BREAKABLE GLASS:
A LOOK AT BILL FORSYTH'S FILM

LOCAL HERO
A THESIS

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by

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Department of Photography
and Cinema
For my brother
Tristan

who introduced me to Local Hero.
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FIELDS OF STUDY

MAJOR FIELD: Film Theory and History
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INTRODUCTION TO METHODOLOGY

The methodology developed here to analyze Bill Forsyth's film *Local Hero* comes not from any one theoretical background but from an amalgamation of a number of theories. First and foremost, this thesis is a textual analysis, grounded in the sociology of Emile Durkheim. Durkheim, a French sociologist who wrote at the end of the last century and the beginning of this, was able to see first hand the powerful changes that came with the onset of the industrial revolution both in Europe and the United States. As the Western world moved from rural farming communities to urban industrial communities, Durkheim noted the changes that took place in the social solidarities established before the industrial revolution. What he discovered was that as the division of labor intensified in urban areas, the people of these social systems became more and more isolated from both the rest of society and also from their own labor.

If all of this sounds similar to the writings of Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, it is because this period of time (between 1850 and 1917) saw the greatest changes in European society since the Romans. Marx and Engels, concentrating on the economics of the modern world, saw the possibilities of an economic uprising in which the workers would control the entire industrial workings. Durkheim, on the other hand, was concerned more with the workings of the social system than that of the economic system. Like Marx and Engels, Durkheim saw the industrial revolution and the division of labor as keys to understanding what Western society had become. But unlike the authors
of The Communist Manifesto, Durkheim did not propose an all-encompassing solution to these problems. Instead, Durkheim dug down to the deepest roots of the urban/industrial society to uncover just how manipulating the system can be.

Along with Durkheim's sociology, we will also use a number of other tools to get at the deepest meanings of Local Hero. We will note the way in which both England and the United States have used Scotland as an ideal place to practice cultural imperialism, forming a picture of the Scots that is neither accurate nor flattering, and how Forsyth works against this image. By using some of the ideas developed by the Russian formalists, we will see the tremendous density of the film. Finally, we will form a definition of the word "hero" so as to be able to solve the riddle of the title--"Who is the Local Hero?"
CHAPTER I

DEVELOPING A METHODOLOGY

One of the reasons why Local Hero is such an exciting film is its refusal--thematic, if you like--to be serious, to settle for points of view, to be, coherently, this or that. It is, in fact, profoundly and magnificently frivolous, and out of that visual and narrative frivolity comes a poetry, informed by laughter, that may well, in a decade or two, take on some of the stature of other, earlier films in this very European tradition. Renoir and Bunuel rather than Ealing. Even then, of course, one is aware of the disservice done by rattling around exclusively in cinema: this is really a film after Lawrence Sterne's heart...[1]

Upon first viewing, it may be difficult to understand why Local Hero should need such an impassioned defense. After all, it is only a "small" movie by Hollywood standards, made for less than six million dollars and directed by a man who, at the time of the film's release, was practically unknown outside of the small circle of film critics and theorists in Paris, London, and New York. True, Bill Forsyth's Gregory's Girl had been widely seen in theatres and on cable television, but his name was hardly a household word. Why, then, all of the commotion? What makes the film worthy of such attention? In the following pages, we will try to answer these questions. Once this is accomplished, we will then proceed to analyze the film more closely, seeing for ourselves what makes Local Hero a highly admirable work.

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When **Local Hero** was released in February of 1983, the press, both in Europe and the United States, gave it considerable notice. Forsyth's earlier films *Gregory's Girl* (1982) and *That Sinking Feeling* (1979) had both been surprise critical and box office successes, and *Local Hero* was expected to continue Forsyth's trend of making "small" films about life in Glasgow, Scotland. What appeared instead was a film about a large American oil company that sets out to buy a small fishing village in Northern Scotland and turn the area into a huge oil refinery. This village, Fersness, is populated by a wide range of peculiar characters. Almost immediately, the critics began comparing *Local Hero* and Forsyth to a whole series of films and directors. A "bewilderment of references" cascaded from the media.[2] Nick Roddick of *Sight and Sound* was one of the first to make such references.

The real problem comes with the appearance of the half-acknowledged ghost of another kind of cinema altogether: the ghost of Ealing. Echoes of *Whisky Galore!* abound, both in terms of theme . . . and in terms of incidental details and characters.[3]

The list of references goes far beyond *Whisky Galore!* (known as *Tight Little Island* in the U.S.). *Laxdale Hall*, *The Maggie*, *Bricadoon*, and even *The Battle of the Sexes* have all been pointed to. As for directors, Forsyth has been compared to Jean Renoir, Luis Bunuel, Michael Powell, Emeric Pressburger, Frank Capra, Preston Sturges, Steven Spielberg, Alexander Mackendrick, Francois Truffaut, and Milos Forman.[4]

The problem with these comparisons is two-fold. On the one hand, it oversimplifies any understanding of Forsyth as an auteur. To read
his work as anything less than original in many ways is to prevent us from capturing the spirit of Forsyth's art. (We will delve into this more fully in the coming chapters.) Secondly, and, at present, more importantly, these comparisons underscore the problems of the British film industry as a whole; an industry that suffers from economic depression and a brand of cultural imperialism for which the current U.S. film industry has become famous.

According to Anne Ross Muir [5], the British film industry has suffered in recent years for a variety of reasons. At present, there are only 1,600 movie screens in England, Wales, Scotland, and Northern Ireland. This number is down dramatically from the 5,000 screens in 1949. Concurrently, worldwide production costs have soared. By 1983, a British production would need to recoup three pounds for every pound spent on production and distribution just to break even, meaning that the already depressed British economy, coupled with the decrease in the number of screens, is no longer able to support massive film production without (a) substantial funding from Hollywood production companies (as in the case of Alien) or (b) a relative certainty that the film will do well in the U.S. market (as with Superman).

All of this means that, if the British film industry is to thrive, it must somehow develop a method of dealing with the influx of Hollywood films: a rather difficult proposition owing to Hollywood's vast resources and the commonality of language between Britain and the United States. Furthermore, this established imperialistic/economic
system has created a huge weight from under which films like Local Hero must climb.

However, Muir continues,

[the] takeover of the British film industry by American movies . . . was, at least in part, an inside job . . . . It is felt by many in the British film industry that Rank and EMI [British distributors] have forced independent cinema operators out of business, that they have alienated a potential cinema audience by screening American films and ignoring the British public’s own cultural needs, that they have failed to support production, and that they have denied independent filmmakers the opportunity to exhibit their films.[6]

The crucial element in this (at least as far as Local Hero is concerned) is the idea of the distributors ignoring the cultural needs of the British public. In the same way that a political scientist can divide the world into nuclear “have” and nuclear “have not” nations (i.e. those with nuclear power and weapons and those without) [7], film theorists can divide the world into film “have” and film “have not” cultures. In this respect, and until quite recently, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland have been film “have nots.”[8]

Furthermore, in a world as complex as our own, it is no longer sufficient for us to see movies about a particular society or culture. Instead, the camera must be placed in the hands of, say, a Native American, or a Kenyan, or even a Scot.[9] This, of course, returns us to Bill Forsyth and Local Hero. All of the aforementioned films and directors to which Local Hero and Forsyth have been compared are films made about Scots and/or by directors who themselves are not Scottish.
Therefore, to examine *Local Hero* in terms of our pre-determined notions, formed by films about and not by Scots, is to do a disservice to both the film and the filmmaker.[10]

It is at this point that a split among the critics has developed. Some, as is the case with Nick Roddick, see *Local Hero* in terms of past films about Scotland. And to some extent, a superficial reading of the film can be made through this method.

[The] dread cliche of the pawky Scot hangs over *Local Hero* in the person of beachcomber Ben Knox, a man so content with his whisky, his wisdom and his wee plot of land that he is secure from the blandishments of the consumer society. With Ben... the film takes a retrograde step back into the cosy [sic] Ealing ethos of *Whisky Galore* [sic] and *The Maggie*; with Felix Happer, a tycoon whose equivalent of the liberating mouth-organ is astronomy, it slips even further back into the facile demagoguery of Capra.[11]

Almost immediately, however, many critics turned against this interpretation. And while they all differ somewhat in content, their reviews all have a starting point of noticing that it is the people of Farness who are ready and willing to sell their town.

The assumption behind the criticism seems to be that Forsyth has naively fallen into the traditionalist trap of the *Whisky Galore* [sic] syndrome, in which the quaint Highland odd-balls, in touch with natural mystical verities, casually outwit the representatives of the unnatural modern world; whereas in truth, this reading would claim, the modern world has ruthlessly exploited and colonized the Highlands... [But Forsyth's villagers, it should be noted, are falling over each other to be exploited.][12]

[The story is akin to] David versus Goliath, not a particularly original scenario, except that Forsyth stands the cliche on its head. The villagers are only too eager to sell out their birthright, and the big oil executives are the ones who end up fighting to preserve the area's way of life.[13]
... Forsyth is savvy enough to know that it's only outsiders who get sentimental over Scottish landscapes. Here the locals are the ones eager for the loot; they just want to be sure that they get the best possible deal out of the Yanks.[14]

All of these comments point away from comparing Local Hero to other films about Scotland. But it is not just the actions of the villagers that makes this separation clear. John Brown (quoted above; see note 12) sees an even wider gap in the way Local Hero departs from the norm:

In their analyses of fiction, the Russian formalists made a central distinction between fabula and sjuzet—roughly, between "paraphrasable story" and "specificity of the text." The distinction is crucial to Local Hero because the all-too-ready familiarity of the fabula can overpower the subtlety of the sjuzet and the distance which Forsyth quietly puts between the two. Once the film's narrative mode is recognized and the spectator has tuned into its playful, allusive style, its relationship to Whisky Galore [sic] and the others fall into place. Essentially, what Local Hero does is to use them as a common cinematic (and indeed extra-cinematic) myth which provides a grain against which to work—significantly... Forsyth speaks of knowing these films without specifically having seen them. In fact he uses them in just this way, as a stock of themes, characters and situations, already familiar and inflected, to which Local Hero can refer out of the corner of its mouth, as it were... There is scarcely a joke in the film... which doesn't contribute to the unsystematic subversion of the Whisky Galore [sic] syndrome.[15]

This subversion of the "Whisky Galore! syndrome" comes in many forms. In the case of Ben Knox, he is actually much more than just a "pawky Scot." While it is true that Ben is content with his whisky and his wisdom, we should note that Ben understands the historical economics of the beach and those who used it. In scene 64, Gordon, Mac, and Ben talk about this. Gordon tells Ben that, if he will sell
the beach, the beach will be able to support hundreds of people. Ben
counters by telling Gordon and Mac that, up until the mid Nineteenth
Century, the beach actually did support hundreds of people; people who
extracted salt and chemicals from the sea and, in turn, these people
cared about and took care of the beach.

