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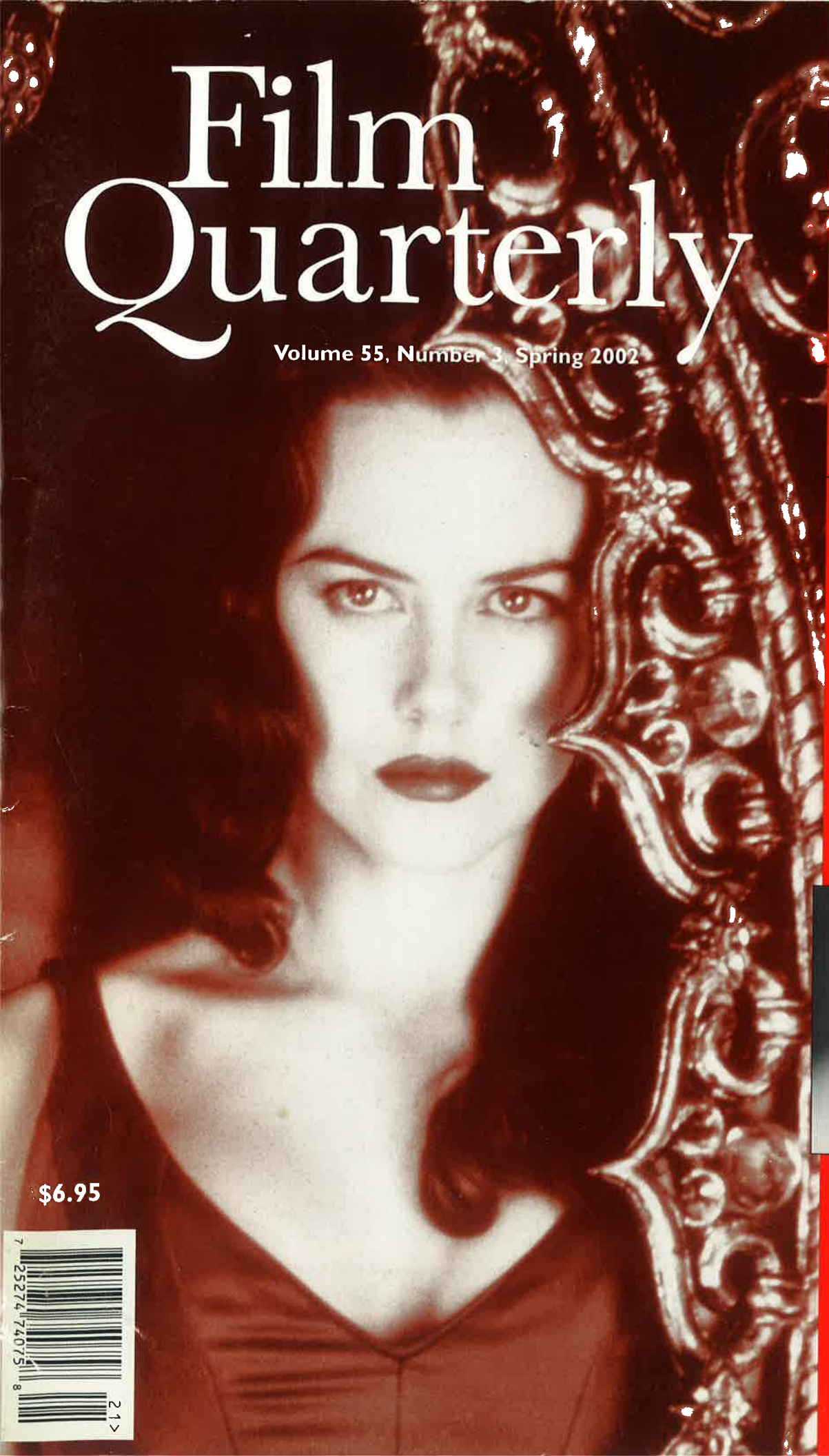

