

Cinephrastics

Kathleen Ossip

For Muriel

The Godfather: Part III

Now that the mother-child bond is
slackened by multiple caregivers,
Freud is passing away like God
did. Good novels make moribund
movies. Middling novels make good
movies. No novels: bad movies.
The only dead novels: good movies.
Never make two when you can make three.
Might I but mourn tonight in thee!

Far from Heaven

takes place during the War of the
Flowers, darkskinned vs. lightskinned,
the petals like human faces,
flurrying. Now in the course of
the flurry, lucent petals change
to bakelite, then to cruel iron.

"One battle too many," says she,
and the befuddled lay down arms,
thunderstruck in the colonnade.

Mulholland Drive

A popstar's a trunk in which vision's
buried. That shrill almost-beauty begs
exegetes. Certain songs, events, films
corrode, and *never become gestures*
(Ashbery). In a thrust is such pleasure.
To die in her armpits, high octane!
But the song's peppy, not compelling.
Exiting the ER, the gale took
up my petticoats, or would have if.

Chicago

On murder we can all agree,
agree the world's great religions.
She wore black velvet, a sweet-
heart neckline. A zit effloresced
with a loveme loveme subtext.
Quoting a soccer dad: Come on,
come *on*, we're going for the college
scholarship. They must be against
life so to hate happiness.

Finding Nemo

The little one leapt from the pile
with wriggling force, gills quivering,
toward the white light, about to
burst with his vision... so much for
crypto-mythical shadowings!
If you see a dogfish, pet it.
If you see a foodflake, get it.
A bit of swish, a bit of pluck
floats you to the estuary
of the unbeatable gerund.

Lilja 4-Ever

Unsafe. It being her dearest
wish to sing harmony, she has
dishonored the family joy.
A pretty face can rent a pad.
A ponytail will pay the bus.
A jet liner rights itself, the
passengers pray to go down, and
fast. Skank me not, regard me not.
Or end up bare on Said-So Row.

The Royal Tenenbaums

The price of real estate burns us all.
Replete with symbolic capital,
we conjured a chatelaine, brunette,
her silverplated scissors hinting
at replenishing the irises,
long-bearded and brown and spooky, and
the debate a hip one, phrases like
ice. Came a warm day, we were as gods.
But a sulky night, puke moon, horndog.

Lost in Translation

Not so far from a Marc Jacobs
perfume ad. However, give me
Tokyo and Elvis C. and I'm
contented. Sex symbol =
Pizza face? Girls get younger and
younger; this, too, a threat. The dark
outside is genderless. Shadows
whisper from the monoliths, shells
open. I would like to be in
bed with some congenial person.

Capturing the Friedmans

Mothers are smarter, calmer, braver
after the birth event, but the same
cannot be said of dad. The Caesars
foundered on the basics: empathy
compassion, like that. A squint of tears,
a range of pearlescent effects, a
true lyric hook—these the thick-skinned will
never understand. Why encourage
the cult of the middle initial,
the craze for the nine-digit zip code?

The Importance of Being Earnest (2002)

I felt like I had been abandoned
in a handbag. I was sick and no
one said "Feel better." A child can be
scarred for life, I thought, and the life less
than normal. What a childhating world,
I thought, or selfhating. For all of
us those 27 inches call
at times: from abandonment to the
place of true ease. And I am earnest,
am I not? Signed, the Divine Kathy.

The Man from Elysian Fields

WTF? This is someone's special vision, someone who prizes himself as quirky. A lapse of impression: not art, not pop, a product that won't linger. With trying people (i.e, all of them), what often works is to state in blunt terms the starkest facts: "You're feeling bored and need to go home." Broad brows, brown brows, locker room by Armani. (Oh Jagger mine.)

In America

First choose a story: your story. But
wait: make your brother your son. (Clutch at
suffering not even your own.) There
must be hardships, they must be over-
come, except for the few that can't be.
Child finds peace in the arms of a gay man,
siblings coin the word "groanups." Old tropes,
old cadences. "Walking on Sunshine"
enlarges the proceedings. Damn mick
sentimentality: it's in me.