Ben is not the only resident of Ferness who has a firm grasp of
economics. In scene 22, Mac decides to call his office in Houston.
Iain, the village's daft but well-meaning idiot, escorts Mac to the
phone box. Mac, wishing to make his call alone, drops several hints
that he would like Iain to leave. He finally does so, but only after
frustrating Mac to no end. Later, during the ceilidh, we discover
that Iain is actually an intelligent man and that he only acts the
village idiot when he is around Mac. In this scene, Gordon is
complaining about the fact that he has to pay the band more for this
party than he did at Christmas. Iain, the manager of the band, tells
Gordon that the increased fee is necessary because Gordon is charging
more at the door than he did at Christmas. "Inflation is going up all
the time," he tells Gordon. "It's your spiralling costs you're
talking about."

Nor do these subversions escape Forsyth's notice. He readily
admits that David Puttnam (the producer of Local Hero and the one who
came up with the original idea [16]) screened Whisky Galore! for
Forsyth prior to the beginning of the scriptwriting. Yet, Local Hero
is similar to Whisky Galore! only in its narrative progression, not in
its actual theme or content.[17] As Forsyth himself puts it, "... I
think you can criticise [sic] those films for the way Scots are romanticised [sic] in them, as long as you remember you can criticise [sic] anything historically . . ."[18]

Historical criticism and hindsight are of crucial importance in looking at Local Hero. In the sense that the film splits the world in two (Houston as the modern world and Ferness as the old, more traditional, world) we could argue that comparisons to Brigadoon and other films of the "pawky Scot" genre are justified. But to do this is to ignore some specific facts given in Local Hero. Despite the quaint atmosphere of Ferness, the modern world has indeed intruded on the village. Unlike Brigadoon, Ferness does not appear only once every century. It exists day by day, with radios, motorcycles, automobiles, oranges from South Africa, three types of shampoo ("Dry, normal, or greasy?" the shopkeeper asks Mac in scene 36), military jets that practice bomb on a nearby beach, lobsters that are caught and sent to London and Paris, and even a "punk rocker." Yet there is no question that Ferness is far different from Houston, while at the same time it is removed from the world of Brigadoon.

To help clarify this, we need to return to our starting point in this discussion— to A.C. Jefford’s comment that, when talking about Local Hero, "one is aware of the disservice done by rattling around exclusively in cinema." Jefford’s point is well taken. In many ways, the cinema actually obscures our understanding of the film. What I propose, then, is to approach Local Hero from another standpoint entirely: from the standpoint of the sociology of Emile Durkheim.[19]
Durkheim's first work, *The Division of Labor in Society*, sets up two different types of social solidarity: mechanical and organic. Lewis A. Coser, using, in part, the words of Durkheim [20], defines mechanical and organic solidarity this way:

[Mechanical solidarity] prevails to the extent that "ideas and tendencies common to all members of the society are greater in number and intensity than those which pertain personally to each member. This solidarity can grow only in inverse ratio to personality." In other words, mechanical solidarity prevails where individual differences are minimized and the members are much alike in their devotion to the common weal. "Solidarity which comes from likeness envelopes our whole conscience and coincides in all points with it." Organic solidarity, in contrast, develops out of differences, rather than likeness, between individuals. It is a product of the division of labor. With increasing differentiation of functions in a society come increasing differences between its members.[21]

What Durkheim realized is that "only if all members of a society were anchored in common sets of symbolic representations, to common assumptions to the world around them, could moral unity be assured.[22] Without these common symbols and assumptions, "any society, whether primitive or modern, was bound to degenerate and decay.[23]

As for individuals within a given social order, Durkheim saw that men were creatures whose desires were unlimited. Unlike other animals, they are not satisfied when their biological needs are fulfilled. "The more one has, the more one wants, since satisfactions received only stimulate instead of filling needs." It follows from this natural insatiability of the human animal that his desires can only be held in check by external controls, that is, by societal control. ..

When social regulations break down, the controlling influence of society on individual propensities is no longer effective and individuals are left to their own devices. Such a state of affairs Durkheim calls anomie, a term that refers to a condition of relative normlessness in a whole
society or in some of its component groups. Anomie does not refer to a state of mind, but to a property of social structure. It characterizes a condition in which individual desires are no longer regulated by common norms and where, as a consequence, individuals are left without moral guidance in pursuit of their goals.[24]

These statements indicate that Durkheim had, by early in this century, come to grips with some of the problems of modern civilization. And while it may not be possible for a community or society to be completely mechanical or organic, it is easy enough to see that all societies have certain elements that tilt the scales in one direction or another. We will soon see how these ideas fit together in the context of Local Hero, but for now it is enough to say that, when reading Local Hero in this context, our vision and understanding of the film becomes far clearer than if we simply rattled around in cinema.

A final introductory note about Durkheim's theories: Robert A. Nisbet (see note 19) goes into some detail comparing Durkheim's work to that of Marx, Freud, and Darwin. It is well known that film theorists can use Marxist and psychoanalytical theory to interpret film. I believe that, to a somewhat lesser extent, we could use Durkheimian social theory in the same way. This, however, must be saved for another time, for this argument would need to be tied together with the writings of Alexis de Tocqueville, Max Weber, Ferdinand Toennies, and Georg Simmel; likewise, these writings would need to be supplemented with a detailed understanding of the sociological idea of ethnocentrism.[25]
Furthermore, I would like to point out that this writing is not specifically a theoretical paper. I make no claim here that the methodology we have established for looking at *Local Hero* will work in all cases for all films. Instead, what this methodology does is allow us to do a detailed textual analysis of a particular film.

As we have seen thus far, we have a whole series of tools with which to interpret *Local Hero*. By moving the film out of the realm of past movies made about Scotland, and by examining Russian formalism, Durkheimian social theory, and the nature of cultural imperialism in Scotland, we are now ready to take an in-depth look at *Local Hero*. 
CHAPTER II
MAC

In *Local Hero* everything counts, and everything matters.[1]

As with many films, the main problem in doing a textual analysis of *Local Hero* is that the film is so dense that any single reading cannot cover all of the levels of understanding the film contains. To accommodate this, we must be able to proceed completely through the film and then backtrack, highlighting other points that illustrate and illuminate new ideas.[2] To begin with, then, we will look at how Mac relates to his environment and how, in turn, he represents much of the major driving force of Durkheim's *The Division of Labor in Society* and *Suicide* discussed in chapter one.

If we recall our discussion of Durkheim in chapter one, we will remember that, as the division of labor increases in an organic society, so does the possibility of anomie. In Forsyth's Houston, anomie has already established a strong foothold, with the symptoms being felt by Mac, Happer, Cal, and Crabbe. Each has a specific job to do and, much in the same way that our brain, heart, lungs, and arteries are interdependent, they all need each other in order to function. Happer is the chairman of the board, Mac and Cal are underlings who take orders from Crabbe who takes orders from Happer. Thus, a perfect organic situation, and, indeed, a complex hierarchy,
is introduced as a premise very early in the film. And within this situation of urbanism and industrialism, "there lie the certain seeds of man’s progressive isolation from both community and morality." [3]

Mac’s isolation is shown through his dependency on communication technology (such as the telephone and the telex machine) and in the way he constantly places a pane of glass between himself and the people around him. With the former, Mac complains to Crabbe in scene 3 that he sees no reason for him to actually go to Scotland. "Do I really have to go there?" he asks. "I’m more of a telex man." "We’re not dealing with a bunch of Indians," Crabbe responds. "We’re dealing with people like ourselves. You’re a Scot, that’s why you’re going." What Mac doesn’t tell him is that his parents were not Scottish but Hungarian. We find this out in the next scene. He confides in Cal who responds, "Jesus, Mac. You’re not a Scotchman, you’re not a Texan," further highlighting Mac’s isolation.

As for the panes of glass, this becomes a motif that runs through the entire film. In scene 1, we see Mac driving to work in his beloved Porsche 930. He is alone in the car, with a vacant look on his face, staring straight ahead through the windshield. Later, in scene 4, Mac calls his coworker Cal on the telephone. Mac is in his office, a spacious enclosure with clear glass walls.

Mac (into the telephone): Will you look after Africa for me while I’m gone?

Cal (v.o.): All of Africa?

Mac: No, just the west coast deals.
During this conversation, Mac walks over to one of the window walls and looks out into the rest of the office. We see Cal standing at a desk, phone to his ear. Mac taps on the window and Cal looks over to him.

Mac (into the phone but looking at Cal): Do you want to eat? (Cal looks confused.) Eat. (He points to his mouth.) Do you want to eat?

Scene 8 is structured in much the same way. Here, we see Rita, another coworker of Mac's, as she leaves her desk at the end of the day. As she walks away, her telephone rings. She stops, turns, and picks up the telephone.

Rita: Hello?

Mac (v.o.): Hi, Rita.

Rita: Who is this?

Mac: Mac.

Rita turns and sees Mac through his office window. Mac is looking at her. He asks her if she would like to go out for a drink, but Rita refuses.

Obviously, Mac is isolating himself from his surrounding environment. For him, relationships are tenuously one-dimensional, having only a thin electrical wire to establish and maintain them. As an executive of an oil company, this style works quite well. But Mac's problem is that, in his anomic state, no other type of communication is available to him. He doesn't see the need to ask for a date in person any more than he thinks he needs to go to Scotland.
If "a couple of telexes" can finalize an oil deal (scene 3), then certainly a telephone call through a glass wall should be enough to secure a personal relationship.

Further evidence of Mac's isolation can be seen in scene 9. Here Mac calls his ex-lover Trudy to tell her that he is leaving town and that she still has some of her things in his apartment. As with Rita, Mac sees his trip more as a permanent exile than a brief visit to another country. He uses the trip as an excuse for trying to make contact with the women, prefacing his conversations with "I'm going to be leaving town for awhile...."

In each of the above cases (the drive to work and the calls to Cal, Rita, and Trudy), Mac physically isolates himself from the people around him. Moreover, he treats all of these people as if they were just another small piece of Houston's organic society to be dealt with in simple contractual terms. This, then, becomes the crux of Mac's character, and the majority of the remaining scenes are structured to force Mac to break down the contractual walls of glass that surround him while, at the same time, the scenes help Mac to untangle himself from his web of fiber optic telephone lines that prevent him from interacting directly with the human world.

After arriving in Scotland, Mac and Danny (the Knox representative in Aberdeen) pay a visit to Geddes' bay lab (scene 13) where they and we learn more about the Ferness project. The lab has a scale model of the whole Ferness area, complete with removable sections of the town and the beachfront. With the exception of the
formal introductions and the very end of the scene, Mac says nothing while in the lab. Yet, even at this early stage of his trip to Scotland, forces are already at work to break through to the thus far buried parts of Mac's personality. Both Mac and Danny are immediately attracted to Marina, but it is Danny who actually talks to her while Mac remains cold and distant.

Once Marina leaves, Geddes and his assistant tear apart the scale model of Ferness and put up a model of the proposed refinery and oil depot. Geddes pulls up a large piece of the town and hands it to Mac. "Hold Ferness for a minute, would you?" he asks. Mac obliges, but is uncomfortable with the model, fearing that it will dampen his expensive suit. When he tries to return the model to Geddes at the end of the scene, Geddes tells him, "Keep it. Keep it. Dreamland . . . Dreamland . . . ."