Judy Garland: The Filmed Body

Visual Style in Contemporary American Film

The Streetcars Named Desire

Charlie's Pussycats

REVIEWS

Affliction

Moulin Rouge

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about the family that lived in this place, something still remains, something that refuses to give way to the inexorable logic of economic zones and property redevelopment. In *Affliction,* place finally stands for something that can't be redeveloped or abandoned, something that draws us back and fixes us in place. Rolfe's refusal to sell the family property to La Riviere is not simply a resistance to the promise of a quick buck or a nostalgic holding on to something past. His words—and Schrader's images—draw out a sense of obligation that, with his father's death and Wade's disappearance, binds him to this place like a memory or history. The ending also reinforces something that we have sensed all along: if the story in *Affliction* could be said to "belong" to any one person it would be as much the property of Rolfe as it is of Wade. Perhaps everything we were told, everything that happened, was Rolfe's attempt to claim ownership not of the property that comes to him with Wade's disappearance but of the past, so that he can tell its story. These stories of brothers, fathers, and best friends, stories that, as Rolfe admits, we can never fully understand, demand to be retold—not only from character to character but, as we have seen, from film to film. It may be that in the end this is what we are left with in *Affliction*: not the security of ownership but a cinematic milieu where the phantasms and stories of the past—the director's past as well as that of the characters—cover everything like a deep snow that refuses to thaw and melt away.

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Notes

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13. Cathy Caruth, "Trauma and Experience: Introduction," in *Trauma: Explorations in Memory,* ed. Cathy Caruth (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1995), 5.
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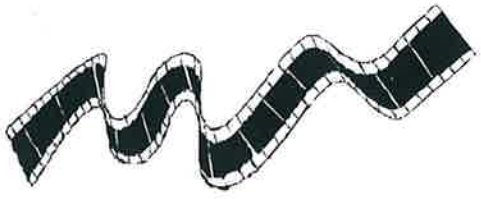

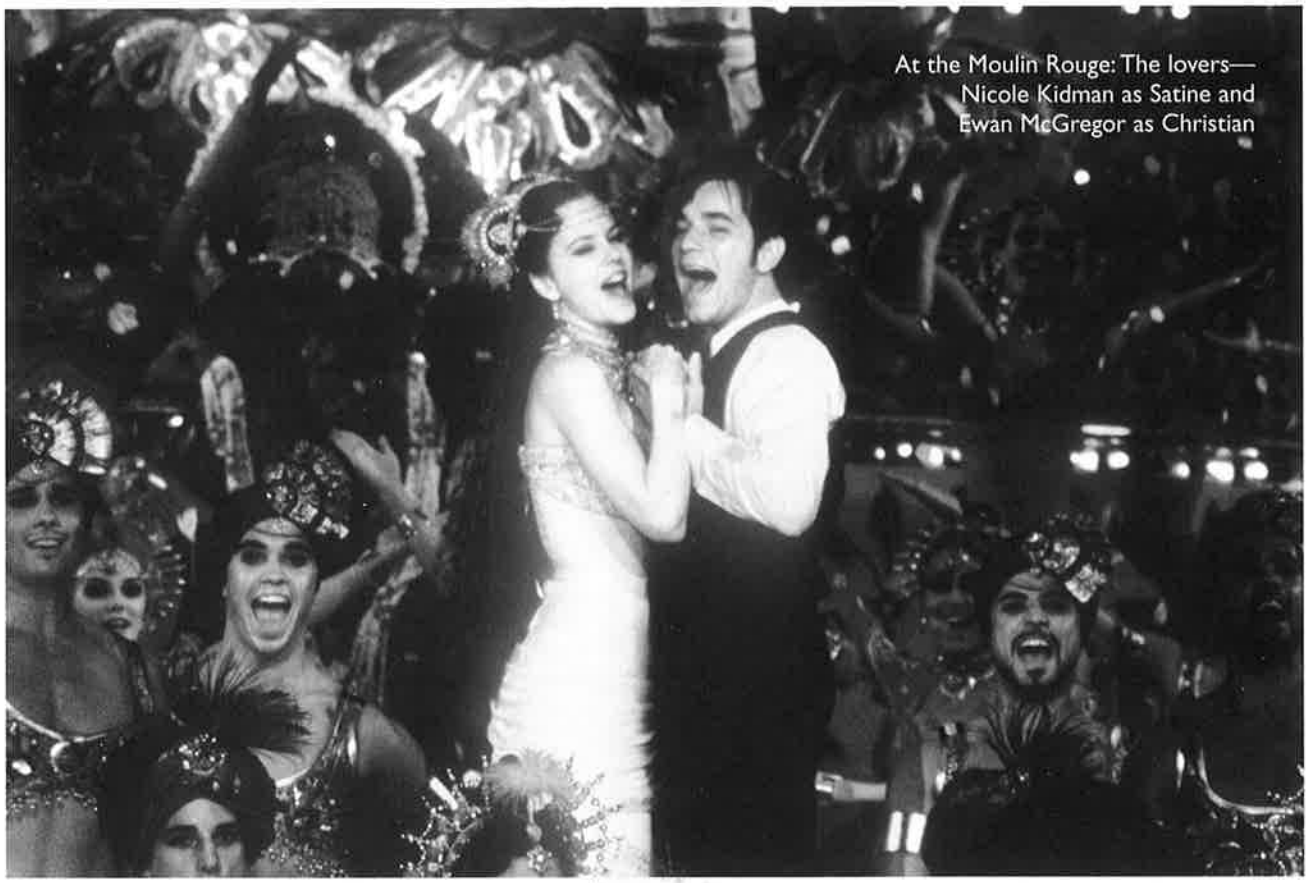

At the Moulin Rouge: The lovers—Nicole Kidman as Satine and Ewan McGregor as Christian

