INFORMATION TO USERS

This manuscript has been reproduced from the microfilm master. UMI films the text directly from the original or copy submitted. Thus, some thesis and dissertation copies are in typewriter face, while others may be from any type of computer printer.

The quality of this reproduction is dependent upon the quality of the copy submitted. Broken or indistinct print, colored or poor quality illustrations and photographs, print bleedthrough, substandard margins, and improper alignment can adversely affect reproduction.

In the unlikely event that the author did not send UMI a complete manuscript and there are missing pages, these will be noted. Also, if unauthorized copyright material had to be removed, a note will indicate the deletion.

Oversize materials (e.g., maps, drawings, charts) are reproduced by sectioning the original, beginning at the upper left-hand corner and continuing from left to right in equal sections with small overlaps. Each original is also photographed in one exposure and is included in reduced form at the back of the book.

Photographs included in the original manuscript have been reproduced xerographically in this copy. Higher quality 6" x 9" black and white photographic prints are available for any photographs or illustrations appearing in this copy for an additional charge. Contact UMI directly to order.

UMI
A Bell & Howell Information Company
300 North Zeeb Road, Ann Arbor MI 48106-1346 USA
313/761-4700  800/521-0600
Treatment of Women in the Cinema of Jean Renoir

DISSERTATION

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for
the Degree of Doctor of Philosophy in the Graduate School
of the Ohio State University

by

Sumit Ghose, B.A, LL.B., M.A.

* * * * *

The Ohio State University

1997

Dissertation Committee:

Dr. Judith Mayne, Adviser
Dr. J. Ronald Green
Dr. Robert Cottrell

Approved by:

Dr. Judith Mayne
Department of French and Italian
ABSTRACT

Andrew Sarris, an eminent film critic, has hailed the career of Jean Renoir, one of the greatest filmmakers of all times, as a river of personal expression. Renoir, as the pioneer of deep focus, has been eulogized for having been a true precursor of néo-realism and for having used an unblinking camera on his subjects, in films like Le Crime De Monsieur Lange (1935). Renoir has also been castigated for his against the grain casting of his performers, in films like Madame Bovary (1934) and for creating confusing images through his highly unconventional treatment of subject matter as in The Woman on the Beach (1946). Throughout his career Renoir has experimented with both form and content in his films, often, much to the utter frustration and anger of his producers and critics. In discussing Renoir’s works, critics have concentrated mostly on his technical innovations and the social implications of his films. Renoir’s fascination in associating “man” with his environment in order to explore the relationship between nature and man, man’s passion and friendship have been adequately extolled. In so doing, critical literature has largely overlooked Renoir’s contribution to the redefinition of the image of women. In this treatise, an attempt has been to analyze the importance and implications of the feminine imagery in Renoir’s films. Six films spanning the various stages of Renoir’s evolution as a filmmaker have been discussed to trace the various ramifications of the
feminine images. It is evident that an appropriate evaluation of women in Renoir’s films can be made only by investigating them in the various relationships that the women get involved in. This monograph proposes that the multiplicity of functions of these images resist any generalized statement or assumption about women in Renoir’s films.
To My Parents, My Brother and His Family
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

I would like to express my sincere appreciation and gratitude to my adviser Dr. Judith Mayne for her invaluable guidance throughout this research. I would like to express deep thanks to Dr. J. Ronald Green for all his emphasis on critical thinking has been very enlightening. Special thanks are extended to Dr. Robert Cottrell for being a member of my committee and for his challenging questions about my work. I wish to thank all other faculty members in the Department of French and Italian for their enthusiastic cooperation and help towards my graduate experience in Film and Foreign Language at this esteemed university.

I would also like to thank Dr. Charles Williams for being a source of inspiration throughout my stay at the Ohio State University. My heartfelt appreciation is also expressed to Dr. Paul Klohr for giving me moral support at every step of the way, particularly in times of need. My thanks to Dr. Nancy Chism and other faculty development specialists for improving my teaching skills during this period.
My deepest gratitude is expressed to Mr. Steve Kremer and Mr. Willie Young for their precious encouragement and invaluable assistance without which this work might not have been possible.