The complexity of this scene is three-fold. First, the model functions as a sort of invitation for Mac to enter this new world of Scotland. In a sense, Mac never lets go of the model. He holds it away from himself because he does not want Ferness to ruin his clothes. But once he arrives in the real Ferness, Mac begins to shed his expensive clothes as he becomes more and more infatuated with the town. By the end of the film, Mac no longer wants to rid himself of the town. Instead, he wants to "keep it" just as it is. Secondly, Geddes calls the place "Dreamland," the place where dreams come true. But this dreamland is, for Mac at this moment and Geddes in general, the dream of creating "the petrochemical capital of the free world"
(scene 13). Mac will eventually change his mind about this, but not until he actually sees the place himself. Third, this scene establishes Danny and not Mac as the potential focal point for Marina. The two men jockey for position to return Marina’s lab coat to her after she gets out of the water. Mac eventually wins, but Marina hardly looks at him. Instead, she concentrates on Danny, looking squarely at him.

From the lab, Danny and Mac set out for Ferness by car. On the way, Danny accidentally runs over and injures a rabbit (scene 14).

Danny: Aw, shit. I hate hitting things. . . . Do you think we should put it out of its misery?

Mac: What do you mean?

Danny: You know. Hit it with something hard.

Mac: You just did that with a two ton automobile.

Despite Mac’s rather callous remark, both he and Danny are troubled by the injury. Mac suggests putting the rabbit in the car, taking it with them. A fog rolls in, so they bed down for the night in the car. . .

The next morning (scene 15), Danny feeds the rabbit some grass while Mac looks on in a supervisory role.

Danny: I think I’ll call him Harry.

Mac: No, her name’s Trudy.

Mac quickly becomes obsessive about the rabbit. Naming it Trudy is the obvious example. But this tie becomes stronger in the next scene. Mac and Danny arrive in Ferness and knock on the front door of
the hotel. Gordon, the hotel manager, cook, bartender, taxi driver, and town accountant, is annoyed at being awakened by the travelers. He shows little interest as Mac tries to deal with him in diplomatic and businesslike terms. When this fails, Mac tries another tack: "We've been on the road all night," he appeals to Gordon. "We have an injured rabbit, also." Gordon gives in and shows them to the kitchen. He tells them that they can make some toast and coffee and points out that there is lettuce in the refrigerator for the rabbit.

This moment is a minor triumph for Mac. Having been ignored by three women in less than two days (Rita, Trudy, and Marina), Mac has become so isolated that it is a pleasure for him to have tender contact with anything, even a rabbit. When he names the rabbit Trudy, he not only embodies it with certain feminine characteristics, he also revolts against Danny's impulse to give it any male characteristics. We have already seen that Mac, up to this point, deals with men in contractual terms, rarely discussing anything but money and work with them. We also know that he tries to use this same method in contacting women. His failure on this front is obvious, even to Mac. Since he is unable to maintain relationships with women in these terms, it is essential for Mac to come up with a different method. He substitutes the rabbit for his ex-lover and establishes a tender relationship with it. Once this happens, Mac is able to use the rabbit as a way to make contact with a human: Gordon. Undoubtedly, Gordon would have let Mac and Danny in with or without an injured rabbit, but it becomes a connecting point between Mac and Gordon.
Over the next few scenes (17-21), Mac continues to move ahead as a proper business person. He opens up negotiations with Gordon, takes a walking tour of the area with Danny, and in general feels very hostile about his present situation. Mac is still convinced that the Knox deal could have been arranged "with a few telexes" and that there is no point in his being in Scotland at all.

There is solid reason for this. Mac's personality has been all but swallowed up by the organic society of Houston. This orientation prevents him, at first, from either liking or understanding the mechanical society of Ferness. The people of Ferness have certain roots that are unavailable to Mac. They have a sense of their own history, being that the same families have lived there for generations, working the same fields, patching the same fishing nets, shopping at the same store, drinking in the same pub, and worshipping in the same church. It is this sense of history, this commonality, that Mac is unable to see or feel. And it is only through understanding these roots that Mac can come to terms with both the town and himself.

In scene 22, Mac calls Cal in Houston and confesses, "I feel like I've been here forever." Here, Mac is still reacting to Ferness' mechanical society in organic ways. He talks to Cal from a phone box across the road from the hotel. Once again, Mac is viewing the world through a small, mostly glass room and he is communicating his view via the telephone. We should also note that one of the principal reasons why Mac is in Scotland is because Happer wants Mac to keep an
eye on the sky. Happer, an amateur but well-financed astronomer, believes that a comet is about to appear in the constellation Virgo and he wants Mac to check the situation every night. Happer, when he talks to Mac, never asks how or if the refinery deal is moving along. All he cares about is his comet. So, when Mac gets disconnected from Cal, he leaves the phone box and, for the first time, looks at the sky. Slowly, the tension dissolves from Mac's face and he develops some sense of awe for the forces of nature. Mac begins to see the beauty of Farness.

What happens, then, is that the scene begins with Mac as the pure organic man and ends with him abandoning both the telephone and the glass booth. For the first time, Mac experiences the sky without the mediation of the trappings of his organic life.

From here on out, a rapid succession of events happen that slowly pull Mac further and further along the road toward accepting Farness' society. In scene 24, Mac lies in bed listening to Gordon and Stella make love in the next room. Envious, Mac is forced to settle with caring for the rabbit, placing it comfortably on a chair next to the bed.

The next day, Mac makes his first attempt at looking at Farness with new, non-hostile eyes. After visiting with the Reverend (scene 27,) he complains about the fighter jets that practice bomb on a nearby beach. "I don't know about those jets," he says to Danny, "They really spoil a very nice area." While we can take this comment as one of the many well-crafted jokes Forsyth infuses into the film,
there is also something chilling in these words. This is the first
time that Mac has ever been to a place that he is attempting to buy
for Knox Oil and Gas. Farness is not just words on a telex printout.
It is real. The people are real, not just statistics. While his job
requires that he remain dispassionate about such things, his soul is
beginning to see things in a new light.

This attack on Mac’s anomie continues in scene 29. Mac and Danny
are eating dinner in the hotel. Gordon comes in and asks how they
like the “casserole de lapin.” Mac says that he likes it and Gordon
returns to the kitchen. Danny, who speaks in excess of a dozen
languages, looks at Mac.

Danny: Lapin. That’s rabbit. (Gordon enters.)

Mac: Is this my rabbit?

Gordon: Yes.

Danny: Harry!

Mac: Trudy.

Gordon: We don’t allow animals in the bedrooms. I should have
told you sooner.

Mac: It was a pet, not an animal! It had a name. You don’t eat
things with names. This is horrific!

Gordon: It was an injured rabbit, that’s all. It was in shock
with a broken leg. It was in pain. (Stella enters.)
Danny: Excuse me, Mr. Urquhart, but I think you were a bit hasty. Mac was looking after it. All it needed was lots of rest and a proper treatment. There was every chance for a full recovery and a fully active life. Mac was on top of the situation.

Gordon (To Stella): They didn't like the rabbit.

Danny: Mac loved the rabbit! That's just the point! It had a name. Two names! (Danny exits.)

Gordon: I'm sorry. I just don't think there's a lot I can do. (To Stella.) Is it worth calling a vet, Stella?

Stella: Don't be a clown, Gordon. Get into the kitchen and make some coffee.

Gordon: It had a broken leg. It was a clean snap. You can check the bones in the plate if you don't believe me. (He exits to kitchen.)

Stella: I'm sorry, Mac, but we eat rabbits here. The vet would have done the same. (Pause.) I didn't know it had a name.

Mac: It's okay, Stella.

Stella: Well, look, you don't have to finish it if you don't want to. (Pause.) How was it, anyway?

Mac: It was nice. Apart from being Trudy, it was nice.

Stella: What lovely little eyelashes you've got.

Mac: Was it a wine sauce?

Stella: Yeah. Yeah, I just let it simmer for a couple of hours in some white wine. Why did you call it "Trudy"?

Mac: No reason.
For Mac, Trudy (the rabbit) embodies what little is right with the world. He names the rabbit after his ex-lover and uses the rabbit to gain access to the community. The rabbit is the only living thing that Mac can relate to in mechanical ways. He is not separated from it. It is an intricate part of Mac's world. When Mac tells Gordon that the rabbit "was a pet, not an animal," he is really saying that it was a person to him. In this sense, the eating of the rabbit becomes cannibalistic. It is not often that a person eats the one thing that he or she can relate to. But once he discovers what has happened, Mac has no choice but to accept the situation. He can't bring Trudy/rabbit back to life any more than he can bring Trudy/lover back to his world. Mac is forced to look elsewhere for human contact. He finds it first in Stella (when she mentions his eyelashes) and secondly in the town itself.

We should also note that it is not just Mac and Happer who suffer from anomie. Apparently, Knox Oil and Gas has developed a system in which the corporation is totally efficient in its anomie. Danny (a Scot) can speak enough languages to communicate with a vast percentage of the world's population. Yet, in spite of this, he is unable to communicate with many of the people in his own country because he specifically does not know Gaelic, a fact he admits to Mac as they drive to Ferness. Mac wakes up from a nap and asks Danny where they are. Danny shrugs his shoulders. "The last few signs were in Gaelic," he says. "It's not one of my languages."
In symbolic ways, Mac slowly strips himself bare, shedding the trappings of his organic orientation. Between scenes 31 and 54, Mac's style of dress goes through a complex transformation. He hangs up his double-breasted suit (scene 30) and dons a more casual jacket (33). His shirt and tie are replaced by a sweater (45, 48). By scene 50, even his jacket is gone and he shows the first signs of needing a shave. In this scene, Mac is collecting shells in some of the tide pools. He removes his watch (which has an alarm that plays "The Yellow Rose of Texas," alerting him to "conference time" in Houston) and leaves it (inadvertently?) to be drowned in the rising tide. By scene 54, he has even gone as far as removing his shoes and socks and rolling up his pants cuffs. This is no longer the same Mac that left Houston five days before.

The shedding of each piece of clothing is preceded by an event that leads Mac down the road toward an understanding of farness: the death of Trudy/Harry/rabbit, the first meeting with Ben Knox, Mac's deliberate avoidance of Ricky's motorcycle, and the discovery of the beauty of marine life.

During all of these changes in Mac's appearance, windows continue as a motif. In scene 38, shortly after buying some shampoo and toothpaste at the general store, Mac walks down a hall in the hotel toward the dining room. He reaches the glass door and looks inside, seeing Gordon and Stella half embracing and half dancing to the quiet music. Mac watches for a moment, and then turns away, leaving his purchases on a small hall table. Two scenes later, some of the
townspeople are sitting in the pub, drinking "pints" and examining the model of the town that Mac got from Geddes back in Aberdeen. They are worried that Mac might pull out if they continue to string him along as Gordon suggests. Mac approaches the door to the pub (it is, of course, glass) and peeks inside. Gordon sees Mac and calls for him to come in. Mac begins to walk away, but then thinks better of it and enters.

This second scene (40) is the first time in the film where Mac ends up participating in the events that he watches through the glass. Gordon pulls out a dusty bottle of forty-two year old whiskey and shares some with Mac as if he were just another drinking buddy. The others join in and they talk for a bit. When Mac and Gordon leave, they do so to discuss business. But for a brief moment, Mac is comfortable with his social surroundings.

