overall effect of these changes, then, is to satisfy a contemporary audience's expectations for action, suspense, and visual spectacle, and to create a more compelling, romantic, and sympathetic hero with which to identify.

In "Frankenstein Reimagined," Branagh (1994) describes his interpretation of Victor Frankenstein as an improvement on Mary Shelley's original. Branagh envisions him as "a very romantic figure" (p. 306), a "sane, cultured, civilized man" (p. 307), who, at "the dawn of the scientific age" (p. 306) wishes to be "a benefactor of mankind" (p. 307). Branagh compares him to contemporary men of science who strive for a cure for AIDS or cancer. His only weakness is his "unyielding resistance to the way the world seems to be ordered" (p. 307), namely "the irresistible fact" of death, which becomes his tragic downfall. "Rather than a neurotic aesthete," which seems to be Branagh's perception of the original Shelley character, his Victor is "someone a little more physical, earthy as well as intellectual" (p. 308). Branagh's comments on the character of Victor illustrate the intent of this film to bring the romanticism of the 19th Century into a late 20th Century context by emphasizing the similarities between our eras in terms of the

scientific quest to beat back death and the ravages of time. His notions of romanticism also play into our contemporary definition of this term. Whereas "romance" once implied adventure, dangerous exploits, and an engagement with the larger world, the term is now understood more narrowly to apply to matters of the heart. Consequently, the romantic subplot between Victor and Elizabeth which remains somewhat in the background of the novel, plays a more prominent part in the film. The overall result is the creation of a 20th Century "romantic" hero, larger than life in his triumphs and defeats, more sexy and sympathetic, and far less vulnerable to criticism than his counterpart in the novel.

Branagh's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein shows how a character can be visually coded for success and strong audience identification. First, we need to acknowledge his appearance as a construction. Reviewers of the film were quick to notice Branagh's "well-toned and certainly well-oiled torso" (Lipman, 1994, p.51), and as he explained in his interview for the New York Times, aptly titled, "How 'Frankenstein' has Created a Hunk," he submitted himself to a regimen of running and weight-lifting in preparation for his role as Victor (Witchel, 1994, p. 1). As Kaye (1996) comments regarding his "newly acquired pectorals", his personal trainer even receives a credit at the end of the film (p. 67). Branagh takes off his shirt to display the results in three scenes, the creation of the monster, his recovery from the sick-bed, and his wedding night love scene, all scenes intended to convey his "earthy" masculinity. Although some critics dismissed the overt display of Branagh's well "buffed", pumped-up, "bionic" body as an instance of extreme personal ego on his part, we may see it as signifying a larger shift in portrayals of the

human form, both male and female, which has occurred in Hollywood movies in the last ten years. As Willis (1993) has noted with reference to the lean and muscular bodies of its female stars, films like Aliens and Terminator 2 "stress the body's constructed character as costume, a costume that asks us to read it both as machine and masculinity" (p. 127). In a film which takes as its subject the technological creation of a human being, this notion of the body as machine has particular resonance. Branagh's creation of his own muscular body certainly mirrors the aspirations of an image conscious society. To this extent, his body can be read as a mirror for the audience, an idealized version of ourselves, which the film invites us to look at and identify with.

Sutured into Frankenstein

The question of how we come to identify with the characters in film has been the subject of recent critical attention in film studies. According to Dayan's "The Tutor Code of Classical Cinema," (1992) the language of film, particularly as it relates to point of view, serves to position the spectator directly within the film so as to forge an intimate identity with its hero. We certainly see this at work in Frankenstein, for wherever Victor appears in a scene, (and he is in almost every scene except for those which focus on the experiences of his creature), we either see Victor, or we see what he sees. The audience thus literally shares his point of view; we are "sutured" into the imaginary of the film with Victor as our stand-in, an idealized, romanticized version of ourselves. Beyond the pleasures of experiencing the story vicariously, as though we are actual participants, Dayan sees the purpose of this code as linking our identities so thoroughly with that of

the hero that we imbibe the ideological messages of the film without consciously questioning them: "As a result of this, the code effectively disappears and the ideological effect of the film is thereby secured" (p. 188).

One message this film seems to ask us to accept is the ideology of individualism and the social constructs which support it. Although both the novel and the film ultimately question the outcomes of individualism or egotistical self-promotion in the guise of benefitting humanity, the film, more so than the novel, tends to glamorize such individual ambition. Branagh's romantic reconfiguration of Victor Frankenstein ironically overshadows the critique of romanticism evident in the original novel. For who can really blame Victor for what he does when his motives seem so pure, his ambition so undiluted, and his heroic facade so impervious to attack? It is easy to overlook the social structure which makes possible his grand if doomed ambitions. For example, at no point in the film are we invited to question Victor's very natural assumption of ownership over his world. Raised in an upper class family, he sees his privilege as his natural due, along with a certain *noblesse oblige* which justifies his wealth and social position. We see this in his opulent family home, his proud, doting parents, and even in the presentation of his adopted sister, Elizabeth, who is introduced into the family as though she were a gift especially for him. Victor has all the advantages that allow him to pursue his scientific ambitions. He is indulged, encouraged, and expected to do great things as a medical doctor. And throughout the film he is supported by an entire underclass who defer to him, report to him, deliver his equipment, make arrangements, guard his rooms on his

wedding night, form search parties, in short, provide all the services which make his audacious project possible. They are the nameless figures in the background of a film punctuated with the phrase, "I am Victor Frankenstein of Geneva." Sometimes the phrase is mocked, when, as a new student, he introduces himself to Professor Krempe, sometimes it is uttered with regret and self-derision, as it is at the beginning of the film, or the end of his experiences, when he introduces himself to Walton, but because we in the audience feel such a strong emotional bond, because we can identify so closely with him, it is easy to miss the criticism of ego implied whenever Victor announces his name.

In a similar fashion, the larger role given the romantic subplot and consequently the part of Elizabeth, tends to obscure the determinedly patriarchal value system this film endorses, for while the film does make some major feminist concessions, it still plays within the boundaries of an essentially male oriented story with Victor as the focus of interest and attention. Again, changes to the original novel show how the film both resists and affirms these boundaries. In this regard, the death of Victor's mother in childbirth has been noted by Branagh (1994, p. 310) as being an allusion to Shelley, whose own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, died ten days after giving birth to her, a tragedy which haunted Shelley's life and no doubt influenced her creation of the novel. As a tribute to Shelley, or perhaps even to all women, the scene in which Victor's mother dies giving birth to William acknowledges and underscores the very real perils of motherhood which Victor's research attempts to ameliorate. In the same vein, the creation of a somewhat more rounded and realistic Elizabeth seems more like Shelley

herself and less like the Elizabeth of her novel. Whereas Mae Clarke's part in the 1931 Frankenstein was little more than window dressing, Helena Bonham-Carter's Elizabeth can be seen as redressing Hollywood's tradition of under-representing women in film. Bonham-Carter's Elizabeth is given more lines, more voice, and more agency in this film than in previous film versions, or in the novel itself, where she functions more as a plot device than as a fully realized character. However, when we stop to examine what she actually says and does, her words and actions still tend to affirm traditional stereotypes about the woman's place that were evident in the 19th Century and may still have some social currency today.

Though intelligent and willful, Elizabeth still functions within the parameters of the love object and helpmate. We see her cajoling Victor away from his studies, tempting him with domestic diversions, dancing and flying kites. When Victor asks her to go with him to Ingolstadt as his wife, she refuses, not because she does not love him, but because she wishes to make a home out of the Frankenstein estate in the absence of Victor's mother. We see her laughing naughtily as she reads the more intimate details of Victor's letters to herself. And when the letters stop arriving, she actually goes to Ingolstadt to search him out. This is a major change from the novel, and can be seen as a somewhat independent, nineties thing to do. Yet it still falls within the parameters of love, romance, and womanly concern— a point doubly significant when we learn from Justine's advice, "Go to him, I would have gone already if he were mine," that both Justine and Elizabeth are in love with Victor. When Victor refuses to come back home, Elizabeth offers to help

him with his work, again, a change from the novel which signifies a certain independence within her role as helpmate. Throughout the film, she is given more to do, but still, it all has to do with Victor. She is still the love object, albeit an updated, nineties version. Even her reanimation in the climax of the film establishes her role as merely an object of male desire. With the head of Elizabeth and the body of Justine, she is fought over in an emotional and at times physical tug-of-war between Frankenstein and his creature. As Kaye (1996) notes, "The women are, despite the attempt to retain independence, merely ciphers, who can act as replacement parts for each other" (p. 65). Her only option is to re-kill herself, a less than satisfying or liberating act of resistence. Elizabeth's role in the film raises interesting questions. Does her portrayal simply affirm the status quo with regard to gender roles, or does the change in the ending imply a very deliberate self-critique of Frankenstein's over-riding male ego? Are we meant to see his reconstruction of Elizabeth as a hopelessly romantic attempt to defy death and to reunite with his true love, or are we to see, as Elizabeth does, that he has reduced her to an amalgam of body parts? In essence, is the film aware of its objectification of women and thereby exposing its own patriarchal attitudes?

The same question might be asked of this film's treatment of the grand narrative of scientific progress, for while the central theme of Frankenstein involves the dangers of tampering in the affairs of God, our society is already so deeply implicated in such tampering that the very phrase, "tampering in the affairs of God" strikes us as an embarrassing cliche. As Schirmacher (1994) observes, "The lesson of Frankenstein is

lost on a society using plastic surgery more and more frequently to reshape a body and in which scientists would love to keep a brain alive without a body" (p. 69). What can Frankenstein teach us in an era that seems, according to Schirmacher, to be "as hostile to the natural body as premodern Christianity" (p. 68)? Does the film actually question the limits of science, or does it share our society's seeming hostility to the natural body? Where we might argue that the original novel set its scientific debate within the context of what is natural vs what is unnatural, an opposition certainly evident in the 1931 film when questions over what was natural or normal had strong cultural relevance, the 1994 Frankenstein does not seem to frame the issues within these same oppositions. We may see it instead as an endorsement of the increasingly sophisticated, life-altering technologies which are daily reconfiguring the human body in the same way that Branagh's body has been reconfigured and re-romanticized for his role in this film.

Recreating the Creature

Branagh's Mary Shelley's Frankenstein offers two images of the human body which can be read as signifiers of our culture's obsession with the ideal of beauty and the myth of perfectibility through science. First is the idealized figure of Victor Frankenstein, second is the scarred and disfigured body of his creature, played by Robert De Niro. Initially they may appear to be polar opposites, natural vs unnatural, beautiful vs ugly, but perhaps they are flip sides of the same coin. Like a reversible coat or, better still, a reversible skin, the creature's body is the inverse, inside-out version of our idealized selves, stitches and seams painfully exposed. In apposition, these two images

"remind us of consumer culture's obsession with managing and transforming the body through exercise, with constructing bodies as sculpture, as fashion, as clothing" (Willis, 1993, pp. 127-128). For many young people today, the body has become our ultimate signifying practice, our identity literally worn on the skin. Willis's notion of the body as fashion is evidenced by the renewed popularity of tatoos which have moved beyond the counter-culture and into the mainstream, as well as the trend in body-piercing. Our society, parents and children alike, has bought the package— fitness clubs, cosmetic surgery, implants, steroid use, all point away from the "natural" and toward a growing social freedom to view the body as a construction to be made and made-over again.

De Niro's creature makes visible the scars on the natural body. Here we see the violation of the body as an inevitable corollary to the idealized, much coveted human form. Young women who starve themselves through anorexia or bulimia show the ravaged consequences of our culture's obsession with the body beautiful. In Reviving Ophelia, Pipher (1994) relates case studies of adolescent girls traumatized by our late 20th Century's fixation on the body. In addition to weight issues and drug and alcohol abuse, Pipher cites self-mutilation as "a frequent initial complaint of teenage girls" (p. 157). As a response to internal pain, young women have admitted to "picking at their skin, burning themselves, or cutting themselves with razors or knives" (p. 157), behaviors that Pipher did not see in the earlier years of her practice, behaviors that she regards as more than isolated aberrations: "In my experience, behaviors that arise independently and spontaneously in large numbers of people often suggest enormous cultural processes at

work" (p. 158). According to Pipher, "self-mutilation can be seen as a concrete interpretation of our culture's injunction to young women to carve themselves into culturally acceptable pieces" (p. 158). It would seem that as our society becomes more and more image conscious, troubling questions of identity and self-worth are related directly to our bodies and, therefore, increasingly inscribed on the skin as our mode of revealing ourselves, our signifying practice.

Branagh's Frankenstein invites us to consider the ways in which technology affects all of us in the most intimate and inextricable ways. Not only is his creature a product of science, but so, too, is Victor. The body of Kenneth Branagh is not, after all, entirely natural; it, perhaps as much as the body of his creature, is a construction, made not born. As if to establish this kinship between Frankenstein and his creature in the film, both have been touched by lightening, a symbol for the tranformative power of technology. Caught in a thunderstorm in the mountains early in the film, Victor, Elizabeth, Justine and William quickly construct a lightening rod which diverts a bolt of lightening through the ground, sparing their lives but leaving them oddly electrified. In a scene reminiscent of E. T., they touch fingers, and we see the actual sparks fly between them. The same power that reanimates the dead body of Frankenstein's creature has flown through their bodies as well. Lightening, which can create human life, can also destroy, a point foreshadowed in the film by the felling of a tree during a storm the night Victor's mother dies. Of course, Frankenstein's monster ultimately kills all four who were touched by the lightening. Beyond foreshadowing the deaths of William, Justine,

Elizabeth, and Victor, however, the lightening rod scene might suggest that we, as much as the creature of Frankenstein, have been fundamentally altered by the technologies we have created. The tension in the film, then, is not so much between the natural and the unnatural as between the use and misuse of the technology which is radically transforming our natural bodies.