Sylvia

Aurelia was anxiously cultured,
the sort of woman who believes literature will save her socially,
the kind of mother for whom a poem
is worth club dues. Danner's portrayal
of a snooty, haute bourgeoisie grande dame's
impossibly false. Since character must
always boil down to mother (and class),
this film's *not* about Sylvia Plath.
(But: the poet beside me, weeping.)

Ocean's Eleven

There are some artists I will follow
anywhere, but I've never been to
Vegas. Diction is key: language is
no one-size-fits-all product. A drive,
vitality, voice. (Julia, silver lame's
the wrong tone.) All style, angular but
well-upholstered. The element of
surprise, as a strategy, it seems
familiar. Lots of goodlooking men
and death doable, like a milkshake.

Ella Enchanted

Power politics get played out in bed.
Heaven's a place on your side of the bed.
Fantasy is best carried out in bed.
Little in the head means more in the bed.
Lime zest, dahlias: scatter them on the bed.
The landscape spread like the bounciest bed.
After a quest nothing's better than bed.
At last, even giants go home to bed.
Who'd think a prince would be uptight in bed?
A carefree certitude's just right in bed.

The House of Mirth

has been turned into a work about
passion instead of money. The rich
pearls, the heaving. Wharton was a female
novelist I had thought good. How did
she do it, with each dip in the spiral--
socialite, hired companion, seamstress,
chloral fiend, corpse—we have hopes, and know
nothing will come of them. Drugged breath stirs
fibers of fur. What should she have done?
Married the first man who would have her.

The Stepford Wives (2004)

Better spacey than shy. Better dead
than plain. Better funny than pensive.
Better wild than free. Better shrewd than
weak. Better unsubtle than uncool.
Better sick headache than brain tumor.
Better someone else than no one at
all. In this town you prove yourself o-
ver and over and over again.
Look, here's the real victim. No, there's the
real victim. A fraud is uncovered.

Mystic River

Seize now the story: then, tragic
was kings. (The critics get off on
what they see, cistern, cocked gun, a
minor key.) Sell now the glory:
Woul'da shoo'ken, wou'dna shak'en.
In that quarter of duplexes,
the thrill of the stoop, snow lies like
an oaf, an unwilling guy. To
metaphorize snow, rather than
guy. Reverse of the red red rose.

Monster

She spat on the rink. Twigs spasmed
in the air. How they just met each
other. How they talked as if they
deserved to talk, even with a
brutal wedgie and a wart on
the toe. What I think I believe:
1. She had an orchid prairie
skirt. 2. In her head played the songs
she loved. 3. A Rosalind, a
Celia? 4. Shakespeare held his breath.

The Fog of War

Health crackling like fur, the mercury
in his teeth seething, he sniffed pepper
in the air: snow was coming. He saw
birch trees and itched to skin them. And yes,
he had, at school, called Francis Herring
a pansy. He picked up a plant pod,
minute, snail-shaped: Here was manifest
prodigality! Whereas he, Mac,
preferred charm. Charm that would, to make a
Father's Day present, skin a birch tree.

The Sorrow and the Pity

Reality—truth, call it—has a most interesting texture. It is not slick nor rough. Not velvet. It neither casts down nor buoys up, but settles, unnoticed. We summon reality by being quiet. We don't impose something extra on it—we might call that judgment (signaled by adjectives). It's not easy to be quiet beyond a certain duration. Thirty seconds is a lifetime of ash.

Fahrenheit 911

Why, in my dream, did Moore and Bush know each other well, as if they had been children together? Do I feel they're akin? Do *I* feel akin to each, and therefore need to integrate them? Indecision ain't an option in these times, said my old philosophy professor. Will we stare down battle, torture, sudden death? The answer glints like turquoise, that is, not at all.

Home on the Range

Udderly dull. I have to wonder,
why this need to produce bad dull art?
Dull high art, certainly. Bad fun trash,
by all means. But to forego splendor
and pop? My daughter recognizes
Judi Dench as a cow; which repays
the two hours wasted, the vile snacks--
that and her soft fierce mind whirring next
to mine in the dark. And so I re-
turn to my themes: vision, mother, art.