Moulin Rouge

Director: Baz Luhrmann. Writers: Luhrmann, Craig Pearce. Producers: Fred Baron, Martin Brown, Luhrmann. Cinematographer: Donald McAlpine. Editor: Jill Bilcock. Twentieth Century-Fox.

Baz Luhrmann's *Moulin Rouge* is an extravagant movie full of excess. Most spectators either love it or loathe it. As one of its fans, I see it as a brilliant celebratory pastiche of the movie musical that highlights defining characteristics of the genre, some better known than others. It reveals a deep structural tension in the musical genre on the register of tone—between a sentimentalizing romantic love that always pushes toward melodrama (a related genre, equally known for emotional excess and visual extravagance, whose musical dimension is underscored by the *melos* in its name) and an edgy reflexive irony built into "the-show-must-go-on" rhetoric of the backstage business that always keeps the genre wavering on the verge of comedy, parody, and satire. In *Moulin Rouge,* the reflexive backstage rhetoric blatantly revels in the primacy of love as the musical's only meaningful thematic and the film's dominant moralizing refrain. As the final title explicitly spells out (in case you missed it in the numerous previous reiterations), "This movie is about . . . Truth . . . Beauty . . . Freedom . . . But above all, LOVE!" Yet paradoxically, as sometimes occurs in melodrama, through such exaggeration and repetition the film simultaneously suggests that this blatantly artificial genre may be the only realm where such love can still be found, let alone flourish.

Moulin Rouge also demonstrates the international scope of the musical, tracing the hegemonic Hollywood genre to its roots in European vaudeville, cabaret culture, stage musicals, and operas—not only the light comic operas of Gilbert and Sullivan but also, as the voice of Placido Domingo reminds us, serious Italian opera (another historic source for melodrama). Its tribute to the international musical includes localized parodic allusions to Bombay-masala films, Jacques Demy's hyper-French musical bon-bon, *The Umbrellas of Cherbourg,* the psychedelic animations of the Beatles' *Yellow Submarine,* and—from out back and down under—its Aussie director's own earlier lip-synched, transcultural concoctions, *Strictly Ballroom*

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Close-up on the lovers

and *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert.* The tribute also extends to globalizing postmodernist spin-offs like music video, although nomadic hip-hop culture is conspicuously absent, perhaps because it is incompatible with this sentimental vision of romantic love.

Moulin Rouge also highlights the musical genre's dazzling visual spectacle, which privileges performance over representation. Yet it simultaneously demonstrates that our so-called visual culture, with all of its eye candy, is still mobilized and driven primarily by the sound of music, which is a crucial source of parody, pastiche, and postmodernism that is frequently overlooked in contemporary discourse. This may well be the most original dimension of the movie. For all the daring pyrotechnics of its lush visuals—the frenzied moves of the Steadicam, the kaleidoscopic spectacle of the dance numbers with their slanted camera angles and speeded-up, step-printed shots, the blatant artificiality of miniatures and digital compositing, the frantic pace of the narrative that periodically renders dialogue and plot points unintelligible, and the stylized performance of the actors—the love story still remains moving. This achievement depends on the soundtrack, which proves to be the ultimate deus ex machina, for it drives the film and controls its emotional impact. We are introduced to this dynamic in the reflexive opening sequence: the 20th Century-Fox jingle is more recognizable than its vintage visual logo, and the silhouette of the orchestra conductor in the movie palace reminds us that music was a key component of cinema from its inception.