Age of the Cyborg

The figure of the cyborg has been noted as "the central figure of the late Twentieth Century" (p. 2), according to Gray, Mentor and Figueroa-Sarriera (1995). First defined and theorized by Haraway (1991), a cyborg is "a cybernetic organism, a hybrid of machine and organism, a creature of social reality as well as a creature of fiction" (p. 149). This "melding of the organic and the machinic" (Gray et al, p. 2), would include any form of artificial life that fuses the natural with the technological in interdependent and inseparable ways. Frankenstein's creature has been identified as "the first cyborg" (Gray et al., p. 5), a potent symbol which has been repeatedly refashioned in science fiction literature and film. "This merging of the evolved and the developed, this integration of the constructor and the constructed, these systems of dying flesh and undead circuits, and of living and artificial cells" (Gray et al., p. 2) is not simply a symbolic or figurative sign of the times, however; the cyborg, quite literally, is us: "Anyone with an artificial organ, limb or supplement (like a pacemaker), anyone reprogrammed to resist disease (immunized) or drugged to think/behave/feel better (psychopharmacology) is technically a cyborg" (Gray et al., p. 2). If we accept this rather

generous definition, few of us would *not* be cyborgs, for we have all benefitted in some way from advances in biotechnology. Branagh's Frankenstein acknowledges the ways in which our 20th Century has fulfilled the scientific prophecy implied in Shelley's novel by making certain additions to the story. In a discussion with Henry and Dr. Waldman, Victor is given an impassioned speech about the possibilities of extending human life: "Listen, if we can replace one part of a person— a heart or a lung— then soon we will be able to replace every part. And if we can do that, we can design a life, a being that won't grow old, that won't sicken, a being that will be more intelligent than us, more civilized than us." Likewise, the doctors in Ingolstadt are tirelessly immunizing its citizens against small-pox, another addition to the novel which highlights the very real benefits we have received from biotechnology. These script additions encourage us to consider Victor's creation of a human life as something other than the demented dream of a mad scientist. It is simply the next inevitable step as technology crosses "the last frontier, the natural body" (Schirmacher, 1994, p. 69). As Woodward (1994) describes biotechnology, it entails "the saturation, replication, alteration, and creation of the organic processes of the body— if not the very body itself— by techno-science" (p. 53). What distinguishes the new techno-science from earlier conceptions of technology as an "extension of man" in McLuhan's words, is that it is now literally under the skin and inside the body, blurring forever the boundary between human and machine, creating cyborgs of us all.

The creation sequence in Branagh's film can be seen as a model for this new techno-science because of its blending of the organic and the mechanical. The scene

merits a close reading, for through a comparison with the creation scene in the 1931 film, we can see how our ideas about technology have changed in the 60 odd years which separate these films. Through an examination of the images in this scene, (there is almost no dialogue) one can note the ways in which film communicates through imagery to show, in this case, how biotechnology has learned to replicate our natural human processes as it transforms them. Like the 1931 version, the creature is animated by electricity, but the manner of its animation is a closer simulation of the natural process of childbirth. Whereas the Karloff creature is hoisted up through the roof of the laboratory to catch the bolts of lightening through conductors in his neck, the De Niro creature is submerged in a vat of amniotic fluid procured by the bucketful from women in labour. The electric charges are further mediated by electric eels, a perfect cyborg symbol like the fireflies which fascinated Victor as a little boy. These eels, apparently thousands of them, are suspended from the rafters in a giant, squirming sack, then injected into the sarcophagus-shaped vat through a long clear tube. It is impossible to miss the sexual imagery here. Although the 1931 film also indulged in phallic symbolism with an abundance of towering, blinking machinery, none of it so strikingly imitated nature as does the procedure envisioned in the Branagh film. So, too, with the actual birth. Whereas the Karloff creature simply twitches his wrist to signify life in his fully clothed, reanimated body, the naked De Niro creature explodes from the tank in a violent rush of fluid, coughing and spluttering like a newborn. He is man reborn as cyborg. He may be monstrous, but he is undeniably human.

"The ultimate technological fantasy is creation without the mother" (Huyssen quoted in Woodward, 1994, p. 63). Like earlier attempts to create artificial life through robotics, Karloff's 1931 creature appears robot-like, not quite human. It is only through a closer imitation of nature, or a combination of natural processes with technological ones, that the goal of creation without the mother can be accomplished, a point which Branagh's film certainly captures in its creation scene. A contrast might also be made with Huxley's (1932) Brave New World, which expressed the ultimate technological fantasy of cloning and test tube babies, but missed the human contribution that would eventually make this fantasy possible. In the novel, embryos are brought to full term in a graduated series of jars on a conveyor belt, marking a clear distinction between birth and production, human and machine. But the vision has only been realized through the combination of human and machine— an embryo may be created or altered through technological interventions, but the test tube baby is returned to the mother in order to grow to term. This interdependence between human and machine marks the distinction between robot and cyborg.

Crossing Boundaries: Cyborg Science

A similar interdependence between man and woman is shown in this film, whereby the woman's natural role in the reproductive process is appropriated by the male, technology-driven prerogative. For example, when Victor realizes that amniotic fluid is the essential missing link which had prevented his predecessor, Dr. Waldman, from creating artificial life, he pirates it by the bucketful from women in labour for the

purpose of his own experiments. Tellingly, he turns down Elizabeth's offer to help him when she comes to Ingolstadt. He wants to create life without female assistance. This same procedure holds true in the practice of current reproductive technologies, during which, as vital as her role in the process may be, a woman's natural functions are preempted by the male-dominated science. As a result, the interventions of science in human reproduction are often dehumanizing to women. The most glaring example of this would be the case of PMV, or post mortem maternal ventilation, used "to sustain pregnancies in brain-dead women so that their fetuses may grow to viability" (Casper, 1995, p.189). This procedure was developed out of the recognition that the woman's body is the ultimate life support system. At the same time, however, the mother has obviously been stripped of her humanity, agency, or control. This procedure comes as close as possible to the male fantasy of creation without the mother, or as Casper describes it in "Fetal Cyborgs and Technomoms," "the crossing of a hitherto uncrossable border" (p. 190).

In the Branagh film, our creature is encased in a coffin-shaped tank, which raises another issue of relevance to our cyborg society, the "hitherto uncrossable border" between life and death which is now crossed routinely in a somewhat more sanitized form than that illustrated in Branagh's film. The 1994 version of Frankenstein shows us quite explicitly how this creature is put together. We see Victor enter the morgue with a hatchet, bracing himself with the words, "It's only raw materials." We see the brain of Dr. Waldman on ice, we see the creature sewn together, stitch by stitch, and we can

almost smell the stench of death and decay that Elizabeth smells when she enters the laboratory. Frankenstein's creature is not life created anew, but life born out of death, like the babies born of PMV mothers. Frankenstein's allusion to transplant technology is particularly apt, for here we see how modern science has literally created life out of death.

Hogle (1995) describes the procedures through which a human being is transformed into an organ donor, noting that the development of the technologies required to sustain life in victims of traumatic injury "coincided with developments in transplant technology" (p. 206). A new definition of death, "brain death", was also created so as to facilitate morally the "harvesting" of a body not quite dead. As Hogle explains, "This new marker was constructed to make the distinction between life and death, human and technology, natural and artificial distinct. Indeed, this medical legal construction left us with an even more ambiguous entity, the living cadaver" (p. 206). Once science and language constructed the notion of the "donor" from this ambiguous entity, the appropriate social sanctions soon followed. Hogle notes that the idea of organ donation was "thus construed not only as a social virtue, but as an efficient use of valuable resources" (p. 206). In the film, this process of rationalization is compressed into the phrase, "It's only raw materials." As Hogle remarks, "With the social sanctioning of the concept of using bodies as sources of 'spare parts'... the donor soon became a routine cyborg" (p. 206). It would follow, then, that any recipients of donor organs would also be cyborgs, a new techno-medically generated life form, "literally

transcend[ing] space and time" (Hogle, p. 209). The creation sequence in Branagh's Frankenstein serves as a model for all of the current and emergent medical technologies which challenge our conceptions about the boundaries between men and women, human and machine, life and death. It also allows us to examine the ethical questions these new technologies raise. Genetic engineering, the Human Genome Project, cloning, surrogate motherhood, other reproductive technologies, fetal tissue research, organ transplants, cryogenics, artificial intelligence— Frankenstein begs to be read as an allegory for the myriad ways in which technology is transforming our lives and our very idea of what it means to be human.

The Evolution of the Posthuman

Hayles (1995) has proposed the idea that "the age of the human has given way to the posthuman. Not that humans have died out, but that the human as a concept has been succeeded by its evolutionary heir" (p. 321), the cyborg. Frankenstein's creature gives us an idea of what this evolutionary heir could be like. As many reviewers have noted, the De Niro creature is hardly a monster at all, but a recognizably human, sympathetic being, though scarred by the birth-marks of his creation. Throughout the film, his scars visibly heal as he takes on the ability to speak (his first word is "friend"), to read, to think, to care deeply about other human beings, and to understand the isolation of his circumstances. As in the original novel, he only turns to violence in response to his own pain, again a recognizably human reaction. If De Niro's creature is a model for cyborg man, the film suggests that he will not be much different from the way we are now. In

this sense the film would appear to redeem or at least humanize the transgressions of scientists like Victor Frankenstein. This humanization of the creature (we can scarcely call it a monster) would also seem to mirror a trend in the public relations marketing strategies employed to "sell" us on all of the new technologies in which we are increasingly immersed. As Gray and Mentor (1995) have observed, "We live in a society of cyborgs, or machines tightly coupled with 'organic' bodies themselves denatured and reassembled" (p. 455). As we become routinely and inextricably linked, wired, and networked to computers and through computers to each other, it would seem natural that we might question the extent to which our technologies may be dehumanizing us. Yet, how often in the past decade have we seen magazine and television ads which aim to humanize and domesticate our technological innovations? How often are these new technologies photographed in our homes in cozy, convenient, user-friendly, non-threatening ways? How often are they photographed with dogs? With children? How often do advertisements for computers or communications systems bring a smile, a chuckle, or even a tear? The 1994 Frankenstein does a similar "sell" with the De Niro creature, allowing us to sympathize, empathize, and ultimately identify with him through the same process which forges our initial identification with Victor. The cyborg is our friend. Thus, although the film ostensibly questions the dangers of tampering with nature through technology, it also naturalizes, humanizes, and romanticizes the results of such tampering

Is our "posthuman" era an evolutionary advancement? De Niro's creature may

suggest that it is, while also embodying our conflicting emotions about where our new technologies will ultimately lead. De Niro's creature has the brain of a brilliant and dedicated scientist and the body of the man who killed him out of superstitious mistrust for the vaccine with which the scientist was trying to innoculate him. When the creature confronts his maker in the ice cave scene, he asks, "What am I made of? Did you ever consider the consequences of your actions? You gave me emotions, you didn't tell me how to use them. Do I have a soul or is that a part you left out?" The questions sum up the moral of the Frankenstein story while oddly answering themselves. Does the creature have a soul? Resoundingly, yes. In this scene he appears wise, sad, somewhat philosophical, and morally superior to the man who created him. He is definitely an evolved being, in some ways more intelligent and civilized than his creator. The problem is that neither Frankenstein nor the world knows quite what to do with him. In the end, they chase each other to the frozen Arctic, where the creature dies with his maker, perhaps a sign that our own machines cannot live without us.

Stephen Hawking is a cyborg, a scientific genius whose mind is trapped in a body withered and incapacitated by disease. His wheelchair is his exoskeleton, his body's functions taken over by the elaborate medical technologies that make his life viable and allow him to communicate his genius to the world. What if the human mind could be preserved in this manner indefinitely? Frankenstein enacts the ultimate techno-cyborg fantasy of downloading human consciousness into immortal machines (Morse 1994, p. 162). It romanticizes the possibilities inherent in our techno-wizardry by romanticizing

both the creator and his creation. In this film, the grand narrative of romance subsumes narratives of class, gender and scientific progress. Bennett (1994) draws a distinction between the romanticism of Shelley's original novel and that employed by Branagh in this film:

> ... Romanticism tried to create a new value system and a new socio-political order, shaking up the old system, sometimes writing about, and sometimes breaking, any number of taboos.... And then there is pulp romanticism.... Branagh, both in his romantic story line and with his nervous camera, substitutes the pulp for the politics. (p. 16)

Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that Branagh's blend of romantic pulp and politics makes it easier to reconcile ourselves to the new value system of a posthuman, cyborg age.

Chapter 5: Romeos and Juliets: Appropriating Shakespeare

A brief comparison of the first few minutes of the Franco Zeffirelli (1968) and Baz Luhrmann (1996) versions of Romeo and Juliet shows how much film making has changed in the intervening thirty years. Zeffirelli's version begins with a somber reading of the Prologue by an uncredited Sir Laurence Olivier, accompanied by Nino Rota's tender love theme in the background. In one continuous sweep, the camera pans the ancient city of Verona at dawn. The screen is lush with early morning blues and purples until the camera rests on a smoldering red sun at the line, "where civil blood makes civil hands unclean", foreshadowing the violence that is soon to erupt over the seemingly tranquil city. Then the camera makes its only cut to a quiet street, and as Olivier intones the line, "A pair of star-crossed lovers take their life," the title, Romeo and Juliet, appears. The complete reading of the Prologue takes one minute, and then the quiet is disturbed by the bustle of the morning market.

Luhrmann's film begins with a television set on a black background from which a black anchorwoman reads the Prologue as though delivering the day's news. As she reads, the camera slowly zooms in until it seems to break right through the glass to the other side and keeps moving until it reaches a large statue of Christ positioned between two city buildings, one titled Montague, the other Capulet. The Prologue is read again, this time by a male narrator whose voice is reminiscent of James Earl Jones's voice of CNN. This time, the reading is punctuated by lines of text, white on a black background,

interspersed by corresponding images which establish the contemporary setting and introduce the updated versions of the play's dramatis personae. "Fair Verona" is now Verona Beach, we learn from the shot of a police car. At "the fatal loins of these two foes" we are introduced to Romeo and Juliet's parents, presented as wealthy heads of corporate families, in the style of the Colbys and the Carringtons from the 1980's tv drama, Dynasty. Likewise, Prince Escalus is now Captain Prince, Chief of Police, and Paris, Juliet's unfortunate suitor, is now Dave Paris, the governor's son. All of these characters, including Mercutio, are identified for the viewer during this second reading of the Prologue, which also includes newspaper headlines and magazine covers establishing the wealth and notoriety of these feuding families and signifying that their private lives are the subject of gossip columns and scandal sheets. We are definitely in the 1990's on the American West Coast, replete with money, drugs, gang wars and guns. As if to underscore this point, the Prologue is flashed on the screen a third time, line by line, amidst a rapid montage of images from the film, like gun shots themselves, and as the music throbs to a dizzying crescendo, the screen explodes into the title, Romeo + Juliet. The introduction takes two minutes. Any attempt to keep track of the camera cuts becomes futile after the count of 50. Luhrmann has set his story in the TV age, the MTV age, the postmodern age, where ad men count jolts per minute, or perhaps even per second.