I sincerely acknowledge the long hours of patience and care which Dr. Nilendu Gupta spared me to attend to my computer and other problems. Very special thanks are extended to my friends, neighbors and well-wishers for their consistent unadulterated entertainment to help me focus on my studies. Finally, my deepest thanks go to my parents and my wonderful brother, whose love, affection and constant motivation made my career possible.
VITA

Born - Calcutta, India

1984 .................................................. B.A.(Hons.)

University of Calcutta, Calcutta, India

1985 - 1987 ........................................... Diplôme de Langue,

École Internationale, Paris, France

1988 - 1991 ........................................... Graduate Teaching Associate

Department of Foreign Languages and Literatures and Communication,

Indiana State University, Terre Haute, Indiana

1991-1995 ........................................... Graduate Teaching Associate

Department of French and Italian

The Ohio State University, Columbus, Ohio.
FIELDS OF STUDY

Major Field: French Films and Literature
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

| ABSTRACT | ................................................................. ii |
| DEDICATION | ........................................................ iv |
| ACKNOWLEDGMENTS | ................................................. v |
| VITA | .............................................................. vii |
| 
| **CHAPTER** | **PAGE** |
| 1. INTRODUCTION | ................................................. 1 |
| 2. Nana: the maligned performer | ................................................. 35 |
| 3. La Chienne: the misunderstood murder victim | ............................................. 70 |
| 4. Madame Bovary: the melancholic soul | ............................................. 105 |
| 5. La Règle du jeu: the manipulating wives and the mistress | ............................................. 148 |
| 6. The River: the mysticism of love and life | ...................................... 174 |
| 7. Eléna et les hommes: dangerous relations | ............................................. 200 |
| 8. Conclusion | ...................................................... 222 |
| Bibliography | ........................................................... 231 |
CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

"The more I travel through life, the more I am convinced that masks are proliferating. I have difficulty in finding a woman whose face looks as it really is. Our age is the triumph of makeup. And not only for the faces, but, more important, for the mind as well." 1

Jean Renoir

In his very first film Catherine (1924-27), there is a scene in which Renoir, playing the role of a dandy sub-prefect, "leaning on a mantlepiece, with marvellous insouciance," reads the following poetic billet-doux to Edith:

Dites, Edith un mot pour plaire
Au plus tendre des sous-préfets.
Dites Edith: Votre voix claire
A de délicieux effets.
Dites Edith, un oui qui laisse
Votre soupirant en liesse.
Un oui, par pitié, ou sinon,
Malgré mon zèle, je délaisse
La France et l'Administration.2

This adoration of women is reflected in almost all his films, and can often have perilous consequences.

In Catherine, Mallet, who is both the mayor and Catherine's aspiring lover, risks his family life to express his compassion for Catherine. The dandy sub-prefect admonishes Mallet for his "immoral" actions. The sub-prefect, however, continues to express his admiration for Mallet's wife Edith. In Eléna et les hommes (1955), Rollan, the
proud and victorious general who is about to become the undisputed ruler of the country, reacts in a similar vein. He is ready to forsake his political career and fame for a “Princesse polonaise.” Jurieu risks his life and fame as an aviator for the sake of Christine in La Règle du jeu (1939). In La Chienne (1931), Lulu’s seductive appeals precipitate Legrand’s loss of his home, his passion for painting and eventually his mind. In many of Renoir’s films, the women emerge as femmes fatales. The image of Renoir’s women clearly has deep and complicated implications. This research focuses on an analysis of such complications, through detailed readings of six films: Nana (1926), La Chienne, Madame Bovary (1934), La Règle du jeu, The River (1951), and Eléna et les hommes.