These scenes (27-54) comprise the middle section of the film and, for the most part, Mac's first order of business (the purchasing of the town) is all but forgotten. In fact, he only discusses business twice (scenes 41 and 43). Both of these scenes are short and, each time, the business is forced into the background. In scene 41, Mac and Gordon stand near the cliffs that tower over the beach. They talk about money in vague terms, but Mac is constantly distracted by the sight of Ben who is in the deep background, walking along the beach. When Mac actually meets Ben in scene 43, their business-like conversation is interrupted when Mac asks Ben what he knows about the stars and secondly when Mac notices the meteor shower.
By scene 54, Mac has lost all interest in business. Victor (the Soviet fisherman) has arrived for the ceilidh (a traditional Scottish celebration) and is talking money with Gordon, his financial advisor, in the pub. Mac, his arms full of shells, sees Gordon and Victor through the open pub door. Tentatively, after Gordon extends the invitation, Mac enters the pub.

Victor (To Mac): We have been buying some fish. You are doing some business, too, I believe.

Mac (hesitating): Yes... I think I'll go upstairs and wash out these shells.

Victor: Hey, what have you got there? Is that a scallop shell? (He takes it.) A very nice one. And this is a razor fish... You can eat them.

Mac (Looking at Gordon): I wouldn't want to eat them.

Mac is desperately trying to find a way to protect Ferness (evident by the way he cradles the shells in his arms like a newborn child). He is embarrassed by his position as a Knox representative—as the man who, for all intents and purposes, will be directly responsible for the death of the town if he closes the deal. His acknowledgement that he "wouldn't want to eat" the shellfish refers back to his feelings about Trudy/rabbit and his newfound fondness for the town. They are all related to each other and to eat any of these things is to cannibalize these elements that make Ferness a perfect mechanical society. Mac's refusal to talk business with Victor, coupled with his implicit desire not to eat the shellfish, are Mac's
way of showing that his transformation is nearly complete. If he can move from a feeling of guilt to one of remorse, he will then be in a position to make Ferness and its mechanical society his own.

This happens two scenes later (58) at the ceilidh. This scene, the longest and most complex in the film, shows us that Mac has learned that what he is doing as a Knox representative is no longer compatible with the type of person he has become since arriving in Ferness. Twice within this scene, Gordon tries to get Mac to "haggle" with him. Each time Mac shrugs it off with an "I don't care anymore" attitude. Even Victor tries to cheer him up by telling him that "you can't eat scenery," but Mac is not convinced, since closing the Knox deal would mean that the area would be eaten up by the corporation.

Simultaneously, forces are at work to make sure that Mac does not diverge from his present path of remorse. First, Stella dances with Mac. As they waltz about the floor, they exchange precious glances of mutual admiration. Later, Gordon and Mac—both drunk—talk about Stella.

Mac: I have a proposition for you, Gordon. I know I may be a bit tipsy, but I want you to consider this seriously, okay?

Gordon: Okay.

Mac: Okay... I want to swap with you. Everything. I want to stay here, run the hotel, do little bits of business. You can go to Houston. Take the Porsche, the house, the job. It's a good life there, Gordon... I won't let down your good name here, Gordon. I'll make a good Gordon, Gordon. What do you say, pal?
Gordon: What about Stella?

Mac: I was coming to that. I love her very, very much. She's wonderful. She is the most beautiful woman I have ever loved, and I think she knows it. I want you to leave Stella here with me, Gordon. Would you do that? Would you leave Stella here with me?

Gordon: Sure, Mac.

Mac: You're a good guy, Gordon.

This particular sequence is the culmination of everything that has happened to Mac. Just prior to this, Mac sees the aurora borealis and calls Happer to make his report on the sky. As these natural fireworks go off, Mac becomes more and more excited until he can no longer contain himself. Phone receiver in hand, he steps out of the phone box to get a better view. The sky lights up and Mac shouts into the phone, "Oh! It just went red all over! It's red all over!"[4]

This final push into the mechanical society is the event that allows Mac to make his confession about Stella. She embodies all of the things that Mac needs in a relationship, and she also embodies all of those things that are good about Ferness. For Mac, one does not exist without the other and he is unwilling and unable to separate the two.

This is even more evident in scene 68. Mac is preparing to leave Ferness and is settling his bill with Gordon. Gordon tells Mac to go and say good-bye to Stella. Mac refuses. It is bad enough that he is being uprooted again (again by Happer, who has arrived in Ferness and has told Mac to go back to Houston); the last thing he needs is to say
good-bye to the one woman he truly loves. Since Mac has only recently learned how to love in mechanical as opposed to organic ways, he chooses to say nothing.

By the time Mac gets back to Houston, he has turned into a schizoid personality. On the one hand, he still has some amount of loyalty to Happer and Knox Oil and Gas. After all, he did return to Houston instead of quitting his job and staying in Farness. On the other hand, he clearly misses the people and town of Farness. At home, he lingers with his shells, smelling them carefully. Above him, his ceiling lights appear as a constellation-like pattern that forms a halo around his head. He takes up a few snap shots of the villagers on his cork board. Finally, and with a mighty heave-ho, Mac pulls open the sliding glass door that leads to the balcony. He looks out over the Houston skyline as a siren wails in the distance. The time has come for Mac to make a decision. Houston no longer holds any magic for him. As he contemplates the image before him, the shot fades to black and fades in on a long shot of Farness. The telephone in its box begins to ring. Blackout.

Mac's metamorphosis from being an organic man to becoming a mechanical man is complete, but not without cost. Mac still has his job, but he is far from enthusiastic about it. Ben gets to keep his beach, but he will no longer be the sole curator of it. Gordon and Stella will be able to keep the hotel, but they will not get their neverending honeymoon that being millionaires would have afforded them. The relationship between Danny and Marina is unresolved. As a
matter of fact, the only person who gets exactly what he wants is Happer. The refinery site will be moved offshore and he gets to spend the rest of his days eyeing the sky for his illusive comet.

Despite these changes in the situation, the ending should not be seen as completely negative. Mac becomes a whole person, learning that possessions are far less valuable than people, and the town of Ferness, that perfectly mechanical society, is saved from becoming just another oil "boom town." It is not the same as it was before Mac came along, but then again, neither is Houston. Happer is gone (possibly never to return) and Mac brings back with him the knowledge that different societies exist outside the realm of corporate America.

Forsyth sees another positive side to the ending:

I think there's a kind of positive side to [the ending], because from the beginning [Mac] is a telephone man, it's [sic] how he calls on his resources. In fact, there was something in the earlier draft of the script about him talking on the phone in his Porsche to the mechanic who looks after his car and that came in again at the end. So the idea as it stands is that even if nobody answers, he has got more resources now, he can ring the village. But at the same time, I'm glad if it rather disturbs people, because it does surprise me when people only see the lighter side of the film...[5]

This "lighter side of the film" will be covered more fully in chapter 4. But we have already established the heavier side of the film: Forsyth is playing for high stakes here, not just laughs. His understanding of the problems of the modern world, and the solutions he proposes (the compromise between organic and mechanical societies that will benefit all of mankind) are the signs of a writer/director
in full stride. Where there is alienation, Forsyth postulates, there is always hope for reconciliation in both our society and ourselves.
CHAPTER 11

HEROES

The performances [in Local Hero] are so marvelously modulated and integrated that one begins to recall the great ensemble effects in the distant past before stars hired their own writers.[11]

Even when [the film is] over you may not know which of three or four characters is the "local hero" of the title.[2]

As this chapter is dealing with heroes, it behooves us to first come up with an acceptable definition of what a hero is. According to the Webster's New Collegiate Dictionary [31], a hero is:

1a: a mythological or legendary figure often of divine descent endowed with great strength or ability b: an illustrious warrior c: a man admired for his achievements and qualities d: one that shows great courage 2a: the principal male character in a literary or dramatic work b: the central figure in an event or period...

We can easily see how some of these definitions could apply to some of the characters in Local Hero. Mac is the "principal male character" of the film; Victor is "admired for his achievements and qualities;" Ben is "one that shows great courage." But in spite of these similarities to the above definitions, most of the characters in the film have a heroic quality about them that is far removed from any dictionary statement. It is these qualities that we must concern ourselves with. We must settle on a definition that is, at once, wide-sweeping and specific.

34
We know that an essential part of any narrative is conflict. It can be conflict between people, between a person and his or her environment, or between two or more opposing forces. Implicitly, conflict assumes a sense that, at one time, there was or needed to be a harmony—a balance—in the world and that, for whatever reason, this balance no longer exists. We can see this unbalanced vision in practically every narrative work from *Oedipus the King* to *Hamlet*, from Edwin S. Porter’s *The Great Train Robbery* to Bob Fosse’s *All That Jazz*. Dramatic conflict, then, is the battle between opposing forces that culminates in either the restoration of the battle (as with *Melvin and Howard*) or the demise of the entire dramatic situation (as with *Dr. Strangelove*).

Once this notion of balance becomes clear, so does our definition of "hero." In an off-balanced world, a hero would be the person who, through specific acts (either intentional or not), restores the balance. In the case of *Local Hero*, Ferness has lost the fragile balance of its social system. The opposing forces of mechanical and organic societies are in direct conflict, with the scales being tipped in the organic direction. Therefore, any character who, in some way, helps to restore the balance must be seen as a hero. For our purposes here, we will deal with eight such characters: Ben, Happer, Gordon, Stella, Danny, Marina, Victor, and, of course, Mac.

**Ben Knox**

In a sense, Ben does more to save Ferness than any other character in the film. His refusal to sell his beach (and it is his
beach, having been deeded to an ancestor of his and handed down from
generation to generation) forces all negotiations between Mac and
Gordon to a standstill for, without the beach, the rest of the
property is completely useless to Knox Oil and Gas.

The question we must ask is why does Ben refuse? What makes a
person choose to live in an old shack instead of taking an
astronomical amount of money (1.5 million plus five miles of any
beach in the world) and retiring? The answer lies, as do those of
most of the questions raised in Local Hero, in the understanding of
the two social orders depicted in the film. Mac (the organic man) and
Gordon (who aspires to be an organic man) have difficulty
understanding why this particular stretch of beach should be so
important to Ben. They cannot see that Ben does not want any beach,
he wants this beach. "It's how I earn my living," Ben tells them.
"It supports me" (scene 43).

More than this, Ben sees a greater problem with selling his
beach. He is the last survivor of a family that has owned this beach
for hundreds of years. It is a glorious family heirloom—a living
document of sorts—that is as much a part of Ben's life as the air he
breathes. Similarly, the beach is an heirloom of a much larger family
than just Ben's blood relatives. Ferness is, first and foremost, a
fishing village, built beside a bay that is a perfect funnel for the
North Atlantic Drift. In this sense, the beach does not belong solely
to Ben. It belongs to the mechanical social system of Ferness; a
system established long ago when all of the people in Ferness worked
the beach, extracting chemicals, salts, and marine life from the sea. As the modern world encroached on Ferness (bringing with it telephones, accountants, automobiles, and shampoos), the beach became one of the few remaining anchors to the past.

Ben has a clear understanding of this. He is not so much unwilling to sell the beach as he is unwilling to sell the beach to Knox Oil and Gas. The company has no intention of taking care of the beach. In scene 64, after giving Mac and Gordon a brief history lesson on the beach, Ben tells them that if Knox Oil and Gas gets hold of the property, "it would be bye-bye beach forever, wouldn't it?"