What distinguishes these two openings is obvious and certainly telling. Perhaps what is less obvious, however, are the similarities in intent and effect between these

drastically different versions of the same play. Both are attempts to reanimate Shakespeare and introduce him to a new generation, both speak for this new generation in their condemnation of the status quo, and finally, both of them, while adhering to Shakespeare's original language, demonstrate the struggle for dominance between word and image that characterizes communication in our late 20th century. These commonalities only become apparent when one places the films within their particular time and cultural context. Just as postmodernism can be said to have its birth in the counter-cultural 60's, so too does Baz Luhrmann's postmodern version of this play stand precariously on the shoulders of Zeffirelli's 60's film rendition.

Critical Reception

Contemporary reviews of the Zeffirelli film serve to place it within its cultural context and underline the many similarities in the critical receptions of these two films, for both were praised and panned on identical grounds. "Virtuoso in Verona," Time magazine's (1968) review, states Franco Zeffirelli's intention in the making of Romeo and Juliet: "I wanted to bring the story to the attention of young people... The story is of two urchins crushed by a stupid, banal quarrel with origins even the adults don't know. In love the young couple found an ideal— one they could die for— and youth today is hungry for ideals" (p. 96). Zeffirelli's statement takes on added meaning when we consider its timing. The film's American release, October, 1968, followed only by short months the April 4th assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., and the June 6th assassination of Robert Kennedy, both embodiments of 60's idealism. The late 60's were

also a time of student protest against the war in Vietnam, which might also be described as a senseless conflict "with origins even the adults don't know". This cultural sub-text adds relevance and poignancy to the ageless story of youth tragically sacrificed. Reviewers also noted the youthfulness of the film's lead roles, and the risk Zeffirelli took in casting virtual unknowns: the 15 year old Olivia Hussey and the 17 year old Leonard Whiting. Reviewers were divided on the success of this risk. The Anonymous reviewer for Time pronounced it a success: "Romeo and Juliet appear afresh as two incredibly articulate but believably agonized teen-agers whose turf happens to be Quattrocento Verona. Too young to buck the Establishment-- the Italian city-state with its machinery of epic feuds and rituals-- they are finally undone by their passions" (p. 96). The characterization of Romeo and Juliet as young flower-children ennobled through their "bucking" of the "Establishment" confirms Greene's (1999) contention that "every generation feels the need to recast "Romeo and Juliet" in its own image and likeness" (p. 1). Although Zeffirelli's version is a more conventional production of the play than the 1956 West Side Story, it, too, reshapes the play to say something to a contemporary audience, and was consciously "marketed... to the flower-power set as a mod rendering of eternal teenage torment and the 'generation gap'". (Greene, p. 1). In Kael's (1968) New Yorker review, she decried the selling of Shakespeare on its "youth appeal": "Some odd readings... suggest that this teen-age tragedy is partly the result of teen-agers' betrayal by their elders. It's a bit ugly to see Shakespeare used for being with it; moviemakers drill into the 'generation gap' as if it were an oil well" (p. 209). In a similar vein, she found

the portrayals of the leads as somewhat insipid and banal:

> In Shakespeare's version, they played together at poetry and at love; they made love through poetry, matching each other's conceits. Here the actors seem dear little children playing at the director's notion of teen-age sex hunger, and, despite the words, they look and move like inarticulate modern kids in the latest movie cycle. (p. 209)

Indeed, Hussey and Whiting do look the part of 60's teenagers. When we first see Romeo with his Beatles-style haircut, he is holding a flower (in contrast to DiCaprio's Romeo who is first seen holding a cigarette). The picture fits Romeo's portrayal of the Petrarchan lover, but also alludes to the flower children of the sixties, whose motto, make love, not war, seems appropriate to Romeo's entrance after the latest brawl between Montagues and Capulets. Similarly, Juliet wears her hair in a characteristic 60's style, long, brown, and parted down the middle. As Dirks (1996) notes, the film caught a certain spirit of the sixties, in large part because of Hussey and Whiting:

> ... it appealed to the youthful, counter-cultural generation of the late 60's with its realism, brief nudity, and its contemporary feel. The film's reinterpreted modern message, coupled with youthful, idealistic, yet strong-willed and rebellious heroes heralding dreams of peace, love, and freedom, have made the two lead characters

representative, anti-establishment icons. (p. 2)

The problem with this, according to Kael, (1968) is that in Zeffirelli's attempts to be "with it", he sacrificed the beauty of Shakespeare's language, describing the readings as "so tonelessly mediocre that one hardly hears the words at all" (p. 209). Adler's (1970) New York Times review voices the same complaint: "In the classic speeches, one begins to worry about diction and wish the modern would recede and let Shakespeare play through" (p. 3795). Variety's review is equally damning in this respect: "For all Miss Hussey's prettiness and Whiting's shy charm it is clear that they do not understand one tenth of the meaning of their lines and it is a drawback from which the film cannot recover" (Bowker, 1983). Although Zeffirelli's version of Romeo and Juliet was acknowledged for its attempt to bring relevance and immediacy to the traditional love story, the critical consensus seemed to be that the heart of Shakespeare's play, its language, had been lost in the process.

Similar themes are taken up, in magnified form, in reviews of Baz Luhrmann's 90's version of Romeo + Juliet. As Matthews (1997) notes, "It's a grave understatement to say that this Romeo and Juliet is youth-oriented" (p. 55). The contemporary 90's setting with its music, fashions, fast cars and fast cutting speaks directly to the MTV generation. Matthews suggests that Luhrmann's version also interprets the play's tragedy in light of the "generation gap": "Shakespeare's play about teenage lovers attributed the tragedy precisely to their 'stars' or fate. Luhrmann, like Zeffirelli before him, views it as

the outcome of adult betrayal and indifference" (p. 55). Corrupted by money, power, and conspicuous consumption, Juliet's parents are portrayed at the masked ball as figureheads of fallen dynasties— she a neurotic Cleopatra, he a drunken Roman in toga. Arroyo (1997) notes that the skyscrapers bearing the Capulet and Montague names "are so rickety, dusty and old that they indicate a crumbling social structure" (p. 6). The older generation in this film typifies the worst excesses of late 20th century capitalism, and its children, in true 90's fashion, are its wayward albeit moneyed victims.

Like Zeffirelli, Luhrmann chose young leads whose youthful attractiveness and innocence play well in contrast to the corruption which surrounds them; but rather than risk casting unknowns, Luhrmann chose Claire Danes and Leonardo DiCaprio, both established names with proven box office appeal for a young audience. Reviewers generally praised the choice in terms of the appearance of Danes and DeCaprio, but criticized them on the same grounds that Hussey and Whiting were panned. As Ebert (1996) states: "Much of the dialogue is shouted unintelligibly, while the rest is recited dutifully, as in a high school production. Leonardo DeCaprio and Claire Danes are talented and appealing young actors, but they're in over their heads here"(p. 2). Greene's (1996) assessment sums up the conflict at the heart of the critical reception of both film's leads, they are perfect looking Romeos and Juliets until they have to open their mouths to speak:

When it comes to hip wardrobes, cool lighting, and intricate staging, Luhrmann

> has spared no effort to make his leads look good, but when it comes to the rich, dense and lyrical pentameters of their lines, he leaves them to fend for themselves— a dangerous tactic even with experienced Shakespearean actors, and an all but fatal one for iambic novices like DiCaprio and Danes. (p. 1)

Language stands at the heart of the criticism of both film renditions of this play. Almost every review of both movies grants that much of Shakespeare's poetry has been lost, perhaps inevitably through editorial cuts, but also through the inability of the lead actors to understand and communicate the poetry they have been given to speak. Whether the reviews were positive or negative depended on the extent to which reviewers were bothered by this. For what is left of Romeo and Juliet without Shakespeare's poetry? As Matthews (1997) states, "language is the chief thing Romeo and Juliet, an early play, has going for it" (p. 55). Without "the music of the great lines," Kael (1968) complains, "the idiocies of the plot shine through" (p. 209). "What's missing amid all this frantic activity and eye candy," states Rozen (1996), "is the poetry" (p. 1). But what if the poetry has simply been relocated or translated from page to screen, from word to image?

Poetic Dislocations

Although Kael's (1968) review of Zeffirelli's film was far from flattering, she noted that the poetry has been moved, if not necessarily removed: "Zeffirelli has not, however, left a total vacuum; he has replaced the poetry with his own 'cinematic' version

of poetry" (p. 209). Whiting and Hussey "communicate with eyes and mouths and smiles..., not in words; the lines of Shakespeare that they speak are redundant as well as meaningless". Finally, Kael described the effect as "nonverbal lyricism" (p. 209). Adler (1970), while lamenting the loss of Shakespeare's poetry, conceded that "the scenes, the ball, the duels, are so beautifully thought out and staged that things I had not noticed... become extraordinary"(p. 3795). Echoing Time's (1968) review that Zeffirelli's "camera is a Renaissance palette" (p. 96), Adler described the look of the film as "so human, social and derived from Dutch and Italian painting schools that it is a joy to watch, if not quite to listen to"(p. 3795). Variety's review also noted the "splendid use of color in costumes and backgrounds" and the "bold effective cuts in the Bard's text" (Bowker, 1983), as though the word and image were mutually exclusive codes, as though the trade-off were somehow inevitable.

When set beside the Luhrmann version, Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet is still, by far, the more traditional of the two, yet the translation of poetry from word to image had its beginnings here, and one might say that Luhrmann simply finished the job. One of the first questions one might ask of this film is, with such a drastically modernized (or postmodernized) setting, why retain Shakespeare's original language at all? In an on-line interview, Luhrmann (1997) responds to this question:

> Here is a text that has survived time and geography for four hundred years. There is no question that that moves people. So why not use any device? I mean in the

> nineteenth century they would have 35 minute pageants in the middle of it. If that worked, that worked to reveal that language. The setting was only about revealing and clarifying the language, that's the only motive. (p. 6)

Ostensibly, then, Luhrmann's contemporary, almost futuristic setting, and the striking use of visuals throughout are intended to complement Shakespeare's language and to clarify its meaning for a 90's audience. As Matthews (1997) explains, "Luhrmann tries to give the audience a leg up over the semantic difficulties by using intertitles and an elaborate scheme of colour co-ordination. However, this busy visual surface is as much a hindrance to intelligibility as a help" (p. 55). Arroyo (1997) disagrees, seeing the language as a secondary feature of the film, as mere dialogue rather than poetry:

> If most other Shakespeare films nullify the expressive power of *mise en scene* by subordinating it, in the service of the language,... Luhrmann... elevates Shakespeare cinematically... The dialogue is performed and heard as much in and through the exhilarating movement of striking images, and it is in and through motion that the film moves its audience emotionally. (p. 6)

Although it might be argued that in Zeffirelli's visually and musically lush Romeo and Juliet, the unique possibilities of the cinema are employed to complement Shakespeare's imagery in terms of characterization and theme, in Luhrmann's version,

the language of film tends to compete with it, replace it, and possibly render it altogether obsolete. As Greene (1996) observes, "the visual inventiveness of Luhrmann's staging is so ravishing that the at times tin-eared line readings of his principals seem like an annoying distraction, which is a fairly remarkable achievement of sorts, given the fact that they are reciting some of the most beautiful romantic poetry ever written" (p. 1). One could interpret the preservation of Shakespeare's dialogue as Luhrmann's acknowledgment that language itself hardly matters anymore. The story will tell itself through its succession of brilliant and evocative images whether contemporary viewers understand a word of it or not. While we might see this more easily in Luhrmann's treatment, the same assessment has been made of Zeffirelli's:

> ... [Zeffirelli} produced a version of Shakespeare's script less complicated than the original by disengaging the lovers' passion from the verse that relates it and telling the story primarily by means of confluent images. (Levenson, 1987, p. 82)

Perhaps because Zeffirelli's version of the play aims at realism and naturalism, this process seems less jarring than it appears in Luhrmann's film, which deliberately breaks the realist conventions Zeffirelli adheres to and in so doing, rips the language from its Shakespearean moorings. A close reading of selected scenes from both films, however, will show how this process of translation from word to image occurs in both films, as one executes a neo-realist interpretation of the play, the other a decidedly

postmodern one.

The Opening Fight: Neo-Realism in the Marketplace

Franco Zeffirelli's treatment of Romeo and Juliet is strongly influenced by the neo-realist school of film-making which developed in post WWII Italy as a means of presenting, as accurately as possible, the lives of real people in real settings and situations. In Understanding Movies, Giannetti (1996) defines this movement in terms of its ideological and aesthetic dimensions. The political thrust behind neo-realism was to bring cinema back to the people, and to say something of social value to a country ravaged by war and its Fascist past. Films in the neo-realist school could be characterized by "a new democratic spirit, with emphasis on the value of ordinary people such as laborers, peasants, and factory workers," a "compassionate point of view," a "blend of Christian and Marxist humanism," and "an emphasis on emotions rather than abstract ideas" (p. 437). In keeping with this ethical dimension, the style of neo-realist film could be summed up by its honesty, including "an avoidance of neatly plotted stories in favor of loose, episodic structures", "a documentary visual style," "the use of actual locations-- usually exteriors-- rather than studio sets", "the use of non-professional actors", "an avoidance of literary dialogue in favor of conversational speech" and "an avoidance of artifice in the editing camerawork, and lighting" (p. 437). Zeffirelli's mentors were the prominent neo-realist figures of the time, Vittorio De Sica and Roberto Rosselini, and although Romeo and Juliet cannot be considered neo-realist according to Giannetti's entire list, its influence can certainly be felt throughout this film, particularly

in the setting, the choice of unknown principal actors, and the paring down of Shakespeare's highly stylized language to recreate a more natural sounding dialogue with an emphasis on honest expressions of human emotion.