Most critical discussions of Renoir’s filmmaking have concentrated on exploring his stylistic approaches and the social and technical ramifications of his films. It has been well established that his creative use of focus creates an aura of impressionistic painting on screen. The tableaux Renoir created with his leading women, especially with Catherine Hessling, affirm this concept. For example, the dream sequence in La fille de l’eau (1924) illustrates this point. Sesonske describes this dream sequence in the following manner:

... a double exposure in which the dream Virginia, clothed in flowing white gown, detaches herself from the real Virginia, still asleep in the rain... Finally he photographed his actors on a white horse running on a treadmill against a dead black background in order to achieve the effect of ride through treetops. Through all this Virginia moves with unshaken serenity.

Sesonske quotes Pierre Philippe to further elucidate this notion. “The protagonist is an evanescent female figure who appears and disappears across dream forests, who attends impassively to the most strange and incredible things...like a pretty and idiotic little animal.”
One of the first notable characteristics of Renoir's film making and authorship, as
documented by Leo Braudy, is Renoir's integration of nature into his films. The long
shots of the plush green outdoors in *Une Partie de campagne* (1936), *Boudu sauvé des
eaux* (1932), and *The River* (1951) are examples. Boudu, in *Boudu sauvé des eaux*, leads
an almost anarchic life. His refusal to abide by the bourgeois social norms reflects images
of the natural wilderness. Braudy also notes that Renoir juxtaposes theatrical forms of
expression in film on nature, with the creation of the proscenium frame and the
constructed sets, establish a blend between theater, film and man’s close association with
nature. The sets *La Règle du jeu*, *The River*, *La Grande Illusion* (1937) and *La Carrosse
d'Or* (1953) serve as examples. Maréchal sitting on the bench in the garden in *La Grande
Illusion*, brilliantly illustrates the proscenium. Rosenthal tells Elsa that they will be
leaving. In a tearful voice, Elsa replies that she knew they would leave and destroy her
momentary relief from loneliness. As she wails, she opens the kitchen window which
allows a direct view of the garden. In this scene, the window panels serve as the curtains
for the garden stage, creating a frame within the frame. Maréchal sits there as a lonely
protagonist, resembling an exhausted knight of honor. His languid eyes echo Elsa’s
despondency and the tense drama that the audience witnesses between Rosenthal and Elsa
in the kitchen.

According to Braudy, Renoir also searches for a society which brings energy and
in which order is very pronounced. The attempt to establish fellow feeling despite
confusion and hate as in *La Règle du jeu* or in *Eléna et les hommes* or in *Le Crime de
Monsieur Lange* (1935), point to this direction. In *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, Estelle
positions herself in the middle of working-class men. The workers have a community of
their own. Since Lange and Estelle identify with that community, their actions have direct
consequences on the community. She recounts the incidents leading to the murder of
Batala, the corrupt former proprietor of the publishing house. The community does not appreciate the idea that one of them should commit a murder. They serve as the judge and the jury to decide the gravity of Lange's action and pass a sentence. Lange leaves the community in search of a better future and a more peaceful life. Lange's departure cleanses the community from the effects of a crime and reinstates harmony. Renoir's films such as *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*, apart from being exciting enigmatic narratives, are studies of social classes and the politics of socio-economic life. Faulkner demonstrates how *La Chienne* develops into a film concerned with examining property as the infra-structure of inter-personal relations among Legrand, Dédé, Lulu, Adèle and Godard.7