Luhrmann demonstrates the power of music through the film's dramatic shifts in pace and rhythm—a musical concept that has driven montage and camera movement from the early days of the medium to the latest technical wizardry of digital compositing. In the opening sequence, the frantic camera moves evokè the kinetic zooms of fast-paced electronic games as they race to penetrate the inner recesses of the Moulin Rouge and then withdraw with the same accelerated rush. This reckless pace matches that of the narrative, as if this musical (like all members of its genre) were rushing to get to the good parts—not just to those spectacular ensemble performances at the Moulin Rouge where hundreds of dancers writhe within a dizzying Busby Berkeley-like design, but also to those sobering solo numbers with their huge close-ups that make

everything slow down. Even though the film frequently races ahead so that the plot is barely coherent, it also periodically pauses so that we can savor these quieter moments, whose emotional power is augmented by sheer contrast, as they are in Noh and Kabuki theater. Instead of interrupting the flow of the narrative and objectifying the performers (as Laura Mulvey has argued about such numbers, especially when performed by females), these performances and their silent pauses captured in two-dimensional fragmenting close-ups actually humanize the story and its characters. They make it easier for us to identify with these figures, even though they are often as stereotyped and one-dimensional as avatars and toons.

This rhythmic contrast and its emotional reverberations are accentuated whenever the performative pace is interrupted by the panicky breathing of the film's consumptive diva. For, as the hero Christian puts it in his narration, "a force darker than jealousy and stronger than love takes hold of Satine" and brings her voice and life to a halt. Thus the musical's real antagonists are not the stage villains (the malicious Duke and his murderous henchman), who turn out to be merely comic buffoons racing through the story like a pair of Wyle E. Coyotes, but rather the magisterial forces of Silence and Death that slow everything down.

Although visually situated in Montmartre at the turn of the century (with all of this setting's painterly associations), the film is distinguished primarily by its humorous audio pastiche: a promiscuous poaching of familiar words and music from a diverse melange of songs from different decades that acquire new meaning within this new narrative context. This technique of renarrativizing popular songs can be traced back to eighteenth-century ballad opera (a British genre that was a key source for musical comedy) and more specifically to John Gay's successful *The Beggar's Opera,* which was the source for Brecht and Weill's satiric *Threepenny Opera.* Luhrmann, however, unlike Brecht and Gay, retains the original lyrics along with the tune, a strategy that makes it almost impossible for spectators to miss the poaching (even if they cannot name the particular source). A similar strategy was used by Dennis Potter in his brilliant teleplays *Pennies from Heaven* and *The Singing Detective*, but his ironic contrasts between the light-hearted pop music and the vicious murder and psychic mayhem it accompanied gave the renarrativization a cutting edge, and the vintage nature of his borrowed songs infused the combination with a nostalgic sense of longing. Potter's strategy was also pursued by Alain Resnais in his film musical *On connaît la chanson* (*Same Old Song,* 1997), where the combinations were not as jarring as Potter's, but moved in the same direction.

In contrast, Luhrmann's renarrativized lyrics are never disturbing, for they are usually more innocent here than in their original source, and that's precisely the point. The gap in historical periods (between the supposed vintage of his characters and the obvious youth of their songs) freely acknowledges the contemporary nature of this vision of Parisian modernism without any trace of nostalgia. It is a blatant act of ventriloquism that justifies the genre's widespread use of lip-synching and voice doubles and that says far more about the period in which the film was made than the period it depicts. And in the wake of recent tragic events, the historical moment of the film's production now seems all the more innocent, even if that innocence was merely the kind of illusion that frivolous musicals help to maintain.

Once Luhrmann's hero arrives in turn-of-the-century Paris, the proverbial international center for modernism, with the puritanical voice of his disapproving father still ringing in his ears, this historical representation is immediately ruptured by a postmodernist intervention. Descending from above like a pantheon of dei ex machina, an anonymous Argentine narcoleptic drops through the ceiling of the hero's hotel room accompanied by a dwarf dressed as a nun (one of Buñuel's favorite disguises) and by others in their entourage. They are collaborating on a musical play called "Spectacular Spectacular," which they hope to pitch to Harold Zidler (Jim Broadbent), the director of the legendary Moulin Rouge. Despite the zaniness of this gaggle of artists, who perform like a Surrealist version of the Marx Brothers, the dwarf (Puerto Rican comic actor and comedian John Leguizamo) turns out to be the painter Toulouse-Lautrec. Though he claims to be pursuing "a true Bohemian revolutionary aesthetics," he actually parodies the classical theatrical traditions of the deus ex machina and chorus.