The opening fight scene, then, becomes for Zeffirelli a glorious opportunity to recreate Italian village life as it might have appeared during the fourteenth century, or at least as we would imagine it might have appeared. While some sets, including the main square of Verona, were meticulously rendered studio creations, much of the film was shot on location. According to Levenson (1987), "Under a real Mediterranean sun on location, whole towns in Tuscany and Umbria served the public scenes" (p. 107). Verona's morning marketplace is teeming with onions and peppers, evoking the verisimilitude of daily life. Likewise, the citizens of Verona, old and young, are rendered as real people going about their daily business. After brief flashes of the surroundings, the camera focuses on the legs and then the entire forms of the two Capulet servants, Samson and Gregory. What becomes immediately apparent are their vivid red and yellow costumes. Costumes are not only authentic, but they are also used to differentiate the characters and identify their allegiance to each of the feuding families. The Capulets are characterized as the nouveau riche in their bright ostentatious colours, which Giannetti (1996) describes as "appropriately 'hot'" (p. 310), while members of the house of Montague are dressed in sombre blacks and blues to represent a more modest and dignified family "in obvious decline" (p. 310). Tybalt, later referred to by Mercutio as "The Prince of Cats" (2,4,19), is introduced by the camera in the same way Samson and

Gregory are, beginning with his feet, then moving upward till we reach his hat, the flaps of which are even suggestive of the ears of a cat. Thus in the first few minutes, we can see how Zeffirelli both adheres to and departs from certain realist conventions. Costumes are chosen not simply for their realism, but for what they might add to our understanding of characters. And where the originators of neo-realism favored a lack of artifice in terms of camera work, preferring a more documentary style with a minimum of editing cuts, Zeffirelli consciously uses the camera to direct our eye and create particular effects, although these effects are employed in the service of realism. Giannetti (1996) cites an example of this in the fight sequences:

> The essence of Shakespeare's play is found in the impulsive haste of its youthful protagonists, the dominolike swiftness of the chain of events, and the violence of much of the action. Zeffirelli heightened these characteristics by kineticizing many of the scenes. The fight sequences are often photographed with a handheld camera that lurches and swirls with the combatants as they spill onto the streets of Verona. (p. 286)

Through this device, we are presented with a realistic depiction of the violence of the third civil brawl, and are in a sense, drawn into the brawl itself as we share the swirling camera's perspective. Zeffirelli also shows us the results of the violence in this scene— a brief shot of an anguished woman running with a baby and later the wounded

participants being carried into their homes, the sight of which occasions Romeo's, "Oh me, what fray was here?" (1,1,171). Giannetti (1996) describes this technique as the substitution of "verbal exposition" for "visual exposition" in the form of "nonsynchronous visuals" which "expand-- not duplicate-- the language" (p. 286). Another example of such visual exposition occurs with the introduction of Lady Montague, who has few actual lines in the play, but whose gentle humanity is very simply and naturally expressed. While asking Benvolio about her son, she is shown dressing the wound of one of the injured Montague servants. This action does not duplicate anything in Shakespeare's text, but it does expand our understanding of her character in a way that is certainly in keeping with her sympathetic nature.

A close look at the opening scene reveals the economy and naturalness Zeffirelli strives for throughout the film. Apart from presenting authentic locations, costumes, and action, perhaps the biggest challenge was to render Shakespeare's language into natural sounding speech, which entailed pruning the language and abbreviating or removing longer speeches. According to Levenson (1987), "only a third of Shakespeare's lines remained" (p. 110) in this film treatment, as "verbiage" was cut "to allow room for visuals" (p. 108). Levenson also notes the alteration of lines and the addition of "interjections as well as other monosyllables" to create the "flavour of colloquial expression" (p. 111). Thus, the puns and word-play are reduced in this scene, with enough dialogue remaining to retain its essential spirit. Levenson cites the opening lines as an example of this. The original play begins with a clever, but almost

incomprehensible series of off-colour puns described by Frye (1986) as "a gabble of dialogue that doesn't contribute much to the plot, but gets over the latecomer problem" (p. 15). These are totally cut from the film which begins instead at line 18 of the play:

Gregory, But the quarrel is between our masters and us their men.

Sampson, Ah, 'tis all one.

Gregory, Here come the House of the Montagues.

Sampson, Quarrel, I will back thee.

Gregory, Right, fear me not.

As Levenson notes, "The swift thrust-and-parry represents about twenty Shakespearean lines..., omitting half a dozen sexual puns" (p. 11). The italicized "*but*", "*Ah*" and "*Right*" are added to create more natural sounding dialogue. And whatever has been lost verbally has been transposed into visuals, part of the translation of Shakespeare which seems necessary and inevitable according to Bazin (1992), film theorist and advocate of neo-realism. In "What is Cinema", Bazin describes the challenge of translating drama into film:

> The problem of filmed theater at least where the classics are concerned does not consist so much in transposing an action from the stage to the screen as in transposing a text written for one dramaturgical system into another while at the same time retaining its effectiveness. It is not therefore essentially the action of a play which resists film adaptation,... it is the verbal form which aesthetic

contingencies or cultural prejudices oblige us to respect. (pp. 382-383)

Giannetti (1996) discusses this idea with reference to the earlier George Cukor (1936) production of Romeo and Juliet, which he describes as "a respectful but often tedious film" in which "virtually all the dialogue was retained" (p. 386). In contrast, "Zeffirelli's movie, though technically less faithful to the stage script, is actually more Shakespearean in spirit than the scrupulously literal version of Cukor" (p. 286-287). This contrast demonstrates Bazin's point that "filmed theater is basically destined to fail whenever it tends in any manner to become simply the photographing of scenic representation" (p. 383). Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet shows how the requirements of neo-realism, when applied to a classic of literature, entail an actual translation of Shakespeare rather than simply a transition from one medium to another. Baz Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet takes this process of translation one step further.

Postmodern Brawl: Plundering the Supermarket of Pop Culture

Just as the opening scene of Zeffirelli's film demonstrates certain key elements of neo-realism, the opening scene of Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet exemplifies certain features common to postmodern film. Unlike the tenets of neo-realism, which can be neatly identified according to their philosophical and stylistic dimensions, postmodernism tends to evade definition, in part, because it is a movement suspicious of ultimate definition or consensus. As Connor (1997) observes, "What is striking is precisely the degree of consensus in postmodernist discourse that there is no longer any possibility of

consensus, the authoritative announcements of the disappearance of final authority and the promotion and recirculation of a total and comprehensive narrative of a cultural condition in which totality is no longer thinkable" (p. 9). Its refusal to ascribe to any type of totality becomes, in itself, a totalizing doctrine of sorts, which would appear to be one of the distinguishing features of postmodern thought. Eagleton (1996) explains:

> Postmodernity is a style of thought which is suspicious of classical notions of truth, reason, identity and objectivity, of the idea of universal progress or emancipation, of single frameworks, grand narratives or ultimate grounds of explanation. Against these Enlightenment norms, it sees the world as contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable, indeterminate, a set of disunified cultures or interpretations which breed a degree of scepticism about the objectivity of truth, history and norms, the givenness of natures and the coherence of identities. (p. vii)

Primarily, then, postmodernism is an oppositional stance which challenges our traditional notions of history, politics, literature and culture itself. Because of its refusal to name itself, except in opposition to anything namable or definable, Connor notes a "difficulty of maintaining a position in which postmodernism is both a set of identifiable stylistic features and a cultural dominant" (p. 201). He suggests that we ask not what does postmodernism mean, but rather, what does it do? (P. 9). When we ask this question of postmodern film, certain distinguishing stylistic features do emerge.

One of the first things postmodernism does is "blur the boundaries between 'high' and 'popular' culture, as well as between art and everyday experience" (Eagleton, 1996, p. vii). This "democratic impulse" (Connor, 1997, p. 190) can be seen as a form of "cultural subversion and deconstruction"(p. 190) according to Connor, which finds its expression in a highly allusive pastiche of borrowings from high cultural and popular cultural forms, or "a stitching-together of different genres and genre expectations" (p. 200). As a challenge to tradition, then, the postmodern film "evokes, mocks, yet lends quasi-reverence for the icons of the past, while it places them in the present" (Denzin, quoted in Connor, p. 201). In addition, the setting of the postmodern film is often deliberately ambiguous, as "the film refuses to allow the viewer to identify its period with any security" (Connor, p. 201). McRobbie (1994) describes the look of postmodernism as containing "the glossy surface of pop, the intertextual referencing between film and advert and television programme" and the "criss-crossing and fast cutting" (p. 4) between genres that is both dizzying and exhilarating. Connor describes this as the "now familiar postmodern aesthetic of montage, repetition, jump-cut, and discontinuity" which has been borrowed from the style of MTV (p. 186). Connor also identifies "a setting of the verbal against the visual" (p. 202), or a disjunction between what we see and what we hear, as a feature of the postmodernist style in film. All of these characteristics serve to upset our traditional expectations of the cinematic experience as the rendering of a seamless, life-like narrative. Instead, postmodern film seems to call deliberate attention to itself as artifice. Connor describes this trend with reference to literature: "... the most influential

accounts of postmodernist fiction stress the prevalence of parodic 'meta-fiction', or the exploration by literary texts of their own nature and status as fiction" (p. 129). In a corollary fashion, the postmodern film might be called 'meta-film' as it consciously explores the nature of its own medium through self-imitation or parody, and constantly reminds the audience that what we are seeing is definitely not reality. A final trend of postmodern film is the "increased prominence and standing of science fiction" (Connor, p. 134) as technology and science transform what was once only fantasy into the reality of our daily lives. Connor describes the "new 'scene' of postmodern experience" as "the interface with the video or the computer screen" (p. 136), which has become a common subject of current popular film. So, while postmodern film continuously reminds us that it is not reality, it is, in a sense, a realistic portrayal of the ways in which our perceptions and understandings are increasingly mediated by our interface with technology. Through these various trends and devices, the postmodern film presents a perspective on the world which is "contingent, ungrounded, diverse, unstable [and] indeterminate" (Eagleton, 1996, p. vii). Postmodern film, as unreal as it may seem, reflects our postmodern reality.

The fight scene of Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet exemplifies almost every feature of postmodern film identified by Connor. To begin with, Luhrmann's choice of a Shakespearean play is itself a postmodern statement of sorts, for there is no more popularly recognizable representative of high culture than William Shakespeare. Romeo + Juliet provides rich opportunities to blur the distinctions between high and popular culture, or to throw Shakespeare "in the deep end of the pool and see if he can swim", as

the online reviewer for Film.Com (1996, p. 1) expresses it. By choosing a contemporary setting for the play, Luhrmann "knocks the academic stuffing out of Shakespeare" (Matthews, 1997, p. 55) and allows for a playful and irreverent fusion of genres and pop cultural influences, or "a thorough plundering of the supermarket of popular culture" (Matthews, p. 55). Greene (1996) describes the effect as:

> ...a gun-crazy, up-to-the-minute cine-collage with art direction that crosses "Reservoir Dogs" and "Mad Max," camerawork and editing blending Hong Kong action ace John Woo with Jean-Luc Godard, and a grafted-on recasting of Shakespeare's event structure by way of urban-themed 70's-era TV shows like "Baretta" and "Starsky and Hutch". (p. 1)

As the reviewer for Film.Com (1996) noted, "You could spend a week nailing down the visual and pop-culture influences" (p. 1) within this film, which is definitely part of the fun. The scene begins with an introduction of the Montague "boys", dressed in loud Hawaiian shirts, cruising in a neon yellow convertible, and looking for trouble. One of them has bright pink hair, another has the name Montague tattooed on the back of his shaved head. The music, like their behavior, is loud and raucous. When they pull into the Phoenix gas station, where the sign reads, "Add fuel to your fire", they taunt a group of nuns, muttering, "Double, double, toil and trouble," the first of many allusions to other plays of Shakespeare. These allusions usually take the form of visual puns—

"Storefronts on Verona Beach advertise "Rosencrantzky's" or "A Pound of Flesh" (1996, p. 1), the reviewer for Film.Com noticed. The boardwalk also has its own Globe Theatre. This recurrent homage to Shakespeare exemplifies the quasi-reverent swipe at high culture which postmodern film seems to revel in. It also serves as a visual substitute for the quick and almost incomprehensible word play of Shakespeare's original scene, most of which, as in Zeffirelli's version, has been cut from the dialogue. Luhrmann does, however, make good use of the line, "a pretty piece of flesh I am", which the pink-haired Montague shouts at the nuns as they escape into their van. Then a blue car pulls up with the vanity plate, "CAP 005", a take-off from the EWING license plates on TV's Dallas, and we see that, for all their bravado, the Montague boys are not as tough as they appear. The Capulets emerge dressed in black and looking like a Latino street gang. Again, perhaps in homage to Zeffirelli's version, Tybalt is introduced from the feet first with a slow motion shot of his ebony-heeled boot grinding out a match. Matthews (1997) describes the ensuing gun battle as a cross between "a spaghetti Western and Apocalypse Now" (p. 55). In an elaborate, over-the-top shoot out, Tybalt takes off his jacket to reveal a red vest embroidered with the image of Christ, kneels to the ground, pulls out his 9mm 'Sword' handgun, and kisses the Madonna inscribed on its handle before aiming and firing. The pink-haired Montague boy, who tries to hide in the car of another customer, is repeatedly hit in the head with the lady's purse, as the camera cuts back and forth between him and the gunfire, spilt gasoline, frightened onlookers, and finally Tybalt's dropped cigarette, which causes the gas station to erupt into flames, perfect

footage for the evening news. Helicopters swirl through the smoke, from which Captain Prince admonishes Benvolio and Tybalt to "Throw [their] mistempered weapons to the ground". The opening scene, then, is a postmodern pastiche of Shakespeare, Zeffirelli's Shakespeare, well-worn Hollywood movie conventions, TV cop shows, and MTV music video overlay, the end effect of which is a delightful, in-your-face self mockery of the ways in which we package violence as entertainment.

The unreality of this opening scene is supported by the mise en scene or the general look of Luhrmann's film, which Arroyo (1997) describes as a "constructed world" (p. 6), a "device presently popular across a variety of cultural forms" (p. 6) including comic books and science fiction. Filmed in Mexico City and Veracruz, the setting of Verona Beach presents a "millennial urban nightmare [which] is a key component of the film's look" (p. 6). Although recognizably set in the 90's, part of this look is slightly futuristic in the manner of Terminator or Mad Max. This science-fiction feel to the mise en scene, set against the Shakespearean language, places the film in some other impossibly unreal time. Because it has been so decontextualized, so forcefully removed from the time and place in which it first found utterance, the language becomes highlighted or hyper-realized, newly framed against an entirely unexpected visual matting. Arroyo explains that the purpose of the constructed world is to "allow for different ways of being and knowing, but with enough similarities to permit understanding" (p. 6). Luhrmann is asking us to look at the story again for the first time.