The description of Renoir's filmmaking remains incomplete without noting an interesting observation by Bazin. Bazin writes that, "He[Renoir] is the only film maker in the world who can afford to treat cinema with such apparent casualness."8 Renoir's treatment of women reflects this casualness. He seems to defy any particular social norm that defines and restricts the role of women in society. Eléna, in *Eléna et les hommes*, in order to save her family fortunes is very casual about her possible marriage to Martin-Michaud. She is equally apathetic about her risky relationships with both Rollan and Henri. Her infatuation with Rollan puts her in danger of being entangled in political scandals. Her flirtations with Henri nearly result in a fatal rivalry between the two friends Henri and Rollan. Again, this is very casually averted. A similar aplomb is visible in Mme. Lestingois's (a bourgeois housewife) attitude, when she has sex with a tramp, in *Boudu sauvé des eaux*. The fortuitous discussion that takes place around Estelle's pregnancy in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange* (1936), which Estelle enjoys and actively participates in, provides another example of this casualness. 9
This analysis proposes that Renoir's approaches to social issues can be illuminated through the understanding of his treatment of the women characters in his films. The study of women in Renoir's films has not been explored in secondary literature.

The development of the woman's image

Women appear in very prominent roles in Renoir's films from the beginning of his film career. Many of his films are even named after a woman or focus on an individual woman's life: Catherine, La Fille de l'eau (1924), Nana, La Petite Marchande d'allumettes (1928), Madame Bovary, Marquitta (1927), La Chienne, Éléna et les hommes are only a few examples. His interviews with the writers of Cahiers du cinéma, viz., Godard, Rivette, Truffaut and others, his own accounts in his autobiography and in his biography of his father, all foreground women. In his interviews, Renoir often suggested that his films were studies of the gestures of French people. In Renoir's films, gestures are frequently either analogous, complementary, or alternative to emotions. Renoir's films give the gestures of women a critical function. Renoir even devoted one film, The Woman on the Beach (1946-7), to the exclusive study of the gestures of women. In The Woman on the Beach, Renoir claims that he wanted to lay the foundation of the story on sex, "a story in which emotions played no part." The film concentrated only on analyzing how the woman's gestures expressed her physical love, not her emotions. This film's commercial failure proves, however, that spectators did not appreciate Renoir's creative approach.

Made in Hollywood, The Woman on the Beach marks a distinct break from the traditions of classical filmmaking and from any predetermined criteria for the image of women. This film is an assertion by Renoir that the filmic image of women does not have to abide by the prescriptions of either the audience or the film industry. Years after
having made *The Woman on the Beach*, Renoir described his feelings about the commercially unsuccessful film in the following words:

> What I wanted, without using that exact word, was to suggest that my characters were very physically in love, and to express this idea with different words,— with very ordinary words, for example, with memories... The Truth is I think I tried something that would have worked today... I am afraid I was ahead of the public.

It may be surmised that Renoir's interest in foregrounding women, in many of his films along with their gestures and their demeanors stems, in part from his personal association and experience with women. It has been noted that women played an important role throughout Renoir's life, both in his own family and in his professional career. Sesonske describes Renoir's early association with women in the following words, "A house full of women: Mme.Renoir, Mme.Mathieu, various models who seemed to be part of the household..." From early childhood, Renoir was left to the care of his aunt, Gabrielle Renard, who was also his father's model during the last years of his father's life. It was Gabrielle who introduced him to the world of films in the first place. Sesonske writes, "Gabrielle and Jean roamed through the maquis, a sort of wasteland of brambles, rosebushes, and non-descript dwellings that bordered the rue Girardon... Gabrielle gave young Jean his first glimpse of the cinema, at the Dufayel department store in 1897..."

The close association with women affected Renoir's treatment of them. The image of women in Renoir's films requires an in-depth examination in other respects also because of the universal acknowledgment of Renoir's place as an author. In fact, the body of Renoir's work is an important cornerstone in understanding French national cinema. Breitrose writes, "there are very few film makers who have been as influential, as widely respected, as aesthetically and intellectually provocative, and as good as Jean Renoir."
The image of Renoir's women can be studied within the paradigm of some, if not all, of the seven typologies that Hayward suggests are vital components of French national cinema. These typologies are narrative, genre, codes and convention, gesturality, the star as sign, cinema of the center and cinema of the periphery, cinema as the mobilizer of the nation's myths and of the myth of the nation.\textsuperscript{15}