The Anglo hero Christian is played by Ewan McGregor, veteran of Peter Greenaway's *Pillow Book,* where he played the ultimate rewritable Brit. He immediately doubles for the ailing Argentine, not only replacing him as the writer of the inset musical but also casting the narcoleptic to play his own fictional "piteously poor artist" alter ego. In both outer and inner story, the poor artist falls in love with a beautiful French courtesan named Satine, skillfully played by Hollywood superstar Nicole Kidman, whose Australian roots are recuperated through her collaboration with Luhrmann. Since the writer figure is transformed into

Satine as the Indian courtesan

a sitar player, the Argentine must change his medium from word to music and his ethnicity from Latino to Indian, but he still manages to import the tango, at a dramatic moment in the outer story, to stylize sex and violence into dance. In both stories, the courtesan temporarily mistakes the poor artist for the rich villain—a French Duke or Indian Maharaja—whom she is paid to seduce and who eventually finances the show and divides the lovers.

The film highlights the mobility of these melodramatic stereotypes which, like the poached lyrics—and the popular genres of melodrama and musical—so easily navigate across cultures, periods, and media. Such mobility implies not only that no movie genre can be confined within national boundaries (not even those vigilantly guarded yet wide-reaching transnational borders of the U.S.A.), but that the ongoing history and fate of every genre can be greatly enriched and reinvigorated by this kind of daring transcultural dialogue and exchange. Such enrichment is most palpable in the finale, the premiere performance of the inset play, which is set in India and which opens with a virtual explosion of vibrant color like an Indian Bollywood musical. On stage we see a diverse mass of writhing bodies that contrast sharply with the uniformly black-tuxedoed European male audience on the other side of the lights. The only recognizable spectator among them is the villainous Duke in the front row.

Within the film's complex narrative entanglements, plot points are frequently driven by songs, which also move fluidly across borders between cultures, periods, genres, and tones. For example, Christian is hired to replace the Argentine writer only after he contributes the perfect line of dialogue to the script-in-progress—a line which the other characters have never previously heard but which all of us in Luhrmann's audience probably know: "The hills are alive with the sound of music." It is the mantra that transforms the spoken dialogue into song. Christian also produces a string of love lyrics poached from other songs familiar to moviegoers, including "Love is a many splendored thing" and "All you need is love." This medley creates a kaleidoscopic effect on the musical track, which triggers the kaleidoscopic visual performance of "The Sound of Music" by a Tinkerbell-Ariel fairy who prefigures Satine's equally kaleidoscopic entrance in the Moulin Rouge extravaganza that follows. This is the first time we see the power of popular lyrics in action: their ability to link spoken dialogue with music, trigger the release of spectacular visuals, and temporarily slow down the pace so that a rhythmic shift can refocus the story on the next step in the romance.

The renarrativization of poached lyrics also helps to negotiate the relationship between this particular story and its generic conventions. Although the familiar lyrics connect this story and its performers to

Spectacular Satine descending

legions of others from the same genre, the song's unique presentation here in close-ups still makes the words and singer emotionally moving. We encounter this dynamic in the introduction of Satine during the first spectacular number at the Moulin Rouge; she descends on a swing amid a sparkling snowfall of glitter in slow motion that prepares us for the startling extreme close-up of her ultra-white, ruby-lipped, blue-eyed face. As she sings "Diamonds Are a Girl's Best Friend," with a brief musical detour to "Material Girl," she harnesses the erotic power of those earlier formidable sirens (Jane Russell, Marilyn Monroe, and the latter's simulacrum, Madonna) associated with these songs, and thereby positions herself within a familiar paradigm of paramours. Yet the singularity of Satine's solo performance is accentuated by the hundreds of Diamond Dog dancers who surround her. With their gypsy dwarves and homo-erotic tattooed men, they exhibit an astonishingly colorful array of nationalities, races, costumes, bodies, and sexualities—a diversity that sharply contrasts with the legion of black top hats being thrown in the air by the white heterosexual male audience. One spectator is singled out for special attention: the Duke is introduced as the stereotypical rich suitor while he lip-synchs the refrain, "Diamonds are a girl's best friend." At first this makes him seem a playful variation on Laurence Olivier's Prince (who similarly fell for Marilyn in *The Prince and the Showgirl*), but he becomes more threatening once we meet his murderous henchman, who just happens to be named Warner (like the movie studio), thus rendering the romantic rivalry reflexive in this musical from 20th Century-Fox.

There is a silent moment at the climax of this frenzied opening performance when the astonishing Satine grows faint and falls from her swing, to be caught by an equally singular black giant, who seems to come out of nowhere (unless we consider the orientalist colonial heritage that groomed him to serve a white goddess). As the first sign of her illness, this false move prefigures Satine's ultimate fate in "Spectacular Spec-

tacular"—dying on stage in mid-song. This opening performance, like that of an opera or ballet, thus functions as an overture that synthesizes the musical narrative that follows. In case we are unfamiliar with the generic conventions of the musical, it lets us know what will happen so that, as with any myth, we can concentrate not on what happens next, but on the unique inflection with which the familiar moves are performed. This strategy provides a pleasurable and reassuring combination of familiarity and surprise; for we may recognize the music and the lyrics but still wonder with curiosity and anticipation how they will be uniquely adapted to this tale.