One of the different ways of being and knowing afforded through the mise en

scene of Luhrmann's film, is the possibility of interpreting aspects of the setting for their symbolic significance in a manner that a more realistic setting like Zeffirelli's would not as readily invite. For example, the center-piece of the city is a "gigantic icon of Christ, arms outstretched, ineffectually loom[ing] over its inhabitants" (Arroyo, 1997, p. 6). This statue, standing between the corporate offices of the Montagues and Capulets, suggests the resolution to their ongoing feud through a spirit of Christian forgiveness, but as we see at the end of the film, the building beneath this statue is the Capulet tomb where Romeo and Juliet meet their end. Like the figure of Christ on Tybalt's vest, these families have adopted a religion of violence instead of love, which will ultimately unite them in death. Luhrmann's choice of the "+" in the title, Romeo + Juliet seems significant in this regard. It is the symbol of the cross, which like the giant statue of Christ, stands between their two families, separating yet uniting them in violent death.

The city is near a beach where we first meet Romeo, and much of the action which in Shakespeare's original play takes place on the streets of Verona, is set here along the beach and boardwalk, typically bright, gaudy, and somewhat run-down. In contrast to Zeffirelli's muted tones, the light is almost too bright, the colours, as Arroyo (1997) notes, "bright pinks, blues and oranges are rarely to be found in nature" (p. 6). The amusement park with its merry-go-round and Ferris-wheel adds further colour to the scene, yet seems oddly abandoned and forlorn. This is the world Romeo has chosen over his father's world of cutthroat competitiveness. His escape into a world of idle amusements places him at the very margins of society along with the prostitutes and drug

dealers. In this version, he is not simply the lovesick youth of Shakespeare's original, he is the heir apparent to a Mafia-style family business who has already rejected his father's name and legacy. Like Vito Corleone in The Godfather, Brian Dennehy's Senior Montague sits in a black limousine which has pulled up along the beach, and expresses his concerns to Benvolio about his errant son. Romeo stands on the shore in the distance, his back to the camera, as far away as he can get from everything his father represents. The symbolic associations of Luhrmann's constructed worlds of the city and the beach allow for a "different way of being and knowing" Romeo as a young man who has rejected his father's dubious calling but has found nothing substantial to turn to instead.

One final feature of this constructed world is the picturesquely ramshackle grandstand found directly on the beach, where we first see Romeo framed within its arch. The stage is a concrete reminder that what we are about to see is a performance of a classic of the theatre. Luhrmann may also be suggesting the artificiality of Romeo's initial love-sickness for Rosaline, for he is morosely setting down many of his lines to Benvolio from Shakespeare's text as a poem to his beloved. But while Romeo is playing the part of the love-sick Petrarchan poet, he is also an actor playing the part of Romeo who is playing the part of the love-sick Petrarchan poet. The stage on the beach is this film's most pointed admission of its own artifice, again, a recurrent feature of postmodern film. In addition, the stage and TV screen seem to function as visual bookends or reminders of the ways in which our stories are and have been told.

The opening scenes of Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's films lend themselves to close

inspection in light of the effect of neo-realism and postmodern hyper-realism on the telling of essentially the same story. In both cases, language is subordinated to image as the reading of the story becomes a semiotic reading of the mise en scene rather than an interpretation of actual spoken dialogue. The use of the television as a running commentary on the action in Luhrmann's film might be seen as a commentary on both of these film treatments of Romeo and Juliet: "Our chorus is the media, the media is the chorus of today," as Luhrmann (1997, p. 6) states. The use of the television screen in this film as a postmodern statement on our "interface with technology" oddly validates the action in the opening sequence and makes it appear more believable or true to life than it would otherwise. Ultimately, these cinematic translations of the play, one scrupulously realistic, one determinedly unrealistic, seem in our postmodern era, more true to life than Shakespeare's original text. (As one student remarked while reading the play in my class, "Wow! This is just like the movie!)

The Language of Love: The Ball and Balcony Scenes

While the opening scenes provide an opportunity to see how verbal exposition is replaced by visual exposition, the ball and balcony scenes show how poetry itself, the very essence or magic of Romeo and Juliet, is transposed onto the screen. This is possibly one of Shakespeare's most poetic plays, a point which becomes immediately apparent when the two lovers finally meet at the Capulet ball. Their language is transformed into poetry as a sign of the transformative power of the love they feel for one another. Their very first conversation together has been identified as a sonnet (Stoll,

1970, p. 42), the highly stylized love poem which had its genesis with the love sonnets of Petrarch and was popularized in England by Shakespeare. The union between Romeo and Juliet is thus signified linguistically by the fact that their dialogue together is instant poetry.

This confluence between love and poetry has its origins in the courtly love tradition, which, according to Frye (1986), "focussed on a curious etiquette that became a kind of parody of Christian experience" (p. 20). As Frye describes it:

> Someone might be going about his business, congratulating himself on not being caught in the trap of a love affair, when suddenly the God of Love, Eros or Cupid... forces him to fall in love with a woman. The falling in love is involuntary and instantaneous... From that time on, the lover is a slave of the God of Love, whose will is embodied in his mistress, and he is bound to do whatever she wants. (p. 20)

Further, part of the convention depended upon the cruelty of the "Courtly Love mistress," the frustration from which "drove the lover into poetry, and the theme of the poetry was the cruelty of the mistress and the despair and supplications of the lover" (Frye, p. 20). As we have seen at the beginning of this play, Romeo is a caricature of the courtly lover pining over the cruel Rosaline, but when he meets Juliet, the religious imagery of the courtly love tradition is transformed into genuine expressions of mutual devotion. When

Romeo first speaks to Juliet, he describes her hand as a "holy shrine" which his hand is unworthy to "profane". His lips are "two blushing pilgrims", and so the conceit continues throughout their impromptu sonnet, till "lips do what hands do", and they kiss. Later, she is described as his "bright angel", he, "the god of [her] idolatry", courtly love phrases which are elevated to spiritual dimensions by the sincerity of their feelings.

Religious imagery from the courtly love tradition melds with images of light in darkness, which, according to Spurgeon, (1970) are the "dominating image[s]" (p. 61) of the play. When Romeo first sees Juliet at the ball, he exclaims, "O, she doth teach the torches to burn bright!/ It seems she hangs upon the cheek of night/ As a rich jewel in an Ethiop's ear" (1,5,43-45). In the well-known, "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?"soliloquy, she is "the Sun", and her eyes are "two stars", again, a courtly-love conceit which is eventually brought to earth by his very human wish to be "a glove upon that hand,/ That [he] might touch that cheek" (2,2,24-25). The image of light is also used to characterize the nature of their love for one another, which Juliet describes as "too rash, too unadvis'd, too sudden; / Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be / Ere one can say 'It lightens'" (2,2,118-120). The flash of lightning in the night sky becomes for Spurgeon the central image of the whole play: "There can be no question, I think, that Shakespeare saw the story, in its swift and tragic beauty, as an almost blinding flash of light, suddenly ignited, and as swiftly quenched" (p. 62). The friar's warning, according to Spurgeon, "sums up the whole movement of the play" (p. 63):

These violent delights have violent ends,

And in their triumph die; like fire and powder

Which as they kiss consume. (2,6,9-11)

The beauty and doomed nature of their "star-crossed" love are crystalized in this image of gunpowder, part of an extensive weave of "running images" (Spurgeon, p. 65) of light and darkness which form the "pictorial background" (p. 63) for the action of the play.

Back to Nature: Zeffirelli's Translation

In Romeo and Juliet, Shakespeare has provided an embarrassment of riches for the film director, whose stock in trade is, after all, the image. But, as Levenson (1987) points out in her discussion of Zeffirelli's version, "Many of them, Petrarchan and stylised, do not fit any concept of realism. Zeffirelli had to alter or cut them to suit his notion of the play" (pp. 87-8). Here, Zeffirelli's goal was to apply "Italian feelings to this masterpiece of English classical theatre" by redefining poetry "as a specifically Italian mode of expression, essentially non-verbal and extremely passionate" (p. 89). Thus, while cutting much of the dialogue, Zeffirelli "emphasised several features of Shakespeare's text by giving them concrete expression" (p. 90).

We see many examples of this concrete expression of imagery from word to screen in the ball and balcony scenes. First of all, the revelers' entrance to the ball by torchlight sets the party ablaze with light, highlighting the rich, sumptuous colours of the decor and costumes. The screen becomes a warm palette of light and darkness against which Romeo in blue and Juliet in vibrant red stand out in relief. "So shows a snowy dove trooping with crows", Romeo says while watching her dance. This contrast is

underlined in the film with a shot of Juliet, so bright and vibrant, standing beside a rather chaste and pale looking young woman whom one might imagine to be the now-forgotten Rosaline. Zeffirelli lingers over the forms and faces of many of the guests to present various vignettes of love, from the older couples to the young and back again, a visual counterpoint to the love theme sung in the background: "A rose will bloom, and then will fade. So does a youth, so does the fairest maid." During the Moresque, Zeffirelli's camera swirls with the dancers then locks on various faces. As Levenson (1987) describes the effect, "it juxtaposes faces— even superimposing one on another— until those of the lovers become central making it apparent that the camera reflects events from their point of view" (p. 120). This technique also establishes their affinity for one another, a literal picture of their oneness which is defined in the original text by the sonnet they speak. During these lines, Zeffirelli focuses on the hands of Romeo and Juliet as they first clasp. Their bond is given pictorial form through a shot which shows the two hands as though linked in prayer, arms emerging from the bottom of the frame in a brief trick of photography which makes it appear that they are the hands of one person. Levenson describes the touching of hands, along with the kiss, as "*leitmotifs* or symbols" which run throughout the film to "comment on the original text" (p. 120).

In the balcony scene, the lush beauty of an Italian garden becomes a visual metaphor for the verdant love that has suddenly bloomed between these young people. Romeo, whose face is framed by the leaves of one of the orchard trees, sees a light and exclaims, "But soft! What light through yonder window breaks?" But instead of the

familiar conceit, "It is the east, and Juliet is the sun," Zeffirelli's script skips directly to "It is my lady, it is my love". Perhaps the omitted lines have become such a cliche that Zeffirelli chose to cut them rather than keep them simply for the sake of sentiment or tradition. In Levenson's (1987) discussion of the scene, she describes how the poetry of Romeo's soliloquy is broken up by the sounds of a dog barking, Mercutio calling, crickets chirping, bells ringing, and the romantic music forming an accompaniment, so that all of these sound effects become part of the poetry. Her contention is that "Instead [of Shakespeare], the audience hear disconnected fragments of Shakespeare's text in a filmic composition which, shot by shot, represents the director's understanding of the tragedy" (p. 114). The poetry itself has been, in effect, remixed or reconstituted by Zeffirelli. And what has been taken from the poetry again has been given to the visuals, or as Levenson notes, "The poetry has become visible" (p. 91). An example of this is the balcony and the tree which Romeo climbs to be nearer his beloved. As Levenson explains, "The large high balcony represented the enormous obstacle which the feud placed in the way of love; Romeo's awkward struggle up the tree conveyed his adolescence, intensity, and frustration..." (p. 90). Romeo's struggle up the tree is a refreshing contrast to more staid and formal theatrical productions of this play which generally relegate Romeo to the ground looking upward at his Juliet throughout. Zeffirelli's version presents a more authentic expression of his desire, and the physical closeness of the young lovers during this scene is by far a more appropriate portrayal of young love than the traditional staging. Although many of their lines have been cut, the

palpable closeness of Romeo and Juliet, the rich garden setting at night, and the romantic background music all serve to create a fully realized cinematic moment.

These scenes show how, perforce, much of Shakespeare's poetry is rendered redundant by the techniques of the cinema. When one recalls that the play would have been originally staged in daylight on an apron stage, with a minimum of scenery or props, and a young boy playing the part of Juliet, Shakespeare's rich imagery was a necessity, for the words themselves had to create the setting and mood in the audience's imagination. That necessity removed, the imagery could be put where it belongs, in the rich naturalistic setting and the realistic actions of the principal players. There is nothing in Zeffirelli's interpretation of this scene that cannot find its inspiration in the actual text of the play. One has to look a little closer, perhaps, to find the Shakespearean genesis for Luhrmann's rendition of the same scenes, for they do not flow quite as naturally from the poetry as they appear to in Zeffirelli's film.

Postmodern Liberties at Luhrmann's Party

In some cases, the transfer from text to screen is quite literal in Luhrmann's version of the Capulet party, where the costumes are an obvious comment on the characters' personality traits. Juliet is dressed as an angel in a simple white dress with wings to complement her purity, simplicity, and the sincerity of her affections. In this case, the inspiration comes directly from Romeo's line, "O, speak again, bright angel". He, of course, is dressed as her knight in shining armour, a visual allusion to the courtly love tradition and an era of chivalry which supports his effusions of romantic poetry

when he first speaks to her. Their first meeting is through a large opulent fish tank, a device which denotes certain truths about Juliet's fish-bowl existence as the daughter of the scandalously wealthy and prominent Capulet family. Their first glimpse of each other through the water allows the cinematic play of their reflections on each other's faces which forms a visual rendering of their instant affinity and sense of oneness, much like the super-imposing of their faces in the Moresque dance sequence of the Zeffirelli version. One is hard-pressed to find a Shakespearean antecedent for the image of the fish tank, however, a fact which left one exasperated reviewer to describe the film as bathed "in pointless water imagery" (Rozen, 1996, p.1). Yet, when Romeo reveals himself to Juliet in the balcony scene, he declares, "Call me but love and I'll be new baptis'd" (2,2,50), a line which takes on visual and thematic dominance in this film.