This conclusion is more than just a gut reaction on Ben's part. Two scenes earlier (62), he tests to see if Mac understands the importance of the beach to Ferness' society.

Mac: I'll buy you any beach you want, and I'll give you seven hundred and fifty thousand pounds to set yourself up with. It'll give you some security in the early stages. What do you say?

Ben: You're great at talking with the big numbers, Mister. . . er. . . MacInti. . . Say, look. You're good at numbers, eh?

Mac: Yeah, it's part of my job, yes.

Ben (Scooping up a handful of sand): Right. Would you give me a pound note for every grain of sand I hold in my hand? Now, you can have the beach for that. (Some sand slips between his fingers.) Oop. Saved you a pound or two there.

Mac: Come on, Ben. I don't ant to play games. Let's negotiate in a business-like way.
Ben: Oh, dear. Oh, dear. (He drops the sand.) You could have had a very nice purchase there, Mr. MacIntire. I can’t hold much more than ten thousand grains of sand in my hand at a time. Did you think it would be a bigger number?

Mac: You took advantage of me, Ben.

Ben: Did I?

Mac: How about a hat full of sand?

Ben: Ah, no, no. I mean, that wouldn’t be business-like.

Ben has an understanding of the beach that transcends money. Unlike Mac, Ben does not see a separation between man and his environment. They are one and the same. Ben takes care of the beach and, in return, the beach takes care of Ben. They live in harmony with each other.

This is Ben’s heroic moment. By proving that Mac has no understanding of the beach environment, Ben delays the entire acquisition project long enough for Happer to arrive and save the beach, the town, and the surrounding land.

Felix Happer—

Obviously, Happer’s heroic moment comes in scene 67 when he decides to build the refinery offshore, saving Fennery as a center for astronomic and marine research. But it is how Happer reaches this point that is of interest to us.

Of all the characters suffering from anomie in this film, Happer’s case is the most acute. Unlike Mac, who separates himself from society but is still involved in it as a passive observer, Happer
has lost all connection with his culture. He is unmarried, childless, apparently friendless, and completely isolated from even the inner workings of his corporation. He sleeps through board meetings. He hires a psychiatrist to heap verbal abuse upon him. He lives alone, having a private telephone number that almost no one knows. His office, a sterile environment devoid of any cultural artifacts not pertaining to the oil business, is protected by his receptionist and secretary, Mrs. Wyatt, who stands a silent guard of the office entrance.

Completely isolated, Happer’s one interest is astronomy. His office is actually a small planetarium, complete with a star ball to project the stars and planets on the domed ceiling. Having found the modern world lacking, Happer turns to the sky, looking for a comet he can name after himself. Since he will not be leaving behind any children to carry on his family name, and since even his corporation is named for someone else, his one hope for immortality is a heretofore undiscovered comet.

While we may not know which came first, Happer’s isolation or his mania for astronomy, a point of fact is that none of the people who surround him take his interest in astronomy seriously. Moritz uses it as another way to abuse Happer. Mac finds it whimsical, the result of an old man heading into senility. The Knox board members are equally uninterested, choosing to let Happer dream about the stars rather than conducting the business of a multibillion dollar corporation.
It is no wonder, then, that Happer and Ben hit it off as well as they do. Ben is the first person to show any interest whatsoever in Happer’s quest for a comet. Likewise, Happer is the first person to acknowledge that Ben is right, that the beach should stay as it is. Happer gains a friend (his only friend) and Ben acquires a very powerful ally. Their alliance gives them a mighty "trump card" that they can play to solve a whole series of problems. Together, they go a long way in saving the town, the sea, the beach, the sky, and the people of Farness from what could be an unpleasant future.

Nor should we forget that Happer saves Ben from being lynched by the villagers who, to the bitter end, are clamoring for the Knox dollars. As the lynching party approaches Ben’s shack, a beautiful light appears in the sky. The light grows in intensity, finally becoming not a comet or a star, but Happer himself, in a helicopter, descending from the sky like Ben’s guardian angel. Had Happer arrived any later, it is quite possible that he would have missed his chance to save Ben and Farness. Fortunately, his timing is perfect.

From these brief discussions of Ben and Happer, we can see that much of the action in the movie depends on precise timing. Ben forces the negotiations to stop dead, giving Happer time to arrive. Happer arrives just in time to save Ben. We will shortly see other examples of this systematic timing that Forsyth infused into the film for, in the midst of it, one person becomes an important, if inadvertent, hero of the whole situation. That person is Gordon.
Gordon Urquhart--

As the mouthpiece of the villagers, Gordon is the most eager to sell out. But he makes a major blunder: he decides to take the time to "land [Mac] in style" (scene 40). His thought is to let Mac and Danny wander the area for a few days, thereby making them nervous and jacking up the price of the property. He could not have been more wrong.

The scheme backfires for a number of reasons. First, it gives Mac time to fall in love with Ferness. Once he does, negotiations bog down for lack of interest on Mac's part. Second, it allows Danny and Marina time to solidify their relationship, causing Danny to desire saving the area as a marine laboratory. Third, it gives Ben the opportunity to exploit Mac's lack of understanding of the harm Mac's work can do, for this is the first time that Mac has actually been to a place he is trying to purchase. And fourth, the scheme turns Ben into the one stumbling block of the negotiations. The village is ultimately saved because Ben will not sell his beach. When Happer appears, he first just wants to get Ben out of the way by offering him a piano. It is only Ben's and Happer's common interest in the sky that prevents the deal from going through.

Essentially, Gordon can be seen as an inadvertent hero. He did not plan for what is to become the final outcome of the events in Local Hero, but he was in the right place at the right time, at least as far as the social system of Ferness is concerned. And while he may live to regret his actions, this in no way tarnishes the changes in
Mac or the overall effect of the film on the audience, for both Mac and we are better people for Gordon's actions.

Stella Urquhart--

As Gordon's spouse and the real boss of the hotel, we might expect Stella to be as anxious as Gordon is to sell the hotel. Nothing could be further from the truth. Stella is as uninterested in the dealings as Gordon is maniacal about them. She is completely at ease with Farness' social system, choosing to avoid any and all discussions of the business at hand.

Stella is the embodiment of all of the things that turn Mac from an organic into a mechanical man. She runs the hotel, but she cares more for the people in the hotel than the money they pay to stay there. During the ceilidh, she lets Gordon worry about the profits while she Waltzes with Mac. She is a friend of the villagers, opening up the hotel for social gatherings. And even more than Ben, she is at home and content with her life.

In chapter 2, we noted that the cooking of Trudy is the first big push into the mechanical society that Mac gets. After Gordon and Danny leave the scene, Stella sits with Mac in quiet conversation.

Stella: I'm sorry, Mac, but we eat rabbits here. The vet would have done the same. (Pause.) I didn't know it had a name.

Mac: It's okay, Stella.

Stella: Well, look, you don't have to finish it if you don't want to. (Pause.) How was it, anyway?

Mac: It was nice. Apart from being Trudy, it was nice.
Stella: What lovely little eyelashes you've got.

While rather peculiar, this moment is "the passing of the baton" from Trudy to Stella. Mac immediately relaxes, hanging up his double-breasted (scene 30) and spending the next morning skipping stones (scene 33), a childlike endeavor to say the least. It is as if the old Mac died with Trudy, only to be reborn with "lovely little eyelashes" the next day.

We could argue that because of this, Stella is more of a mother figure than a potential love interest for Mac. But this implies that the rabbit, too, would have to be seen as a mother figure, and we know that this is not true. For Mac, the rabbit is (as we have seen) the embodiment of everything that is good with the world. When the baton is passed from Trudy to Stella, Stella takes Trudy's place as the focal point of Mac's newfound humanism.

What happens, then, is that Mac, walking the tightrope from organic to mechanical societies, stumbles when he eats Trudy. But Stella is right there, catching Mac before he can fall, and sending him back on his way again. Since we have already determined that much of what happens in Local Hero is structured around Mac's transformation, it is easy to see the passing of the baton as an heroic moment for Stella. Had she not been there, Mac might have fallen, never completing his transformation. (See chapter 2, pp. 23-25.)
Danny Oldsen--

Once again, coincidence plays a major role in determining heroic qualities in a character. If Danny did not have a "facility with languages" (scene 14), he would not have known that "casserole de lapin" meant "cooked Trudy." Without this knowledge, it would not have been possible for the baton to be passed from Trudy to Stella.

Furthermore, Danny plays an important role in the final outcome of Local Hero. Once Happer decides to build an observatory in Ferness, Danny reminds him that research into the sea is equally as interesting. Happer agrees. Danny then suggests that the research center be named "The Happer Institute" (scene 67). Happer likes this idea, for he will now be able to not only have his own observatory, he will also be able to leave behind his namesake. The Happer name will live on long after Happer himself is gone.

Danny's motivation to do this comes not from any loyalty to Knox Oil and Gas or Happer, but from his love for Marina. Marina has been studying the effects of the North Atlantic Drift on Ferness Bay. If the refinery were to be built in and around Ferness, the fragile biological environment of the area would be undermined and destroyed. This could happen even if the observatory was built without being conscious of the sea. By reminding Happer of the potential benefits of a marine biology station, Danny insures not only the salvation of the bay, but the assurance that Marina will be able to continue her research and, presumably, her life as a mermaid.
Marina--

Elusive as the fabled mermaids of old, Marina’s heroic contribution to Local Hero comes in two forms. First, because she is mermaid-like, she evokes in Danny an unselfish, pure love: a love that transcends the mythic quality of a mermaid. When Danny falls in love with Marina, he falls in love with everything she stands for. Danny tries to save the bay not just because it is the morally correct thing to do, but because it is also Marina’s “home.” He would no more allow the bay to be destroyed than he would allow someone to set fire to Stella’s and Gordon’s hotel.

Marina is also as much the curator of the ocean as Ben is of the beach. They are both bound by a self-imposed duty to protect and care for their environment at the expense of any and all profit. Similarly, they both see their work going unrewarded. Marina sent a proposal to Knox Oil and Gas months before Mac and Danny show up in Ferness. In the proposal, she spells out what needs to be done to save the bay. But as with most large corporations, her proposal falls on deaf ears and she hears nothing from the Knox people.[4] This is reflected in the attitude of Gordon toward Ben, where Gordon only sees Ben as an eccentric old man, the last of his breed.

Marina’s second heroic contribution is that she is in fact a virtual mermaid, carrying with her the feeling that there is something magical about Ferness. By showing Danny the up-close beauty of the seals, the shellfish, and the strange effects of the North Atlantic Drift, Marina is able to instill in Danny a sense of wonder about this
place. Through this, Danny is able to bring to the surface hidden strengths. He is no longer Mac's "yes man," flowing with the tide as it were. Instead, he realizes that he can take certain actions to prevent the destruction of the area. He spends the rest of the film looking on apprehensively as Mac, Gordon, and Happer try to convince Ben to sell the beach. When the deal falls through, Danny sees a small opening and exploits it. He tells Happer about the North Atlantic Drift and convinces him to build a marine laboratory as well as an observatory.