The lyrics also have power to control the rich palette of color in the painterly costuming and mise-en-scène. For example, the contrast between the dominant reds and blues is sometimes blurred by the songs, creating a synesthesia that links back to opera. At first we are struck by the luscious reds of the Moulin Rouge decor and costuming—particularly those gaping ruffled skirts of the can-can dancers, which recuperate their original erotic shock value even for twentyfirst-century viewers—and those diagnostic droplets of bright crimson blood on Satine's handkerchief that link her back to the consumptive Camille of cinema and her musical roots in *La Traviata*. These livid reds are contrasted with the moody blues of Christian's impoverished hotel room in Montmartre, where their love is finally consummated. In the scene in Satine's dressing room after her first number, where she mistakes Christian for the Duke, the comic convention of mistaken identity suddenly dissolves at the magic moment when the spoken words merge into song ("And you can tell everyone that this is your song"). And this musical emotional rupture is expressed through color: as the young lovers fly out into the moonlit night and the Méliès-like moon joins their song with the voice of Placido Domingo, Satine's red hair softens to brown and her red dress turns a moody blue. This same synesthetic effect recurs when Christian later joins Satine (still in her red dress) atop the roof of her dressing room, and another romantic medley (including the Beatles refrain, "All you need is love," and Whitney Houston's signature line, "I will always love you") makes the red tones blur back into blue. Once more the operatic moon chimes in, and the voyeuristic Lautrec (cast in the inset play as a musical instrument, a magic sitar that can only tell the truth) echoes their secret refrain: "How wonderful life is, now you're in the world."

As illustrated in this pair of matched sequences, the entire film is structured by a series of repetitive performances that create a dizzying spiral of doubling. This pattern is accentuated by the soundtrack's poached lyrics and echoing refrains; by the visual technique of step-printing; by the plot's many theatrical rehearsals, flashbacks, and chain of dei ex machina; and by the doublet title of the inset musical "Spectacular Spectacular" that mirrors the outer love story.

The can-can dancers

The Méliès moon

The film is book-ended by a pair of matching frames: from the reflexive setting of a vintage movie palace, with opening curtains that reveal the now retro 20th Century-Fox logo, the shot leads deeper inward to the historic setting of Paris in 1900 and to the framing song (David Bowie's rendition of Nat King Cole's classic "Nature Boy": "There was a boy, a very strange enchanted boy"). The song is lip-synched on the sidelines by a white-faced clown whom we later recognize as Leguizamo doing Lautrec, and it introduces the writer/protagonist Christian, who sits in his Montmartre hotel room at his typewriter tapping out his sad tale of love. This leads into the flashback dramatization of that story within the highly artificial theatrical space of the Moulin Rouge, where the inset musical will ultimately be performed. Following that final performance, a reverse movement quickly leads outward and back through all of those successive layers to the closing credits.

Within this invaginated structure, Christian's tragic tale of love is framed, in turn, by two spectacular numbers: the first show in the old Moulin Rouge, where the hero sees and falls for Satine, and the premiere performance of "Spectacular Spectacular" in the new Moulin Rouge, where the consumptive diva dies on stage in her lover's arms. In contrast to the opening number, when she descended from above, she now rises from the underworld below, thus foreshadowing her death. In both scenes she is guarded by the giant black actor, a silent androgynous figure who in the final performance appears in blue body paint as the Hindu god Krishna, embodying both life and death. This time Satine is the mortal and he's the god—the "force darker than jealousy and stronger than love"—who takes hold of her. As her singing is interrupted by coughing, her face turns blue—not only signaling her move toward Krishna, but also giving new resonance to the blue tones of her romance with Christian. Similarly, at both ends, the story is watched over by the clownish dwarf Lautrec in whiteface (which evokes the extreme pallor of Satine's face in her first number). This time he performs his dual role as chorus and deus ex machina by falling from the theater's overhead catwalk just in time to lip-synch the key line from "Nature Boy": "The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return." Thus these two dei ex machina, the chattering white dwarf and the mute black giant, dramatize the ongoing struggle between Eros and Thanatos.