Just before meeting Juliet, Romeo is high on a drug given to him by Mercutio in an inventive recontextualizing of the Queen Mab speech. Under the influence of this drug, Romeo's perceptions of the wild Capulet party are even wilder, almost frightening, and one wonders whether Mercutio's transvestite, Rocky Horror- inspired musical number is actually happening or is simply a figment of Romeo's hallucinations. When he stumbles into the men's room to wash his face and clear his head, he loses his mask, a symbol of his former identity not simply as the spurned lover of Rosaline, but as the disaffected young man who is wasting his life. The sight of Romeo's face submerged in water recalls our introduction to Juliet in this film, for we first see her likewise under water. His meeting with Juliet is a rebirth of sorts, as we are led to expect that the old

Romeo has been washed away by the purity of his affections for Juliet. The balcony scene, then, takes place in the Capulet swimming pool, as both are baptized into a new religion of love for each other, a post-modern play on the Petrarchan courtly love conventions, but also an answer to the acrimony between their families as represented by the religious iconography in the opening scene. By leaping into the pool, Romeo has denied his father and refused his name (2,2,34). Shakespeare certainly does appear to have been thrown into the deep end of the pool here, but given that the setting is a millionaire's mansion in Southern California, it would be unrealistic *not* to have a pool, and there does appear to be a governing logic in Luhrmann's excessive use of water imagery. Their frolic in the pool arouses the suspicions of the security guard who is monitoring the area by video, and Romeo must stay submerged, for as Juliet fears, "If they do see thee they will murder thee" (2,2,70). In this version, we actually believe her warning. Arroyo (1997) notes that many of the scenes where love is expressed between Romeo and Juliet occur in settings that suggest enclosure and entrapment, their underwater kiss, for example, and their later love scene filmed under a sheet (p. 9). They are both trapped like the beautiful fish in Capulet's aquarium. This imagery extends to the scene where Romeo kills Tybalt and he falls dead in a splash of water, the act which ultimately seals their fate and leads to their own deaths. Water, then, assumes the dual associations of rebirth and dissolution in this film, a thematic development not seen in Shakespeare's original text.

Luhrmann does make good cinematic use of Shakespeare's imagery of light and

darkness, and, unlike Zeffirelli's softened, romantic tones, this Romeo + Juliet is ablaze with bright light, from the gaudy glitter of Mercutio's dress and Senior Capulet's sequined toga and glitter make-up, to the bright neon lights and the fireworks which announce the party as the social event of the season. In contrast to the naturalism of Zeffirelli's torchlight and candles, the light in this scene is "Too like the lightning, which doth cease to be ere one can say It lightens." Luhrmann's use of energy and electricity highlights the almost frantic, out-of-control nature of the Capulet ball as reflected through Romeo's distorted and drug-induced perceptions, against which the love between Romeo and Juliet emerges like the calm after a storm. In this context, the Friar's warning, "These violent delights have violent ends, and in their triumph die like fire and powder which as they kiss consume," takes on more immediate and literal associations. Shakespeare's gunpowder metaphor can be considered somewhat fortuitous for Luhrmann, for the equating of young love with the violence of a pistol shot lends a certain Shakespearean credence to his use of guns throughout this film, particularly in the final scene when Juliet shoots herself.

The ball and balcony scenes in both films demonstrate the directors' appropriation of Shakespeare's imagery for their own ends. In Zeffirelli's case, the stylized diction has been muted or modulated in keeping with a more naturalistic representation of young love. Zeffirelli has cut the excess in the process and introduced natural elements like the lush Italian garden and the quiet intimacy of the clasped hands to convey the the love between Romeo and Juliet. True to neo-realist conventions, Zeffirelli's version of these

scenes is also in keeping with the "back to nature" movement of the 1960's and its corresponding celebration of the spontaneity of young love. Luhrmann's postmodern take on the same scenes seems to exaggerate the very elements of Shakespeare's imagery which are toned down in Zeffirelli's version. The joyous excess in the explosive imagery of light and the extension of Shakespeare's somewhat peripheral use of water imagery tend to heighten Shakespeare's language and literalize it. As Arroyo (1997) comments, "Though Shakespeare's text doesn't leave much unsaid, the *mise en scene* excessively intensifies that which the characters are saying.. Every emotion is overdetermined" (p. 9). This somewhat 'campy' excess, a feature common to postmodern film (Arroyo 9), may be an extrapolation of a trend noted in Levenson's discussion of the performance history of Romeo and Juliet. She points out that by mid century,

> ...a large proportion of the audience for drama had become accustomed to the visual media; they depended on naturalistic action and graphic imagery to communicate a play's meaning. Their demands led inevitably to increased verisimilitude, transcription of words as pictures, and therefore reconstruction of the original script. (1987, p. 83)

The idea that even staged productions of Shakespeare were responding to the demands of a more visually oriented audience suggests that the more immersed in visual media our society becomes, the more graphic and literal these productions must become in response.

Perhaps Zeffirelli's and Luhrmann's film treatments lie along the same continuum. Levenson quotes John Fuegi, who credits Zeffirelli for helping "...to ease a too literal modern audience into an appropriate relationship with Shakespeare" (Fuegi, quoted in Levenson, p. 123). If a modern audience of the 60's was considered too literal, what might we call the postmodern audience of the 90's?

"Out of the Corset": Shakespeare Unbound

Seiler's "'Romeo & Juliet' woos and wins young audiences" quotes sample responses to the Luhrmann film from its teen audience members, and the reaction of Mark Bailey, 17, seems representative:

> I really understood what was happening in the movie.... Some of the language I didn't get, but I understood it better with the context in which they were saying it, and their faces and their body language... I still don't want to pick up a Shakespearean book. There's too much work trying to translate it. (1997, p. 2)

Bailey's comments illustrate how literal-minded a young 90's audience has become, and how foreign Shakespeare's language has become as a result. This young student understood the play solely through its visuals, "their faces and their body language". He also understands that the work of reading Shakespeare is in fact an act of "translation", which he would prefer a movie treatment to do for him. "Maybe that's the idea," Matthews (1997) reluctantly admits, "to package Shakespeare as a big, tempting box of

candy for those who won't swallow their medicine any other way" (p. 55). Bailey's response to this film encapsulates the English teacher's dilemma when introducing Shakespeare to her students. The very basic struggle with Shakespeare's antiquated language presents almost formidable obstacles to appreciation or understanding. In her introduction to the section on teaching Romeo and Juliet in the Folger Library's Shakespeare Set Free, Biondo-Hench (1993) acknowledges that the mere mention of Shakespeare's name "is likely to make a class of freshmen panic" precisely because language "can be a barrier for students" (p. 117). The sample lessons which follow are "designed to bring a distant relationship between students and blocks of intimidating lines into a meaningful dialogue" (p. 117). The very title of this volume indicates that Shakespeare's words themselves must somehow be liberated in order for this meaningful dialogue to occur. Levenson's final comments on Zeffirelli suggest that film might be the way to accomplish this:

> ...cinema allowed him to free the drama almost completely from its belletristic sources. His conversion of the poetry in this medium relieved Shakespeare's tragedy of its literary backdrop, and he could easily set the newly enfranchised words into a more up-to-date context. In the film, those words engage rarely with one another, more often glossing the composite images which now tell the story. (1987, pp. 122-123)

The enfranchising of language begun by Zeffirelli is certainly completed by Luhrmann, who according to the anonymous reviewer for the on-line Film.com, has not trashed Shakespeare but has done him a service by setting him free: "What Luhrmann has trashed is the tight corsets that have literally and symbolically stifled Shakespeare's passion and fire" (p. 1). Baker (1999) describes Luhrmann's film as "Shakespeare as it was meant to be watched" (p. 1), and the operative word, "watched", suggests that if Shakespeare is to be "set free" for a young audience of Mark Baileys, his words must first be translated into images.

The recent proliferation of on-screen Shakespearean productions has signaled a "return of the Bard," which, according to Tolson (1999), began in 1989 with Kenneth Branagh's Henry V (p, 49). Since then, Hollywood has recognized that "there might be an audience for movies based on the plays of William Shakespeare" and as profits go up, we're now "getting a plethora of iambic pentameter" (Corliss, 1996, p. 57). Paradoxically, while the academic community debates whether Shakespeare is "too dead, too white, and too male to be read at all" (Tolson, p. 48), there has emerged a growing interest in seeing his works on film. Tolson quotes Harold Bloom, whose recent book, Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human (1998), has become a best seller: "In the midst of a ruined high culture, there comes out a deep public love of Shakespeare" (Bloom, quoted in Tolson, p. 49). Bloom's comment shows how contested a territory Shakespeare has become in the high culture / popular culture debate. In his book, Bloom claims Shakespeare's works as "the universal canon" which will survive the "anti-elitist swamp

of Cultural Studies"(p. 17) simply because they are so enduring and pervasive a part of our popular culture. The truth is, Shakespeare appears resilient enough to withstand appropriation by any camp, and throughout both his performance and academic histories, has been subjected to all manner of treatments, or, in some cases, mistreatments, from his Bowdlerization in the 19th Century to his postmodernization today. Film critics like Ebert (1996) who declare that they "have never seen anything remotely approaching the mess" (p. 1) that Baz Luhrmann has made of Romeo and Juliet might do well to remember Hamlet's explanation of "the purpose of playing," which "was and is, to hold as 'twere the mirror up to nature" (3,2,21-23). Shakespeare's plays have always been a changing mirror reflecting each successive society's values and expectations. In our postmodern era, the screen has become our mirror, be it the TV screen, the movie screen, or the computer screen. "Our chorus is the media; the media is the chorus of today."

Despite Connor's injunction that "we ask, not, what does postmodernism mean?, but, what does it *do*?" (1997, p. 9), it is difficult not to ask what the postmodernization of Shakespeare means for English teachers and their students. Does it simply mirror the vacuousness of our own times? Peter and Will Brooker (1996) argue, "If some examples of postmodern art are at once scandalous and vacant, or 'merely' playful, others are innovative and deeply problematising" (p. 143). Their comments on Quentin Tarantino's Pulp Fiction might as easily be made of Luhrmann's Romeo + Juliet: "The deconstructive effect of an intertextual postmodernism is precisely to challenge distinctions between the original and authentic and true, the unified, high and centred on the one hand and the

copy, the false, the low, the supplementary and marginal on the other" (p. 143). While Luhrmann questions the cultural value of Shakespeare, and answers with a popular retelling of one of his best-loved plays, he also deeply problematises Shakespeare's language. By placing it in the here and now, he asks us what we make of it, and more importantly, what we are asking our students to make of it.

The thesis of Bloom's Shakespeare: The Invention of the Human, is that "Shakespeare will go on explaining us, in part because he invented us" (1998, p. xviii), by creating characters who could reflect on their experiences and refashion themselves. He created characters not only rounded, but interiorized, and thus helped to create our own interior selves. In this sense, "All the world's a stage," and Shakespeare created it by creating us. Within this context, he states that "Romeo and Juliet is unmatched, in Shakespeare and the world's literature, as a vision of an uncompromising mutual love that perishes of its own idealism and intensity" (p. 89). It is, quite simply, the world's guidebook on young love. In general, Bloom's awe of Shakespeare rests not so much on the language of his plays as on his creation of character. If this is where our endless fascination with Shakespeare resides, if this is the reason English teachers still teach Shakespeare, then perhaps there is still a meeting place between English teachers and the Mark Baileys we teach. If we apply Peter and Will Brooker's comments on the deconstructive effect of an intertextual postmodernism to a young audience's experience of seeing the newest Romeo + Juliet, and take Mark Bailey's response as representative of that experience, it is the characters, their feelings, actions and tragic consequences

which emerge as the true or authentic part of the story, the language not simply anachronistic, but foreign, false, untrue. While Luhrmann problematizes Shakespeare's language in this manner, his film provides evidence of Bloom's claim that we still need Shakespeare. Further, according to Tolson, Bloom believes "that we inhabitants of an increasingly virtual world find Shakespeare 'the perfect antidote' to the impersonality of the digitized existence" (1999, p. 49). Perhaps it is also true that our virtual world can help to humanize Shakespeare, especially among those living on the other side of the generation gap from their English teachers.

When the soundtrack to Romeo + Juliet was released on CD Rom, an excited student came by to tell me all about it. "It's so cool," she explained. "If you play it on your stereo, you can hear all the music from the movie, but you can also put it in your computer, and then you get the whole screenplay, plus the music, plus pictures from the movie. It's interactive. Just click whichever part you want." At that time, I had never heard of an interactive CD Rom, but the idea that students could interact with Shakespeare's words and Luhrmann's images suggested to me a kind of "meaningful dialogue" that might truly set Shakespeare free.

Chapter 6: On The Edge: Critical Literacy and Popular Culture

After sixteen years as an ELA teacher, I am finally coming to understand the necessity of teaching film in the English Language Arts classroom. It's not that I've never shown films before, but I have always used films as adjuncts to works of literature we have already studied in class, or, I'll admit, as a treat for myself and my hard-working students. It wasn't until I actually took a film course that I came to appreciate the value of film as film, not only as an art form in its own right with its own unique language, aesthetic qualities and emotional power, but also as a valuable tool for examining the social conditions that produced it and the resulting cultural mores it transmits.

These seemingly competing goals of aesthetic appreciation and critical interrogation are two of the most important goals of media studies, and I must admit to faltering over one or the other any time I have launched a media studies unit in my classroom. It is not enough simply to alert students to the dangers of "the media", a complex of cultural messages they swim in almost effortlessly and unconsciously. Students are apt to bristle at the suggestion that we know their language better than they do. Therefore, a cautionary approach to teaching the media (sometimes referred to as the inoculation model) tends to alienate students and close off fruitful areas of discussion. On the other hand, a purely aesthetic approach to film may capture the interest of a few students but can tend to coopt film into the sphere of the *object d'art,* yet another fossil to

analyze, thus severing its connection with students' daily lives and experiences. Only when these two goals are pursued in tandem, it would seem, can either one be realized.

So this year I tried again.

The Language of Film

I began by acknowledging that my students were probably more media savvy than I was, had probably seen more films, and could most likely *read* movies without even realizing they were interpreting a unique language with specific symbols, techniques and effects. To test their media know-how, I presented my classes with a series of overhead movie stills culled from film studies texts and movie ads. As predicted, they were quite adept at recognizing the effect of various camera angles, lighting techniques and spacial relationships among characters and between the characters and the camera. Together with a brief glossary of film terms, we worked through the basic elements of *mise en scene*, the director's placement of people and objects in relation to the camera within each particular frame or still picture. Once students came to accept the fact that there was a specific intention behind each various effect, it soon followed that there must be a corresponding meaning or message behind the image. I then introduced them to the basic concepts of semiotics.