Victor--

Victor's heroism comes not from any specific action, but from his personality. He is a sort of Santa Claus, emerging from the sea for the ceilidh, his arms loaded with gifts for Stella and Gordon. For reasons unexplained in the film, Victor has adopted Ferness as a second home and the people as an extended family.

There is a genuine sense of community here, a communal feeling that transcends national borders. When Victor steps off his boat onto the Ferness docks, he does so against Scottish law [5] but with the approval of the Ferness people. He is a welcomed guest; a citizen of the world instead of merely a citizen of the Soviet Union.

Evidence of this comes when Victor sings his song (scene 58). In a highly ironic sequence, Victor (a Russian) sings an American country-western song ("Lone Star Man Like Me") while being accompanied by a traditional Scottish band. The irony comes not only from this unorthodox mix of cultures, but also from the fact that Gordon takes
time out from his negotiations with Mac to let Mac watch Victor sing. This is yet another blunder on Gordon's part because, by letting Mac get involved with Victor's song, Mac is able to see that there was once a time when Victor, too, was a stranger in a strange land. Victor's very presence is evidence that it is possible for an outsider to become part of Ferness' society. Once Mac realizes this possibility, he immediately begins feeling depressed, mourning the harm that will come to Ferness if he succeeds in his stated business.

Before we deal directly with Mac, we need to say something about the villagers themselves. In chapter one, we noted that, unlike many of the other films made about Scotland, the people of Ferness are eager to sell out to Knox Oil and Gas. It is as if they are asking to be exploited. If this is the case, then how do the villagers and their actions fit into our model of Durkheimian sociology? How, too, do they fit into our definition of "hero?"

To answer these questions, we need to look into two different areas. First, we need to remember that, if it were not for Gordon, there would not be a person with whom Mac could negotiate. Gordon strives to become an organic man—he wants the money and the power to effect changes in his way of life. Gordon also wants to be in a position to wield his power. As the Ferness entrepreneur (he runs everything except the store and the lobster fishing), Gordon sees the Knox buy-out as a way to "get ahead"; that is, to make money. Among the things that stand in his way are the villagers. Gordon repeatedly tells them that the buy-out is the best thing that could happen to
them. (See scenes 27 [the town meeting in the church], 40 [in the pub], 43 [the first conversation with Ben], 60 [the second conversation with Ben], 62 [more of the same], and 64 [Ben’s history lesson about the beach].)

All Gordon does is convince the people that they want the money. He never addresses the problems that the money will bring; problems that are voiced by the villagers themselves. Two examples: In scene 31, a group of villagers sit on the dock, patching holes in the lobster nets and talking the merits of one type of car over another.

Jonathan: Apart from anything else, a Rolls Royce will last far longer. It is a false economy to invest in cheap goods.

Roddy: It’s not cheap. The Maserati is over thirty thousand, and it looks much nicer.

Jonathan: Oh, I can just see you getting four or five winter lambs and box of mackerel in the back of a Maserati. That’s what you need your Rolls for: its space. There’s adaptability.

In other words, the people do not understand that, while they may become rich, they will no longer have a place to live and work. When Roddy tells Mac in scene 34 (actually an extension of scene 31) that the men are “all working together,” he does not realize that, if the deal goes through, this working together (a basic root of a mechanical society) will no longer be possible.

Slowly, as our second example will indicate, the villagers begin to realize this problem. During the ceilidh, Peter and Edward sit together in conversation.
Peter: Well, Edward, I wonder what the poor people are doing tonight?

Edward: Ay. But, Peter, I thought all this money would make me feel different. All it's done is make me feel depressed. I don't feel any different.

Peter: You need to buck up and accept the fact that you're stinking rich.

Obviously, being stinking rich is not all it's cracked up to be.

Furthermore, it is necessary to keep in mind that the film begins with an unbalanced social system. The scales are tilted long before Mac and Danny arrive in Farness. Somehow, someone from Knox Oil and Gas had to have contacted Gordon because he knows immediately upon Mac and Danny's arrival that it's "them" (scene 16). To a point, Mac, Danny, and Gordon are on the same side, causing this tip in the scales. But this situation does not last long. Danny falls in love with Marina while Mac falls in love with Stella, leaving Gordon standing alone as the one person who is still pushing for the deal to be completed. When it falls through, Gordon is the one person in Farness who feels cheated (see scene 68). Everyone else appears to be just fine, asking Mac for autographs and applauding him as he leaves via Happer's helicopter.

Mac--

Mac's heroism does not function on the same level as the others. He achieves the status of a mythic hero in the eyes of the villagers:
a man who came to town, shook the pillars of Heaven, and then disappeared into the distance, possibly to return in the future.

This type of mythic hero is common to most cultures. Christians have Jesus, Hawaiians had Lono, the Aztecs had Quetzalcoatl. We can see the possibility of Mac reaching a similar stature in the Ferness society. With time, the tales of his exploits might be embellished upon so as to make Mac a sort of demigod. But even if this does not happen, Mac brought with him such excitement that it may take years before he is forgotten.

There is, however, another type of heroism that we can credit to Mac. As viewers of the film, we watch as Mac slowly lifts himself out of the trappings of his organic life. He does what we should do: he becomes a wise man with a clear understanding of how he must act to help save his society, his environment, and his life. The lessons we learn from Mac's actions are indispensable. In this light, Mac is the most notable hero, pointing the way to righteousness and, more importantly, sanity.
CHAPTER IV

dENSITY

In his quiet, deadpan style—so measured it could almost be called contemplative—Forsyth piles on the incongruities. Yet he explains nothing, prepares nothing, and never comments on a joke once he's made it. . . . Finally the incongruities join together for us in a kind of harmony.[1]

While I admire the work of Sturges and Truffaut, I would not claim to inhabit the same areas as those directors. The one filmmaker in whose footsteps I would care to follow is Robert Altman. I've never sat down and made a list of my ten all-time favorite films, but if I did, McCabe and Mrs. Miller and The Long Goodbye would be on it.

Bill Forsyth [2]

We have seen in detail how Local Hero paints a picture of the modern world; a world that is out of balance with both nature and human beings. We have seen how the film brings society back in balance, creating an environment conducive to human life. What we need to do now is examine how the film functions on its different levels; levels that create a framework on which the social commentary is hung.

In chapter 1, we noted that John Brown analyzes the narrative structure of Local Hero in terms of Russian formalism. "In their analyses of fiction [Brown writes], the Russian formalists made a central distinction between fabula and sjuzet—roughly, between 'paraphrasable story' and 'specificity of the text.'" Indeed, it is
the *squizet*, the specificity of the text, from which *Local Hero* gets its ultimate strength. Forsyth's eye for detail not only creates an amusing story with undertones of critical social commentary, it also creates an entire world—a parallel universe, so to speak—that operates by its own rules.[4]

In this way, Forsyth does inhabit the same area as Robert Altman. Both of these directors have a keen eye for subtle details and each relies on ensemble acting to make his world function. As viewers, it is as if we are taking a stroll in our neighborhood, in an area completely familiar to us, when we turn a corner and find ourselves no longer at home but, instead, in a world entirely alien to us. We are not eased into the situation. We are simply there. We observe, examine, and wonder about this world, searching for clues that will make this new world understandable to us.

Forsyth's eye for detail surpasses even that of Altman's. His precise timing (in scene 59, for example, as Mac, Gordon, and Victor walk toward Ben's shack, Ricky, in the deep, deep background, buzzes across the frame on his motorcycle) and dense images (Ben, as another example, wanders in and out of a number of scenes before he is introduced as a main character) fill the film with details matched only by the great masters of painting, the filmic equivalent of the ceiling in the Sistine Chapel. Other such details include: the South African oranges found by Ben; the men at the ceilidh who play a game of "Guess who I'm impersonating"; the parent-less baby; the Black reverend from Africa; and the automatic door to Happer's office.
The point here is that, taken separately, none of the details are essential to the film. The *fabula* can operate just as well with or without them. But taken together, these details create the *sujet* that gives the film its life.

Even nature is under Forsyth’s control. Fog rolls in on demand. Each sunset paints the partly cloudy sky with a multitude of purples, reds, yellows, and oranges. Low tides come in the early evening, adding to the tranquility of the sunsets. At just the right moments, meteor showers and St. Elmo’s fire light up the sky. Through all of this, the narrative plods along, with whole sections of the film being structured around the revolutions of the Earth, thereby creating an aura of perfect continuity while subtly underlining the importance of nature in the film.[5]

The question becomes: How much of this is deliberate on Forsyth’s part? According to him, most of it is.

When I wrote the script [for *Local Hero*], everything was there for a reason; the balance was already there in the script. There’s a certain point while shooting a scene when you have to relax, and not push too hard. Let the eventual audience contribute—let the people pick up on things which are hard to pin down and describe but which did exist in the script.[6]

From this, we can see that Forsyth had a vision of the density of the film from the start. This vision permeates all points of the film. By having a clear vision, by deciding to create an entire world with its own rules and logic, Forsyth made these details possible.

This density does not stop with specific visual imagery. It carries over to the structuring of the entire narrative.
Local Hero has a narrative which appears to be quite linear and almost casual in its construction but which carries, on closer examination, a dense pattern of themes and variants, full of intricate correspondences and rhymes... An example of this expressive formalism... is the way in which movement in and out of the village is organized. The static tableaux of the villagers always sitting around talking... are systematically disrupted by the land, sea and air arrivals of Mac and Danny, Victor the Russian trawler skipper and Happer the oil magnate respectively, while the magical emergences of Marina on the beach and the near-sUBLiminal eruptions of the village's Hell's Angel [Ricky], always roaring up and down the main street and apparently going nowhere, are further variants on this motif. Another... pattern revolves around the sea/sky opposition, and the complex associations which the film establishes between the two terms of the opposition and the various characters and incidents: the two women named after harbor and star and the pairing of Danny and Mac with them, the chain linking together the aurora borealis, the meteor shower, the jet fighters screaming overhead, Happer's obsession with astronomy, and his arrival by helicopter (its light is described in the screenplay as an "eccentric star") and Mac's abrupt final departure by the same vehicle. This culminates in the bleak moment when Mac returns home, looks at the seashells he has brought with him and then goes out on to his balcony to gaze at the night skyline of Houston through the pollution haze.[7]

We can see a pattern developing here. Each step we take (from the overall density of the film through the unique relationship of the names of the women and the pairing of Mac and Danny with them) brings us to another level of understanding. It should not surprise us, then, that this density returns us to our original starting point: the relationship of Local Hero to the "Highland myth" created by such films as Brigadoon and Whisky Galore!

Towards the end of Local Hero, Forsyth's madman [Happer] arrives in the Highlands and declares, "You've got a good sky here. The air is clear. I could get to like this place." The words are addressed to the Scot Danny, whom Happer has mistaken in the Celtic twilight for Mac, whom Happer believes, equally mistakenly, is of Scottish descent; thus Happer gets it right while getting it all wrong. But
the comic paradox leaves standing, untouched at the centre, the actual response to landscape, and what is striking about . . . [this film and its relation to the Highland myth is its] complex attitude to the signification of the land . . .