Between these two spectacular numbers there is a doubling of key sequences, including Satine's double seduction of Christian and the Duke, her two romantic meetings with Christian atop her elephant dressing room, and her two abortive dinner rendezvous with the Duke. Both these potentially disastrous dinners are in-

tercut with parodic musical numbers that accentuate melodrama's Manichean lurches between misery and humor, lightness and dark. The first is triggered by a question posed to Zidler by the Duke: Why did Satine suddenly have to go to mass instead of to supper? Madonna's song pops into mind: "Because you make her feel like a virgin, touched for the very first time"—a poached line of dialogue that leads into the film's best musical parody, which is intercut with a serious love scene between Christian and Satine. Masquerading as a virginal bride, Zidler grabs a pair of aspics to simulate Madonna-esque breasts and casts the Duke, garbed in his swirling black cape, as his vampiric groom. As the bridal couple dances atop the ivories of a grand piano, they are backed up by a chorus line of waiters opening bottles of orgasmic-popping champagne.

Whereas this first dinner party is dominated by humor, the second turns somber, for this is the sequence where Satine is seriously threatened with rape. The intercut number is a tango in which the Argentine actor tells a cautionary tale for men who fall in love with prostitutes—a story that leads into the pop song "Roxanne." Though it starts out by featuring one gypsy woman (the treacherous performer who betrays Satine and Christian to the Duke), it soon leads into a troop of dancers whose numbers keep growing, making things look increasingly ominous for Satine. Yet the singular couple is posed against this legion of stereotypes, a relation that is mediated by the song and dance and the genre. Ultimately, Satine is saved not by the Eros of her Christian lover nor by the intruding tango (which still lie within the conventions of Western melodrama), but by the more powerful force of Thanatos, which is echoed in the secret song ("Come what may, I will love you till I die") and channeled by the silent black strongman, who punches out the Duke and moves inexorably toward becoming the living incarnation of death.

Luhrmann's witty combination of historical specificity and promiscuous pastiche also demonstrates the musical genre's flagrant violations and disavowals of history. Paradoxically, such violations are most blatant in those melodramatic musicals that take the greatest pains to evoke a particular historical period, as in *Cabaret* and *The Sound of Music,* or even in John Huston's earlier *Moulin Rouge* (whose plot is here eschewed, despite Luhrmann's title, in favor of the earlier Garbo melodrama, *Camille*). Luhrmann's chain of simulations and quotations implies there can be no original or even stable referent in musicals, a position that is also suggested by the Elton John lyric, "I'm writing this song for *you*," whose referent drifted so conveniently from Marilyn to Princess Diana, and is now readily reassigned to Nicole as the consumptive Satine. Starting with Bowie's rendition of "Nature Boy," the film encourages us to become textual poachers ourselves and to purposely "queer the text." In this way, it frees us to come up with our own new historical referents, like the easy substitution of AIDS for TB as the driving force of doom that is far more formidable than any stage villain, at least at this particular point of reception and consumption.

This interactive mode of reception is also encouraged through the musical evocation of real-life pop figures, who can readily be substituted for the fictional main characters (the way the poor sitar player is substituted for the songwriter in the inset play, or the Indian Maharaja for the French Duke). Through its ubiquitous allusions, the film nominates contemporary pop figures who were martyred by death (John Lennon), or transformed by love (Madonna), or elevated by writing song lyrics (Sir Elton John), or who risked career for a dangerous love (Whitney Houston). The film's characters and star personae, like the reigning disease, are not three-dimensional realistic representations but avatars that can be embodied by different players and viruses, as new styles, techniques, and antibodies are designed and old songs are rearranged for new performers who reinscribe their meanings. Even a unique historic figure like Lautrec can be reimagined through the comic talents of Leguizamo, whose performance purposely rejects authenticity and deliberately contrasts with that of José Ferrer, who played the painter as a brooding protagonist in Huston's earlier melodrama. For in this new twentyfirst-century version of *Moulin Rouge,* Lautrec is reduced to a dwarfish alter ego for the Anglo hero, a change that subordinates history to fiction, Romance languages to English, and visualization to music.

Yet Luhrmann's film reminds us that no matter which genre, medium, or culture they hail from, all avatars (like melodramatic stereotypes and tunes) can be endlessly recycled at the ever-shifting point of consumption. And although their melodramatic plots and conventions may be as old as the hills, the genre of the musical and the medium of cinema will remain alive in the twentyfirst century—so long as we keep hearing and seeing, replaying and rewriting, the visually spectacular sound of music.

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Book Reviews

The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini

His Life and Films

By Tag Gallagher. New York: Da Capo Press, 1998. $24.50.