If film can be said to have a unique language, semiotics may be the key to understanding how that language operates. In "Semiotics and Television", Seiter (1987) defines semiotics as the "study of everything that can be used for communication" (p. 17) or the study of signs. "Semiotics begins with this smallest unit and builds to rules for the

combination of signs and the connotative meanings produced from them" (p. 18). The sign has been described by de Saussure as "composed of two distinct parts... a *signifier*, that is, the image, object, or sound itself-- the part of the sign which has a material form-- and the *signified*, that is, the concept it represents" (Seiter, p. 18). To use an example from medicine, a symptom would be the signifier, the sign by which doctors diagnose the illness or the signified. In fact, the earliest use of the term "semiotics" comes from ancient Greek medicine and referred to the art of diagnosing disease from its symptoms (Sebeok, 1994, p. 25). If we apply this relation between signifiers and signified to all forms of communication, we can see that our understanding of reality itself has come to us through the signs that signify that reality for us. Or, as Jensen (1995) puts it, "All thinking, perception, and interaction with reality, thus, is mediated by signs" (p. 21). It follows then, that each act of perception is really an act of interpretation as we construct reality through our interpretation of the signs that signify that reality for us. The cry of an infant is the signifier— what that cry signifies, be it hunger, pain or fear— that is up to the mother to interpret. As if the act of interpretation were not complicated enough, what happens when some other agency steps between the signifier and signified? The outstretched hands of Frankenstein's creature signify confusion and need, the clasped hands of Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet signify their bond of love, the empty pillow between Polanski's Macbeths signifies their growing isolation. Unlike the crying baby, however, these signs have been interpreted or mediated for us— someone else has come between the signifier and the signified, and that something is the camera which shows us

what it wants us to see. The Ontario Ministry of Education (1989) makes this point in its resource guide, Media Literacy:

> All of us have a "construct", the picture we have built up in our heads since birth, of what the world is and how it works. It is a model based on the sense we have made of all our observations and experiences. When, however, a major part of those observations and experiences come to us pre-constructed by the media, with attitudes, interpretations, and conclusions already built in, then the media, rather than we ourselves, are constructing our reality. (p. 8)

Without, for the moment, asking students to consider all the implications behind the understanding that all media are constructions of reality, I was hoping to encourage them to consider images as combinations of signifiers to be read and interpreted. Students demonstrated their understanding of these basic concepts by choosing an image from a newspaper or magazine (many chose ads for current movies), and deconstructing the image for themselves. I posted their images and deconstructions as a visual glossary for future reference, anxious to see how well their new awareness would translate to the next stage, moving pictures.

Choosing Popular Culture

I remember my sincere but rather misguided attempts to teach Il Postino to a class of Senior 4 Literature students a few years ago. They failed to see the charm and subtlety

that had so engaged my interest, and I doubt that it prompted any of them to seek out the poetry of Pablo Neruda. Oh well, maybe it worked for a few of them. The rest were annoyed that I hadn't allowed them to watch Fargo instead. My purpose then, purely aesthetic appreciation, seemed to call for a film that was more arty— by making a somewhat arbitrary distinction between "film" and "movies", I was permitting only certain types of movies into the classroom for serious discussion. My purpose now, however, was to discover, along with my students, the art and artistry in the popular culture that surrounds them, so this year I was determined to find a movie that was more accessible, something a group of students might well choose to watch on their own for pure entertainment. Considering that I had a group of predominantly male students in my Senior 4 class, I chose the movie The Edge (1997), a well-told adventure story of survival in the Alaskan wilderness starring Anthony Hopkins and Alec Baldwin, and featuring a Kodiak bear named Bart. I hoped students would realize that even a movie whose sole purpose is to keep the audience on "the edge" of suspense, is a carefully constructed story which can be appreciated for its craft, but which also conveys cultural values that are subject to discussion and critique.

Briefly, the movie focuses on two men, Charles Morse (Hopkins), a wealthy business man married to Mickey, a young beautiful supermodel played by Elle MacPhersen, (coincidentally a young beautiful supermodel). He decides to join her on a photo shoot in Alaska along with her photographer Robert Green (Baldwin) and various assistants. What becomes immediately evident to the audience and to Charles Morse, is

that his wife is having an affair with Robert Green. When Green decides to fly out in search of an authentic Native hunter to add realism to his shoot, Morse joins him and his assistant, Steve. The small plane crashes, leaving Charles, Robert, and Steve to find their way back to the main lodge. The search becomes a desperate struggle for survival as they are hunted by a bear and finally by each other.

Pressing Pause

After viewing the first forty minutes of the movie, we stopped to consider how the film set up the rivalry between Charles and Robert and established their characters. Although students cringed as I pressed the pause button, a break in the illusion of reality created by the film, their perceptive comments showed that they were actively and critically engaged. When Mickey first steps out of the plane owned by her millionaire husband, I paused to ask them what they observed. Surrounded by people dressed in drab colors, she is the only character wearing a bright green jacket, signifying her role as the prized possession of Charles Morse. This idea is confirmed by the comment of another pilot observing to Morse, "What I wouldn't give to get my hands on her." It turns out he is referring to Charles's plane, but Charles's rather suspicious reaction sets up his role as the jealous husband. I asked students to watch for the ways in which the characters were tested throughout the film, and the first few tests of Charles Morse provided important clues to his character as well as foreshadowing future events in the story. The lodge owner, impressed by Charles's academic knowledge of the wilderness, holds up a Cree paddle with a picture of a panther on one side, and asks him what is on the other. Charles

correctly answers, a rabbit smoking a pipe. "And why is he smoking a pipe?" someone asks. "Because he knows he's smarter than the panther," replies Charles. Students interpreted the panther and rabbit as symbols for the two rivals, Robert and Charles. Although Robert is younger, stronger and clearly the predator, Charles is the smarter of the two. The birthday surprise they play on Charles later that evening reinforces the nature of this rivalry. As Charles is in the kitchen preparing a midnight snack for his wife, he becomes nervous about the threat of bear attacks. But the only attack is from Robert draped in a bear hide. The mock attack foreshadows a later attack by a live bear, but also hints at Green's future attack on Morse. After the first forty minutes of the film, students observed that Charles passed all of his tests with intelligence and good humor, while Green showed the pettiness in his nature and the hostility lurking just below the surface. By the time their plane crashes into the lake, both Charles Morse and the audience know that Green wants to kill him. The only question is how.

Taking Note of Character

As the movie proceeded, I asked students to keep track of the tests each major character had to face. These notes would form the basis of a later character sketch. Charles, predictably, passes every test, whereas Robert fails repeatedly. For example, when their plane crashes in the water, Robert struggles to save himself and is first out of the water. Charles, however, stops to free Steve and even shows the foresight to bring his bag of flares and other supplies. When Steve injures himself, Charles takes care of him and asks Robert to bury the blood soaked rags. Instead, Robert hangs them on a tree,

luring the bear who attacks and kills the helpless Steve.

In addition to noting the actions of the characters, I asked students to notice the mise en scene in various shots. Students noted how often Charles was filmed standing while the other two were shot sitting or lying down, emphasizing his alertness and natural leadership in a crisis. After Charles and Robert finally kill the bear, students were struck by the shot of the two men looking like great white hunters from Nanook of the North, clothed in bear hide, carrying spears, and sporting their trophy bear teeth around their necks, all signifying their triumph over the wilderness. Once the two characters are close to safety at an abandoned hunter's cabin, Robert takes the gun he finds there and decides to kill Charles. But like the bear he is, he stumbles into a deadfall and is impaled on a sharp stick. Instead of letting him die, however, Charles tries valiantly to save his life, and when Robert asks him why, he replies that he likes a challenge. Despite his efforts, Robert Green dies, but he dies repentant just as the search and rescue helicopter circles overhead. The music swirls to an emotional climax along with the swirling helicopter, and Charles is returned to his somewhat chastened wife. Students were clearly moved by the ending. They loved the character of Charles and all determined to write about him for their character sketch as proof that character is destiny.

And Now For The Hard Part...

Teaching The Edge has taught me many things. I couldn't help but observe students' enthusiasm for the film and their thoughtful engagement with the characters. Through the medium of film, students were able to discuss elements of narrative,

foreshadowing, character development and all manner of symbolism with an independence of thought which, frankly, I had not seen in their discussion of literary texts. In addition, they were able to discuss features unique to visual media in terms of mise en scene with a sophistication that was truly gratifying. In short, a success. To this point, we had discussed the aesthetics of film, and students seemed quite content to write their character sketches and leave it at that. But we still hadn't addressed the values this film assumes and transmits— the thorny issue of ideology.

One of the goals of media literacy according to Manitoba's Senior 1 English language arts: Manitoba curriculum framework of outcomes and senior 1 standards is for students to "recognize, analyze, and respond to ways in which media texts reconstruct reality and influence their perceptions of themselves and others" (1996, p. 6). The Edge provides an excellent example of how texts of popular culture mediate our reality and perceptions, our taken-for-granted understandings of how the world works, and without denying the popular appeal of this movie, I hoped to provide my students with a means of critiquing its representations of gender, race, and class.

Here again, it was necessary to remind students that all media are constructions of reality, not simply mirrors held up to nature as unmediated reflections. The point seems all the more important and difficult to make when we become absorbed by the strength of the narrative and the verisimilitude of film. In "Narration and Narrativity In Film", Scholes (1985) discusses the power of story to overwhelm an audience's critical faculties:

> A feature of narrativity is our desire to abandon certain dimensions of existence... and place ourselves under the illusionary guidance of a maker of narratives, upon whom we rely because we respect his powers. There is something very undemocratic about all this, and uncritical as well. Criticism begins when narrativity ceases. (p. 397)

Although we put ourselves in this uncritical position whenever we read a story, the fact that we are actually attending to words in a text reinforces the artificiality or "fictionality" of the story we are reading. When the story is presented visually, however, "the achieved fiction is *there* with a specificity which the printed text alone can never hope to match" (Scholes, 1985, p. 392). This narrows or restricts the potential for critical interpretation because the material has been, in a sense, read for us. The point is somewhat paradoxical— when the story is presented visually, it has been subject to further interpretation by the director, and the audience receives a pre-packaged version of the story instead of the story we may construct for ourselves in our engagement with that same story in print. Yet, "film, because it excels all other narrative media in its rendition of material objects and the actions of creatures, is the closest to actuality, to undifferentiated thoughtless experience" (Scholes, p. 403). This paradox captures the pleasure and the danger of engaging uncritically in the visual media— we can become so engaged in a story that on some level, we forget it is a story. I certainly saw this phenomenon in my students' experience of watching The Edge. But where is the danger

in that?

The Ideology of The Edge

In Media Culture, Kellner (1995) claims that "media spectacles hide the ideological content whereby fast editing, dazzling high-tech images, and narrative excitement overwhelm the viewer's critical faculties, thus subliminally conveying the ideologies through images and spectacle" (p. 69). What ideologies had my students uncritically accepted through their viewing of The Edge? I began by asking how the female characters were portrayed in this movie. Students were initially reluctant to address this question, arguing that this was a guy movie, an action movie, not a girl movie. I asked students to question that assumption. Why wasn't Mickey along as part of the trek through the wilderness? In a class of predominantly male students, I was grateful for the reactions of the few female students who echoed my question and answered it by saying that women are rarely along for the exciting parts. "But that's not the kind of movie it is," the guys insisted. Movies also speak through their silences and omissions, a point to which feminist film critics have alerted us, and this movie is certainly absent of any realistic representation of female characters.

How, then, *is* Mickey portrayed? Our first sight of her in the green jacket coupled with Charles's confusion when the other pilot says, "What I wouldn't give to get my hands on her," shows that Mickey is as much a possession of the millionaire Charles Morse as is his airplane. Students noted how seldom her name is mentioned in the film. Instead, she is referred to in discussions as "my wife" or "your wife". In Charles's

declaration of love to Mickey, he tells her, "You're the only *thing* I've ever wanted," in other words, a rich man's indulgence. The fact that she is a beautiful fashion model underscores her portrayal as an object of desire, an object rather than a fully realized character. I asked students if any of them had noticed this as they initially watched the film. The young women in my class definitely did. The young men, however, were feeling somewhat defensive. "Are you saying this is a bad movie?" one student asked. I could only answer no, not a bad movie, but perhaps a typical one in terms of its representation of women. Students came to the agreement that if every movie portrayed women the way this one had, we would be receiving a false and unfair depiction of women.

I was curious to see what students from diverse ethnic and racial backgrounds had noticed about the representation of race in the portrayal of Steve, the young black assistant played by Harold Perrineau. The character of Steve in no way presents a blatantly negative racial stereotype. He is an attractive character with wit and charm. Yet, I asked my students, how often is he portrayed as childlike, helpless or incompetent? Students found numerous examples. He is trapped in the plane and needs to be rescued. He is tired and develops a stitch in his side, for which Charles provides an old native cure: go find a smooth stone and spit under it. Both Charles and Robert realize the cure works because it allows Steve to slow down, stretch and catch his breath, implying a certain condescension toward the child-like Steve who is simply happy that the mysterious cure has done the trick. And so it continues. To keep Steve's mind occupied

after they have escaped the bear and become hopelessly lost, Charles gives him his knife, a symbol of self-reliance in this movie, and tells him to make a spear, during which operation Steve ineptly cuts himself in the leg. Consequently, he dies the victim of Bart the Bear. A final example noted by one of my students— in a film where Robert Green is invariably at the head of the group and the first to run from danger, he allows Steve to precede him across the tree which they have pushed over a ravine in order to escape the bear. One student wondered whether Steve had to go first to make sure the tree held.

Some students resisted this portrayal of Steve as a racial stereotype by offering the possibility that any actor, black or white, could have played his part. Did the role especially call for a black actor? I suspect it did, as did some students in my class, but the question wasn't entirely resolved because I didn't know. A student from South America stayed after class to tell me about the racial stereotyping of Spanish speaking people he had noticed on television since moving to Canada. At least our airing of the issues of representation of gender and race invited students to question the ways in which our reality is mediated for us through film and to make a personal connection to their own experiences and observations.