The Films

The Godfather: Part III (1990). Directed by Frances Ford Coppola. Starring Al Pacino, Diane Keaton, Andy Garcia, Sofia Coppola.

Far from Heaven (2002). Directed by Todd Haynes. Starring Julianne Moore, Dennis Quaid, Dennis Haysbert.

Mulholland Drive (2001). Directed by David Lynch. Starring Naomi Watts, Laura Harring.

Chicago (2002). Directed by Rob Marshall. Starring Renee Zellweger, Richard Gere, Catherine Zeta-Jones.

Finding Nemo (2003). Directed by Andrew Stanton and Lee Unkrich. Featuring the voices of Albert Brooks and Ellen DeGeneres.

Lilja 4-Ever (2002). Directed by Lukas Moodysson. Starring Oksana Akinshina, Artyom Bogucharsky.

The Royal Tenenbaums (2001). Directed by Wes Anderson. Starring Gene Hackman, Anjelica Huston, Gwyneth Paltrow, Ben Stiller, Luke Wilson.

Lost in Translation (2003). Directed by Sofia Coppola. Starring Scarlett Johansson, Bill Murray.

The Hours (2002). Directed by Stephen Daldry. Starring Nicole Kidman, Meryl Streep, Julianne Moore.

Capturing the Friedmans (2003). Directed by Andrew Jarecki. Documentary about a Long Island family and accusations of child abuse.

The Importance of Being Earnest (2002). Directed by Oliver Parker. Starring Rupert Everett, Colin Firth, Frances O'Connor, Reese Witherspoon, Judi Dench.

The Man from Elysian Fields (2001). Directed by George Hickenlooper. Starring Andy Garcia, Mick Jagger, Julianna Margulies, Olivia Williams, James Coburn.

In America (2002). Directed by Jim Sheridan. Starring Paddy Considine, Samantha Morton, Djimon Hounsou.

Sylvia (2003). Directed by Christine Jeffs. Starring Gwyneth Paltrow, Daniel Craig, Blythe Danner.

Ocean's Eleven (2001). Directed by Steven Soderbergh. Starring George Clooney, Brad Pitt, Julia Roberts, Andy Garcia.

Ella Enchanted (2004). Directed by Tommy O'Haver. Starring Anne Hathaway, Hugh Dancy, Cary Elwes, Minnie Driver.

The House of Mirth (2000). Directed by Terence Davies. Starring Gillian Anderson, Dan Aykroyd, Anthony La Paglia, Laura Linney, Eric Stoltz.

The Stepford Wives (2004). Directed by Frank Oz. Starring Nicole Kidman, Matthew Broderick, Bette Midler, Glenn Close.

Mystic River (2003). Directed by Clint Eastwood. Starring Sean Penn, Tim Robbins, Kevin Bacon.

Monster (2003). Directed by Patty Jenkins. Starring Charlize Theron, Christina Ricci.

The Fog of War: Eleven Lessons from the Life of Robert S. McNamara (2003). Directed by Errol Morris. Documentary about McNamara's work in the Kennedy and Johnson administrations during the Vietnam War.

The Sorrow and the Pity (Le Chagrin et la pitié) (1969). Directed by Marcel Ophuls. Documentary about French collaboration and resistance during World War II.

Fahrenheit 911 (2004). Directed by Michael Moore.

Home on the Range (2004). Directed by Will Finn and John Sanford. Featuring the voices of Roseanne and Judi Dench.

Acknowledgments

The following journals first published these poems:

Court Green: "The Hours," "Lost in Translation," "Capturing the Friedmans"

LIT: "The Godfather: Part III," "Mulholland Drive," "Finding Nemo," "Chicago," "Far from Heaven," "Sylvia," "The Man from Elysian Fields," "Mystic River"

Los Angeles Review: "The Royal Tenenbaums," "Lilja 4-Ever"

New American Writing: "Ella Enchanted," "The House of Mirth"

"Mulholland Drive" borrows from the last line of "Poem at the New Year" by John Ashbery. "The Hours" paraphrases a quote from an interview with Czeslaw Milosz printed in *Gulf Coast*.

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