There is something endearing and endlessly fascinating about this book. It is also unsettling and (at 802 pages) relentless. The length can be accounted for in part by the fact that it is several kinds of book rolled into one. Intended first and foremost as a biography, *The Adventures of Roberto Rossellini* is also a production history of the director's films, and a history of their critical reception, of their later reputation, and of their influence. Gallagher also submits accounts of the intellectual and ideological contexts from which Rossellini's films emerged, and includes two chapters on the theory of Neorealism. I may be overlooking some components, but even so one must admire the challenge the author set himself. Gallagher's evident desire to look into everything he could possibly find about the director (whom he greatly admires) tends to win the reader over, while the massive amount of detail he provides is sure to fascinate anyone who has an interest in Rossellini. The book is thus useful for those who have not seen some of the director's films (seeing them all is a difficult undertaking at best, given the vagaries of international distribution), as well as for those who can't quite remember some of the details. Most of these materials have been available for years, widely scattered among European publications, many of them even in English. But for those who prefer to read about Italian cinema in one place and in English (Gallagher provides translations for the sources that are not), I know of no one other book where so much information is currently available. Peter Brunette's excellent *Roberto Rossellini* (Oxford University Press, 1987) is the only other major treatment of the director with claims to completeness. It differs from Gallagher's study in that it is not a biography, it does not treat the films' production history, its references to critical reception are subordinate to the author's argument, and its readings of the films are—the author's disclaimers notwithstanding—articulated and focused through a strong and selective authorial perspective.

By contrast, Gallagher's film readings rely for the most part on extensive collages of critical discussions ranging from the intelligent to the trivial, from the appreciative to the hostile. This provides a vivid picture of Rossellini's difficult and contentious experience with critics and intellectuals, but what one misses is a consistent and recognizable authorial perspective to help us navigate through this cacophony. By the same token, the materials Gallagher uses to explain the context of Italian intellectual trends such as Marxism, Catholic thought, and the politics of Italy are superficial and inadequate. The history of Rossellini's critical reception, given ample space in the book, makes little sense unless the voices that Gallagher weaves together are contextualized well beyond tagging their owners as "Communist Baldelli" and "Catholic Roncoroni." Gramsci gets 17 lines in the chapters about Neorealism. Is Luigi Barzini really the person we want to question about the tensions between Italian Catholicism and Marxism?

As for the biographical data, Gallagher seems to have included everything and, dare I say, the kitchen sink as well. One way or another, biography is a narrative genre, and Gallagher knows this. Yet because he too rigidly enforces the principle of chronology, even the temporal flow of events is hard to discern. It is disruptive to read about the making of a film, then the release and critical reception of the previous one, then the making of the next film, then the critical reception of the film that came before—especially when other types of material are inserted between these blocks of film history. There are also very different "kinds" of lives that fit into different kinds of narrative, not to speak of the subject's own thoughts and attitudes about his own life in biographical perspective. Rossellini view of himself was informed by the fact that he saw himself as a particular kind of artist; he had an awareness of his own presence in his films; a view of his place in the world and his relations to others. Yet one seeks in vain for Gallagher's response to Rossellini's own master discourse. Then there is a man's life as others see it. From this perspective, in the view of many, it seems that Rossellini was a nasty piece of work. A veritable gaggle of voices, cited in this book, are all too eager to let us know about it. Many of these voices derive from letters written to Gallagher (at his request, it seems) by a variety of people—friends, relatives, victims, and bystanders—most of whom appear to have their own ax to grind. It would have been helpful to hear of the possible motives behind their testimonies.

Occasionally Gallagher provides evocative descriptions of Rossellini's personal life couched in vividly anecdotal terms: the "day like any other" that precedes Rossellini's death (685) is a case in point, as well as his encounter with the future directors of the French New Wave (458-60). All too often, however, the serial accumulations of details scattered over the whole book are confusing in their similarity and, given their distance from one another in the text, don't coalesce into a coherent narrative. How exactly and when did Rossellini fail to live up to his contractual commitments? What was his working method, and how did it evolve? Worse, the reiteration of censorious claims (do we really need the unnerving refrain about Ingrid Bergman's drinking problem?) smacks of tendentious overdetermination. Not to speak of a mass of details that serve no obvious purpose: Do I really want to know about Isabella's spine surgery? Do I need to know how Aldo Tonti was cooking spaghetti as Rossellini outlined one of his projects? Often good information is easily missed, surrounded as it is by data whose relevance and purpose are not clear.

For one thing, the "genres" and source types that Gallagher folds into his book require very different kinds of attention and deserve very different levels of intellectual respect. The biographical sections of the book are based on

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