The final ideological assumption this film makes relates to the tremendous appeal of Charles Morse. Our hero is both clever and compassionate, and our sympathies are with him throughout. If a rich person wanted you to see a film that represented rich people in a positive way, I suggested, wouldn't this be the one to see? We are never told how Charles makes his millions, but we are left to assume that he deserves them.

Although Robert often comments on Charles's wealth and privilege, Robert's character is so lacking in credibility that the effect on the audience is one of total sympathy and respect for Charles. In fact, both Steve and Robert are won over by his kindness and accede to his innate superiority. "You know, Charles, you're alright," the wounded Steve says just before he is eaten by the bear. And Robert Green admits that Charles's wife had nothing to do with his plan to kill Charles, as if returning the prize to its rightful owner. Throughout this movie, Charles's superior status is legitimized by the tests of his character which he passes with humility and grace, particularly in his words to reporters on his safe return to civilization. "And what about your friends?" one reporter asks. "How did they die?" "They died saving my life," he responds, and in a sense this is true, for their deaths have validated his life of wealth and privilege. Again, if a rich person wanted people to see a positive portrayal of the rich, wouldn't this be the movie to see? One student suggested that I was making Charles out to be the bad guy. The point, of course, is that he's the good guy, and while I was trying to make this point, another student jumped in: "It's sort of like Nike— they want us to have a good image of them so we'll buy their stuff, but meanwhile they're exploiting workers in developing countries so that they can make their millions." Only we never find out how Charles Morse made his millions, another example of how movies speak through their silences.

Kellner (1995) defines ideology as "part of a system of domination which serves to further oppression by legitimating forces and institutions that repress and oppress people" (p. 61). The disarming character of Charles Morse "justifies the domination of

one gender, race, and class over others by virtue of [his] alleged superiority, or the natural order of things" (p. 61). Underneath the suspense of the story, the interest of the characters, and the almost total emotional absorption the experience of viewing this movie provides, we are given portrayals of gender, race and class that could easily pass unnoticed but that students felt uncomfortable with once they had paused to consider them. As a teacher, I must at some point play the role of spoiler, press the pause button, and, without denigrating the students' initially positive response to this movie, ask the questions that would otherwise go unasked.

Media Literacy is Critical Literacy

Throughout my teaching of The Edge, I was mindful of the warning to teachers in the Ontario Ministry of Education's guide to media literacy: "It is important to stress the positive features of the mass media rather than to dwell at length on the negative" (1989, p. 12). The role of the teacher is not to pass judgement on popular culture but to "empower students to discover meaning on their own, thus giving them critical autonomy" (p. 12). So, has the experience of studying The Edge sharpened my students' skills of critical literacy? I had my answer one Monday morning from a student who'd gone to the movies over the weekend. "Thanks a lot," he said, with more than a hint of sarcasm. "Can I ever watch a movie for fun anymore? No, now I'm always noticing things."

Mission accomplished.

Postmodern Conclusions

> ... it is from this point properly, that the story of my Life and my Opinions sets out; with all my hurry and precipitation, I have but been clearing the ground to raise the building— and such a building do I foresee it will turn out, as never was planned, and as never was executed since Adam. In less than five minutes I shall have thrown my pen into the fire, and the little drop of thick ink which is left remaining at the bottom of my ink-horn, after it— I have but half a score things to do in the time... (Sterne, 1767, p. 332)

Mission accomplished? Hardly. Like poor Tristam Shandy, I feel I have thus far but been clearing the ground to raise the building. If my chapter on teaching The Edge suggests some terminus, a point at which my teaching has finally caught up with the ephemera of my students' lives and made sense of the ways in which popular culture mediates their experience, then I have fallen prey to one of the worst dangers possible when conducting narrative inquiry according to Connelly and Clandinin (1991), the Hollywood plot, "where everything works out well in the end" (p. 142). Not only could I be accused of succumbing to the temptations of the Hollywood plot, but also of the recuperative Hollywood ending, which, as in the case of the 1931 Frankenstein, smooths over whatever wounds have been opened while denying that the patient has bled to death. Connelly and Clandinin call this "narrative smoothing", "a process that goes on all the

time in narrative both during data collection and writing" (p. 142). They suggest that the way to deal with this problem is to balance what has been smoothed with "what is obscured in the smoothing for narrative purposes" (p. 142). "To acknowledge narrative smoothing," they maintain, "is to open another door for the reader" (p. 142) which inevitably exposes uncomfortable narrative secrets that could lead to alternative or even contradictory readings.

The Tyranny of the Text

What has been smoothed here is not so much the narrative flow of my classroom experience, which I have presented as faithfully as possible, but rather the suggestion that I have successfully straddled the horse of cultural studies and can now ride happily into the sunset. It seems instead that the horse has ridden off without me, leaving me here with my videos which stand almost indistinguishably alongside the other books on my shelf. They are texts as surely as any other texts I have ever read and interpreted. Everything and anything, it seems, can be turned into texts for interpretation in the classroom, co-opted into the procedures that have for so long defined the study of literature. In Postmodernist Culture, Steven Connor (1997) attributes the institutional stability of the paradigm of literary studies to its "extreme adaptability", noting that while it has "been threatened to a certain degree by such loosening definitions of what 'literature', the cohering object of [its] activity, really is," it maintains an "extraordinary capacity to assimilate such intellectual challenges and mobilize them in its own interests" (p. 133). Noting that the discipline of English has been able to "survive and even to

thrive on such apparently lethal doses of radical theory," Connor argues that now literary studies is actively "looking for ways to diversify into the areas which had previously provided [it] with so much theoretical capital, like philosophy and cultural studies" (p. 133). The ability of the paradigm of literary studies to change in this way could be seen as an asset, suggesting an internal mechanism which allows for growth and metamorphosis within its general framework in the same way that Manitoba's new curriculum documents account for viewing and representing as valid and necessary practices within the language arts classroom. But one gets the feeling that Connor is pointing to a slightly different trend, namely that literary studies functions as a recuperative agent for absorbing the challenges to its institutional authority and turning them into further grist for the interpretive mill. Narrative smoothing indeed.

Robert Morgan (1996) addresses this issue as it relates to the teaching of media in "PanTextualism, Everyday Life and Media Education". Morgan's claim that "textual decoding is the reigning pedagogical genre of secondary Media Education" (p. 15) is difficult to dispute; in fact, one might wonder what else *could* be. This "will to interpretation" (p. 16), the hermeneutic turn of mind which characterizes much of my work in this thesis and in my classroom practice, is, however, the very process he problematizes in his article. As Morgan asserts, whenever we pull a media 'text' out of its "larger discursive matrix" (p. 17), that is, the flow within which it is normally experienced by our students, we turn it into something else, the object of interpretive analysis, a thing to study in the classroom. As if to answer Connor's point about the

adaptability of the paradigm of literary studies, Morgan asks, "Why... has English been so hospitable to Media Education if it is not precisely because it has turned everything into texts?" (p. 18). Instead of seeing television, for instance, as "a machine churning out endless texts", Morgan maintains that "it is a social resource viewers draw upon to make meanings, not just from its texts per se, but from its intersection with their daily lives" (p. 21). It is this "quotidian" nature of media experience that seems to elude us in our approaches to media education. Are we doomed to deal only with the "afterlife of media experience" (p. 22) which then become texts for classroom study, or as Morgan puts it, "static props in a disciplinary theatre of interpretation" (p. 29)?

Antony Easthope (1991) addresses this question in part by making an appeal for using the contemporary as the starting point for cultural studies:

> ... cultural studies must take the contemporary as its point of departure— this morning's issue of the Sun newspaper, this month's television programme, this year's Hollywood blockbuster— in studying an object which is always changing. It thus necessarily confronts the history of popular culture as always in process as construction, innovation, reconstruction. (p. 168)

Even so, Easthope makes the point that "all texts are historical texts even if they were only produced yesterday" (p. 157), thus allowing that the process of considering the contemporary in the classroom still entails removing texts from their immediate media

context and submitting them to a process that differs from the way they would otherwise be experienced by students. For Easthope, the object of cultural studies "consists in part of texts... lived within the everyday but then submitted to reconstruction in academic analysis" (p. 172). It seems difficult to conceive of anyplace outside the text from which to approach our study of culture.

Morgan proposes that while texts "are the 'nouns' of discursive activity", we need to "shift our attention to the verbing of culture" (p. 22) by adopting a "performative approach to media" (p. 26), which "sees both texts and the practices which situate them as far more ambiguous and indeterminate than ideology critique does" (p. 26). Instead of starting from the text, then, Morgan suggests beginning somewhere other than the text--"bringing things home" for students by exploring the role the media plays in their everyday lives. Instead of the "key concepts" or survey of media genres approach like that advocated by Ontario's Media Studies curriculum, a "reinvented media pedagogy" would involve "local and community dynamics" (p. 28), and a fuller understanding of the embeddedness of media in the daily lives of our students.

In "Television, Space, Education: rethinking relations between schools and media," Morgan (1995) elaborates on the difference between students' real experience of television and the experience of media offered by teachers in the classroom: "Students relate to [media] not simply as messages to be cognitively precessed in terms of rational claims and or emotional appeals (a frequent media literacy strategy), but as habitats to temporarily live within" (p. 44). The notion of temporarily living within a televisual

world is supported by the phenomenon whereby television makes "specific locations 'more real' by virtue of their televisual presence or analogue" (p. 43), the "as-seen-on-TV" stamp of approval which legitimizes reality through its reflection on the tube. Soon, "stock dichotomies of the representational paradigm— authentic over artificial, original vs copy, 'live' opposed to the 'vicarious'-- become muddied, if not actively inverted" (p. 43). This is a phenomenon I noted in my chapter on Romeo and Juliet, where students felt the 1996 postmodern film version was somehow more "real" than the 1960's version, possibly because it utilized so many of the conventions of contemporary film and television that they had been accustomed to inhabiting. If television has become for my students more real than reality itself, and Luhrmann's film mirrors who they are *within* the television world they inhabit, then the artificial has become the authentic version of their experience.

By comparison, the real world must seem somewhat banal to my students, especially when so much of it is lived within the four walls of the classroom. When one considers that "media realign adolescent identities around other cultural forms and priorities than those promoted by schooling" (Morgan, 1995, p. 51), the classroom begins to look like a rather impoverished place:

> Once rich in stimuli, the classroom becomes relatively barren, a sub-category of students' perceptual options, centred as it is on antediluvian technologies; the human voice, chalk, paper and slate. The dynamic flows of information and

imagery students encounter in their substantial other lives make it no match for the no place / every-place of TV. (p. 51)

Postmodern Classroom, Postmodern Text

Once we have acknowledged these truths about the pervasiveness of television and other visual media in the daily lives of our students, how are we to proceed, we who work every day in the "barren" classroom Morgan describes? No amount of "narrative smoothing", it would seem, takes us out of this place or helps to wrest these questions to the ground. Morgan (1995) concludes his article by recommending that we theorize these questions further, namely "the local, material and geographic structures affecting students' lives; their more fluid engagements with the identities and discursive topographies on offer in media; and finally, the affiliational discourses and bodily inscriptions staged by school discipline and curricula" (p. 54). The postmodern classroom itself must be reconceptualized as a more fluid and dynamic environment which provides students not only with opportunities to view and interpret the texts of our culture, but to create them as well. Although Morgan (1996) concedes that "textual analysis...[has] its place and power... it often seems to be the only game in town" (p. 29). The game he advocates, that of putting "culture into motion" (p. 29) suggests something beyond the critique of representation that I have moved toward in the process of researching this thesis. But what exactly would this look like in the classroom, this verbing of culture which Morgan recommends?

In "English in Its Postmodern Circumstances", Gary Griest (1992) imagines what the postmodern language arts classroom might look like given the confluence of a variety of trends which converge on our discipline. Firstly, he maintains the "need to dismantle the apartheid that exists between the academic study of literature and popular enjoyment of the media, between canon-blessed works of imaginative literature and narratives that blast allegories and blur genres in the true postmodern curriculum of popular culture" (p. 15). As long as we "go on performing as good citizens of the sovereign word" (p. 15), we miss the potentials that exciting new technologies present for refiguring our notions of text. At a time when "it has become common practice to join blocks of text with electronic links and add sound, images, video, and other forms of data— an age in which it is getting increasingly difficult to separate textual literacy from visual, computer, or media literacy" (p. 15), our current notions of text simply cannot hold. Griest foresees a metamorphosis from the 19th century museum piece that is the typical language arts classroom to something "more like a studio, perhaps a discourse studio, or even a place in which literature is seen as an earlier form of virtual reality" (p. 16). Instead of basing our authority as language arts teachers on a literary tradition, we must vest our authority in our ability to mediate "conditions that are inter*text*ual, con*text*ual, and hyper*text*ual" (p. 16). The postmodern English classroom would combine "making meaning from texts with *making* texts, critical viewing, and the hands-on production of multimedia presentations" (p. 17). I imagine the endlessly suggestive term, the "verbing of culture", to comprise of many of the features Griest envisions, integrating word and image, page

and screen, high and popular culture, in ways that we have yet to realize in our antediluvian classrooms. "Such a building do I foresee it will turn out, as never was planned, and as never was executed since Adam."

Meanwhile, back in the "swamplands of practice" (p. 15), as Griest refers to the language-arts classroom most of us still inhabit, while I contemplate what a classroom without text might look like, some of my colleagues still argue over whether film can actually be considered as text. Does it really have a place in the literature classroom? I say this not out of disrespect for my teaching colleagues, who struggle daily with the competing orthodoxies of word and image, but perhaps to remind myself of how far I have come in my own accommodations between the two as equally valid forms of signifying practice. I believe my own reconceptualization as a language arts teacher may have almost caught up to Manitoba's new curriculum. The final Senior 4 documents have yet to be completed, and we await the reconfiguration of the Senior 4 electives. It has been proposed that the literature elective, considered to be the last holdout of traditional literary studies in the secondary language arts classroom, be renamed "Contemporary Literature and Society," a title that implies further movement toward the paradigm of cultural studies as conceptualized by Easthope and others. The framing of the word "literature" by the words "contemporary" and "society" strikes a pleasing symmetry and signifies a role for literature in a reconstituted cultural studies paradigm that breathes a whole new life into our practice, "giving literature wings instead of weights, letting it go back into the world" (Griest, 1992, p. 15).

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