Brown goes on to say that the "dominant Scottish movie myths relate specifically to landscape and geography, the country versus the city . . ." and are thus the reason for not dismissing "the Highland myth [by Scottish filmmakers] as nothing more than a reactionary and pernicious distortion of the Scottish psyche."[9] From here, Brown continues, the next step is to return to the city and engage the equally problematic urban myth; that is, the idea that Scotland is still not part of the modern world, that the people of Scotland are indeed "pawky," and that, when all is said and done, the Scots like it this way. This is where Forsyth started with That Sinking Feeling and Gregory's Girl, and it may be that this is where Forsyth is most at home, for he continues to engage this urban myth in Comfort and Joy.[10]

As we might expect, there is yet another level to the density of Local Hero: the nature and function of the film's humor. Like the overall detail of the film, the humor was also part of Forsyth's original concept.

In common with every other Scottish film-maker, I thought there was a story to be made out of the oil business. I suppose most people saw it in a dramatic way, with oil rigs and mountainous waves. I didn't relish the idea of two months clambering around hard, cold metal girders heaving about in the sea, so I diverted it from the hardware. It seemed to me the human things were more interesting. I saw it along the lines of a Scottish Beverly Hillbillies. What
would happen to a small community if it suddenly became immensely rich? That was the first comic idea and the story built itself from there.\[11\]

It is important to understand that by building up the story from a comic foundation, Forsyth is able to do two things. First, it makes any and all social commentary easier for us to swallow. Had the humor not been there, watching the film would be a formidable task, as dry and as difficult as a reading of Durkheim’s works. By infusing the film with near-equal parts of humor and commentary, Forsyth creates a film that makes our initial viewing a pleasurable lark while, on subsequent viewings, we find ourselves getting more into the rhythms of both the narrative structure and the underlying themes. Not only can we not get everything out of the film our first time through it, we find ourselves picking up on new images and ideas even after repeated viewings.

The second thing that the humor does relates directly to us, the audience. Forsyth assumes that, as viewers, we may not be quite as loutish as most Hollywood comedies would have us believe. Each joke in Local Hero refers back, in some way, to the themes, to the deconstruction of the Highland myth, and to the idea that comedy is, in fact, very serious business. Again, this is not accidental on Forsyth’s part, but a specific attempt at returning to a more pure form of comedy: “comedy that assumes [the] audience does not need to be hit over the head to elicit laughs.”\[12\] In Forsyth’s words:

The films I’ve made have always had a much darker side to them than I think people have perceived, and it makes me wonder if there is really all that much understanding of what irony is. In fact, I am beginning to reach the
conclusion that people think comedy is about making us laugh, and if there is nothing more to comedy than laughs, then a lot of effort is going for nothing. [13]

In effect, this means that, even more so than Ben or Mac or any of the other characters, the audience becomes the ultimate hero of the film. Forsyth relies on us to work while watching Local Hero. We cannot be passive observers. We must put as much of ourselves into the film as Forsyth does. We must, in other words, break through our own anomie to fully appreciate Local Hero.

I think that because of overemphatic acting style and overemphatic camera style the audience’s options become limited, and they have been asked to do less and less work. I would hate to be accused of trying to manipulate an audience into one or other [sic] emotion at any one time.

The nicest thing anyone can say to me about Local Hero is, I saw your movie last week and I’m still thinking about it and I might even go and see it again, because there were one or two things I was thinking about that I want to check out. That means the audience are really working hard and I think that’s wonderful. They are the film in that sense. And when I’ve seen it with a large audience, say about a thousand people, then I can sense that happening: one or two people kind of giggle at something and no one else will and then someone at the back will start laughing at nothing in particular, which means that they’re all sitting there churning it over themselves. I think that’s wonderful, I really do. Makes me feel good when that happens.[14]

It should make us feel good, too. After all is said and done in this analysis, we still leave standing our initial feeling that there is something magical about Local Hero. It is an extremely personal film that touches each viewer differently. Forsyth has created a masterpiece for world cinema, and he has done so by never forgetting that we, the audience, are our own heroes.
NOTES--CHAPTER ONE


8. It should be noted that this is not a problem unique to the British Isles. In Ruyss Naveres' book The Mexican Cinema [Albuquerque: University of New Mexico Press, 1976], pp. 13-14], Mexican director Emilio Fernandez refers to this. He says that, after the aborted revolution of 1924, he realized "that it was possible to create a Mexican cinema with our own actors and our own stories, without having to photograph gringos or gringas or tell stories that had nothing to do with our people." This, in turn, was taken to heart by many Mexican artists. At present, Mexico has the largest commercial film production community in the entire Spanish-speaking world. [See: Carl J. Mora, Mexican Cinema: Reflections of a Society, 1896-1980 (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1982), p. xi.] Further evidence of these facts can be seen in A Collage of Two Cities, a video tape Master's project written and directed by Douglas Gan, a native of Taiwan, for The Ohio State University, 1986, a presentation I helped to edit.

9. This idea first came to my attention in The Ohio State University's Department of Photography and Cinema's course P&C 630, "Film Criticism," Spring Quarter, 1986, Ron Green, instructor.

10. While the process of turning Scotland into a film "have" nation is still in its early stages, it should be noted that both the Scottish Film Production Fund (of which Forsyth is a committee member) and Channel 4 have done an exceptional job in funding homegrown Scottish film production. [See: John Brown, "A Suitable Job for a Scot," Sight and Sound, 52, no. 3 (Summer, 1983), p. 158.]


17. Ibid.

18. Ibid.

19. In preparing this study, certain questions have arisen as to the impact of Durkheim on modern sociology. In this respect, Robert A. Nisbet writes: "It is highly unlikely that Durkheim will ever compete seriously as a household name with Darwin, Marx, and Freud, whether among laity or scholars and intellectuals. His influence in the social sciences has been substantial and, as I have stressed, is very likely to become even more substantial during the age ahead of us. But there is very little likelihood of this influence becoming, as has been so conspicuously true of both Marx and Freud in our century, a very part of the culture we live in."

"There is solid reason for this. Marx has become virtually canonized in a number of countries in the world. But even had nations such as Russia and China not become Marxist in official writ, Marx would still have been assured of a commanding position in the modern world by virtue of his unique relation to the dominant themes of political, social, and economic revolution. It is not different with Freud. We live in an age of extraordinary preoccupation with the self, with the individual conscious and unconscious, and with those aberrant forms of mental life we call neuroses and psychoses. No one needs to be told of Freud's relation to all of this, of the affinity between this preoccupation, to be seen at all levels, and Freud's writings at the turn of the century. As Marx shaped our revolutionary perspective, Freud shaped our psychological perspective. Both have been mighty prophets! For even those vast numbers who never have and never will read Marx and Freud, these two minds, very much like Darwin, will be nonetheless powerful, shaping forces. For, to an astonishing degree, they have created 20th-century [sic] culture."

"Little, if any, of that kind of influence can be claimed for Durkheim. Nor will I make the effort to claim it. What I want to do instead is highlight the relation between Durkheim's central ideas and
some of the most dominating themes of contemporary thought and behavior. I repeat: it would be impossible beyond a very limited, even negligible, degree to put Durkheim's writings in causal connection with these themes; they are too diverse in their roots and manifestation, and, as just noted, Durkheim's name was scarcely known at the time these themes were beginning to become luminous in Western, and especially American culture. But lack of causal connection in no way bespeaks lack of intellectual relation. Very often in the history of thought there have been those writing whose influence was then, and remained, minor by comparison with the Platos and Augustines in the West but whose work we, with the advantage of retrospect, can nevertheless see a striking epitomization of large and powerful cultural forces.

"I believe this to be true of Durkheim's thought. Formidably scholarly and scientific though his works may be by the standards of even intelligent general readers, aloof as Durkheim's own mind was... to the interests of the market place, devoted though he was to the problems which arose directly from his scholarly materials, there is yet an underlying affinity between Durkheim's interests and the by-now far-flung interests of modern Western populations... Irrespective of causal relation or of household status as a name, Durkheim's thought contains ideas, values, and a general sense of the movement of history which are in many ways closer at this moment [1974] to what strikes deepest in the breast of modern man than even the ideas and values of a Marx or Freud." [Robert A. Nisbet, The Sociology of Emile Durkheim (New York: Oxford University Press, 1974), pp. 261-62.]

20. Coser's quotations from Durkheim are from the following:


22. Ibid., p. 132.

23. Ibid.

24. Ibid., p. 132-33.

25. The reasoning here is that if we are to look at films that are being made by those whom, until very recently, have been film "have nots," our first step must be to remove ourselves from the thinking that, as film "haves," we know how a film should be made. The same could be said even for those who have been film "haves" for many years. Whatever the case, we must be willing and able to view a film from the perspective of other races and societies, not just our own.
25. (Cont.) Even without a detailed background of these sociological ideas, we can point to a number of films that seem ready-made for this sort of analysis. That Sinking Feeling, Gregory's Girl, Comfort and Joy (all written and directed by Forsyth), Little Big Man, Kagemusha, Rio Escondido, Melvin and Howard, McCabe and Mrs. Miller, and Nashville come immediately to mind.
NOTES--CHAPTER TWO


2. To assist us in this discussion, Local Hero has been broken down scene-by-scene in the appendix to this paper. References made to specific scene numbers are based on this scene-by-scene outline.


4. It should be noted that Peter Riegert (the actor who plays Mac) does a brilliant bit of acting in this sequence. With both voice and body language, he conveys a sense of excitement that cannot be duplicated on the printed page.

NOTES--CHAPTER THREE


4. At this point, a slight digression is needed. Local Hero was written and produced in the early part of the 1980’s—an era of extreme conservativeness in both Britain and the United States—when those with political power not only exploited the environment, but also reduced the funds that protected and revitalized the ecosystem. The assumption was (and, at this writing, still is) that we do not need to protect the environment because it is here, as ex-Secretary of the Interior James Watt and many Christian fundamentalists (i.e., those who follow the teaching of the Bible to the letter) have said, only to support human beings until Jesus Christ returns and takes all of us to "the Promised Land." And while a number of films in this period concerned themselves with the political arena, Local Hero is one of the rare exceptions that deals with social orders in perfect harmony with nature.

     The point here is that, in an organic society, power is the one thing that really matters. Both Marina and Danny work for Knox, but it is Danny who is in a better position to influence those with power in the company.

5. As far back as 1895, the Twenty-Sixth Parliament of the United Kingdom established territorial sea rights extending thirteen miles off the coast of the British Isles. [See The Public General Statutes Affecting Scotland (Edinburgh, Scotland: William Blackwood and Sons, 1895), p. 84.]


5. A perfect example of this comes with scenes 59 through 65. The day begins in scene 59 with Mac and Victor sitting on the sea wall, talking. The ever-present early-morning British overcast shrouds the sun. In scene 60, the clouds begin to break up. By scene 62, the beach is bathed in bright sunshine. Evening comes with scene 64, and with it, a few clouds roll in. Finally, dusk arrives in scene 65.


8. Ibid., p. 46.

9. Ibid.

10. With Comfort and Joy, Forsyth once again deals with a man who is not in sync with his environment.


APPENDIX A

A SCENE-BY-SCENE BREAKDOWN OF LOCAL HERO
The following scene breakdown has been compiled from a video tape copy of the film *Local Hero*.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENE NUMBER</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Houston. Opening credits over shots of Mac driving to work.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Happer's office. Screening of new Knox commercial and discussion of Scotland acquisition. Happer is asleep throughout.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Crabbe tells Mac that he is being sent to Scotland.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>Mac and Cal talk on the phone and then have lunch at the sandwich machine. Mac admits that he is not Scottish but Hungarian.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>Happer's office. First session with Moritz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Mac tells Cal that he is going to meet Happer.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
7  
Happer's secretary sends Mac up to Happer's office.

8  
Happer's office. Happer tells Mac that he wants Mac to keep an eye on the constellation Virgo while in Scotland. Happer expects a comet to appear there. We also find out that Alexander Knox, and not Happer's grandfather, was the founder of Knox Oil and Gas.

9  
Mac "calls" Rita for a date. He "big deals" leaving town. Rita refuses.

10  
Mac's apartment. He calls Trudy. They have an argument.

11  
Mac on plane to Scotland.

12  
Arrive Aberdeen. Mac meets Danny.

13  
The Bay Lab. Mac and Danny meet Marina and find out about the Farness project. Mac is given a model of the town.
SCENE NUMBER | DESCRIPTION
---|---
14 | The road trip to Ferness (Mac and Danny). They hit the rabbit. Danny explains that he speaks twelve languages. Mac talks about his car. They fall asleep.
15 | Mac and Danny awaken the next morning to Mac's alarm watch. They see the first fighter jet. The rabbit is named "Harry" by Danny and "Trudy" by Mac.
16 | Arrive in Ferness. Meet Gordon and Stella. Gordon tells Stella that it's "them." Mac needs to charge his briefcase.
17 | Lunch at the hotel. Mac needs to talk to a Mr. Urquhart (which Mac pronounces "er-que-heart").
18 | Urquhart's (Gordon's) office. First encounter with Ricky's motorcycle. Mac, Danny, and Gordon talk business. Alone, Gordon dances a little jig at the thought of being rich.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>SCENE NUMBER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19</td>
<td>Dinner at hotel. Lemon in Mac's eyes.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>On the beach #1. Mac and Danny walking in suits. They talk about the construction project and the oil business.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>21</td>
<td>In the pub, Mac needs to make a phone call. All the &quot;lads&quot; pitch in to get enough change for the phone box.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>After almost being run down by Ricky for a second time, Mac makes it to the phone box and calls Cal. After the call, Mac takes his first look at the sky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>23</td>
<td>Houston. Happer and Moritz in Happer's office. Moritz wants to begin &quot;physicalizing.&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>24</td>
<td>Fernness. Mac in bed listening to Stella and Gordon make love. The rabbit rests on a chair.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
25  Next morning. Mac and Danny pass Stella in the hall.

26  On the beach #2, this time with briefcases. Fighter jets do a practice bombing run. Mac and Danny see Ben for the first time.

27  In the church, a town meeting is held. Mac and Danny meet Reverend MacPherson. More jets.

28  Ben on the beach, alone.

29  Dinner at the hotel. We find out who Ben is. Gordon cooks the rabbit.

30  In his room, Mac hangs up and "iron pats" his suit.

31  Next morning at the docks. The men discuss which type of car to buy. Gideon paints a new name ("The Silver Dollar") on his boat.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>SCENE NUMBER</th>
<th>DESCRIPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>32</td>
<td>Gordon and Stella in Gordon's office. They kiss and begin to undress.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>33</td>
<td>On the beach #3. Mac and Danny skip stones. Mac has replaced his double-breasted suit with a sport jacket. He says &quot;un-cut&quot; for the first time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>34</td>
<td>At the docks, Mac almost gets run over again. The locals are surprised that Mac only has one job. Mac is uncomfortable. He asks about the baby.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>35</td>
<td>Danny alone. He sees Marina who tells him that she expects there to be a marine laboratory built in Farness.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>36</td>
<td>Mac buys some toothpaste and shampoo at the general store.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>37</td>
<td>Marina and Danny. More about the lab.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCENE NUMBER</td>
<td>DESCRIPTION</td>
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<tr>
<td>38</td>
<td>Mac watches Stella and Gordon dance in the dining room. He leaves his purchases in the hall.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>39</td>
<td>At the docks, Mac tries to convince Gideon to use a dollar sign ($) in his boat’s name.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40</td>
<td>In the pub, the town’s people are worried that Mac will pull out if they wait any longer for a deal to be struck. Mac enters and has a glass of 42 year old whiskey with Gordon.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>41</td>
<td>Dusk on the cliffs. Gordon and Mac discuss business in vague terms.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>42</td>
<td>At another part of the cliffs, Danny waits for Marina.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>43</td>
<td>Mac and Gordon visit Ben. They talk a little business and about the sky. Mac gets excited about the meteor shower.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
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<tr>
<td>44</td>
<td>Next morning. Danny in tub holding his breath.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>45</td>
<td>Mac and Danny leave the hotel. First time Mac is not wearing a tie. Mac saves Danny from being run over by Ricky. Happer calls Mac and they talk about the sky.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>46</td>
<td>Houston. Happer leaves his office.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>47</td>
<td>At home, Happer gets an abusive phone call from Moritz.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>48</td>
<td>Farness. Mac on the beach alone. A sweater replaces his jackets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>49</td>
<td>Danny on the cliffs. Marina appears from the water.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>50</td>
<td>Mac collects empty shells from tide pools. He leaves his watch on the rocks.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCENE NUMBER</td>
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<tr>
<td>51</td>
<td>Marina and Danny watch the seals and talk about mermaids.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>52</td>
<td>In the store, Victor calls on the two-way radio and says that he is coming to the ceilidh.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>54</td>
<td>Barefoot and with his pants rolled up, Mac walks along the cliffs with his shells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>55</td>
<td>Marina and Danny on the cliffs. Danny discovers Marina's webbed feet.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>56</td>
<td>Gordon and Victor in the pub. They talk business. Mac comes in with his shells.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>57</td>
<td>Mac washes his shells and Danny borrows one of them.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The ceilidh. Gordon tries to get Mac to negotiate. Mac is uninterested. Victor sings his song. Mac waltzes with Stella. Victor tries to cheer up Mac. Danny waits on the beach for Marina and tells her about the refinery. Mac sees the aurora borealis and calls Happer. Mac gets really depressed. He talks to Gordon about changing places and confesses his love for Stella.

The next morning, Mac and Victor talk about the material world. Gordon tells them that Ben really does own the beach. Happer calls to say that he's on his way to Farness.

Opening negotiations with Ben.

In the hotel, Mac asks Gordon to turn off the music. Gordon acknowledges this but does not turn it off.
<table>
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<tr>
<th>SCENE NUMBER</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>62</td>
<td>More negotiations with Ben. Mac misses his chance with Ben's sand game.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>63</td>
<td>Dinner at the hotel with Ben. The locals turn hostile toward Ben.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>64</td>
<td>On the cliffs, Ben tells Gordon and Mac about the history of the beach.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>65</td>
<td>At Ben's shack, he turns in for the night. The townspeople arrive as a lynching party. Happer arrives by helicopter and is dismayed by Mac's appearance. Happer requests a telescope.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>66</td>
<td>Dinner at the hotel. Happer wants to offer Ben a piano.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SCENE NUMBER</td>
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<tr>
<td>67</td>
<td>Happer and Ben talk while Mac, Gordon, Danny, and Victor wait. Happer emerges from Ben’s shack and says that the refinery deal is off and that he will build a sea/sky research center instead. Happer takes Danny under his wing and sends Mac back to Houston.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>68</td>
<td>Mac settles up with Gordon. Mac is tight-mouthed and business-like. He won’t say “good-bye” to Stella.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>69</td>
<td>Mac gets into the helicopter. Danny is looking for Marina. Mac signs an autograph. Happer and Ben take a walk. Mac leaves.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70</td>
<td>Mac arrives at his apartment in Houston, unloads his shells, tacks up a few snapshots, and walks out onto his patio. We hear a siren and see the Houston skyline in the distance. Fade out.</td>
</tr>
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<tr>
<td>71</td>
<td>Fade in on a long shot of Farness. Phone rings three times. Black out. One more ring. Credits.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
APPENDIX B

CREDITS FOR LOCAL HERO
Credits for Local Hero

Cast

Felix Happer...........................................Burt Lancaster
"Mac" Macintire......................................Peter Riegert
Ben Knox...............................................Fulton Mackay
Gordon Urquhart......................................Denis Lawson
Marina..................................................Jenny Seagrove
Stella Urquhart......................................Jennifer Black
Danny Oldsen..........................................Peter Capaldi
Victor..................................................Christopher Rozycki
Moritz..................................................Norman Chancer
Reverend MacPherson.................................Christopher Asante
Geddes..................................................Rikki Fulton
Watt......................................................Alex Norton
Cal........................................................John Jackson
Donaldson..............................................Dan Ammerman
Roddy....................................................Tam Dean Burn
Baby......................................................Luke Coulter
Mrs. Wyatt..............................................Karen Douglas
Skipper..................................................Kenny Ireland
Fountain................................................Harlan Jordan
Peter.....................................................Charles Kearney
Gideon....................................................David Mowat
Anderson..............................................John Poland
Linda.....................................................Anne Scott Jones
Cast (Continued)

Bullock..........................................................Ian Stewart
Russian.........................................................Tanya Ticktin
Jonathan.........................................................Jonathan Watson
Fraser...............................................................David Anderson
Pauline...........................................................Caroline Guthrie
Andrew.............................................................Ray Jeffries
Sandy.................................................................Willie Joss
Edward.............................................................James Kennedy
Crabbe.............................................................Buddy Quaid
Old Woman.......................................................Edit Ruddick
Ricky.................................................................John Gordon Sinclair
Mrs. Fraser........................................................Sandra Voe
Iain.................................................................Jimmy Yuilla
The Act Tones....................................................Mark Winchester

Alan Clark
Alai Darby
Roddy Murray
Dale Winchester
Brian Rowan

Switchboard Operators.......................................Betty Macey

Michele McCareil
Anne Thompson
Crew

Written and Directed by.................................................Bill Forsyth
Produced by...............................................................David Puttnam
Lighting Cameraman.....................................................Chris Menges
Editor.................................................................Michael BradseH
Music.................................................................Mark Knopfler
Graphics.................................................................John Gorham
Sound.................................................................Louis Kramer
Sound Editor............................................................Ian Fuller
Assistant Sound Editor..............................................David Grimsdale
Production Designer................................................Roger Murray-Leach
Art Directors (Scotland)..............................................Adrienne Atkinson
                                                          Frank Walsh
                                                          Ian Watson
Art Director (USA).....................................................Richard James
Modeler.................................................................Steve Simmonds
Special Effects........................................................Wally Veevers
                                                          Peter Hutchinson
                                                          Peter Skeham
                                                          Patrick McColgan
                                                          Stuart Galloway
                                                          Roy Carnell
Costume Designers.....................................................Penny Rose
                                                          Pip Newbery
Crew (Continued)

Make-up......................................................Tommie Manderson
Assistant Make-up........................................Karen Dawson
Assistant Director.........................................Jonathan Benson

A Warner Brothers release of an Enigma Productions for Goldcrest.

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Running Time: 111 Minutes.

MPAA Rating: PG.
BIBLIOGRAPHY

Books


Articles

Articles (Cont.)


Articles (Cont.)