**Narratives**

Renoir adapted his filmic texts frequently from popular literary works such as Zola's *Nana*, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, de La Fouchardière's *La Chienne*, Mirabeau's *Le Journal d'une femme de chambre* and Feydeau's *On Purge Bébé*. These texts reflect the national traditions in a broad sense. The screen adaptations by Renoir confirm the national sentiment, for they are not removed from the indigenous ambiance. The place of women in his films in general, and particularly in the aforementioned films, sometimes resonates or more frequently challenges national perceptions of women. The *femmes fatales* such as Lulu in *La Chienne* or Eléna in *Eléna et les hommes* are interesting case studies. For example, if one considers Lulu's character in *La Chienne*, one may anticipate the reaction of both men and women (as well as the spectators of both genders) in that society.

Lulu, being a prostitute, does not have any dignity or freedom to live the kind of life she wants to. Dédé never treats Lulu with either respect or compassion for the sacrifices she makes for him. Legrand is fond of her for she provides a diversion from his unhappy family life. Her mother, who is present at Dédé's trial, does not have the opportunity to express her grief, for Walstein asks her if Lulu had left any painting with her (so that he could trade them for profit), rather than consoling her. The striking
peculiarity of Lulu's sad demise is that no one seems to mourn her death. Lulu is only a medium of monetary transactions.

Éléna, in *Éléna et les hommes*, is also ready to be traded to save her family prestige and fortune. She also tries to salvage national honor and to maintain the balance of power, as is evident from her involvement in the negotiations with Rollan and the other politicians. Her position is no different from Lulu's, even though she unlike Lulu, comes from an aristocratic background. Elsa, in *La Grande Illusion*, is a medium of pleasure and escape for Maréchal. Women, in short, are often present as the key agents for the resolution of the problems that both arise in the discourse and affect the lives of the male characters.

**Genres**

Renoir often made films dealing with comic themes, mystery, politics, and fantasy. The tumultuous emotional upheavals in most of his films reflect an underlining tone of humor and even satire. The almost farcical depiction of the tramp character Boudu in *Boudu sauvé des eaux* borders on absurdity. Nobody knows why Boudu jumped into the water. Lestingois had no reason to rescue Boudu, but he did, and even tried to teach him some social etiquette. The resulting disorder in the Lestingois household, as is evident in the scene in which Boudu tries to polish his shoes, suggests that the character of Boudu is a mockery of bourgeois etiquette. Boudu refuses to abide by any norm. Ironically, however, an apparently disoriented Boudu amuses Mme. Lestingois by making love to her, although she initially resents Boudu's presence in the house. Boudu not only satisfies Madame Lestingois's desires, but also makes a cuckold of his benefactor M. Lestingois who [also] commits adultery.
This strange twist of events highlights the burlesque nature of the plot. The role of the woman in this raillery acquires a special significance. Madame Lestingois's active encouragement to Boudu to have sex with her suggests two things: (a) her act is a calculated revenge on her husband, (b) she just seizes an opportunity to satisfy her corporal cravings with an "emblem" of the anti-bourgeois as manifestation of the hypocrisy of her style and ideals. (Though she probably does not know that her action ridicules bourgeois norms.) This satire delineates the active participation of women in ridiculing bourgeois social norms. Eléna in *Eléna et les hommes* and Lisette in *La Règle du jeu* show similar contempt for aristocratic and bourgeois norms by flirting freely with men from all walks of life.

Renoir also experimented with other genres of films, such as *La Règle du jeu* and *Eléna et les hommes*, which combine adventure and comedy. In these films too, women provide impetus to the action. For example, the focal point of all major action in *Eléna et les hommes* is Eléna. Her maneuvers make or break the pillars of society; the businessmen, the political leaders, and other social elites. Likewise, the loci of all actions in *La Règle du jeu* are Christine, Geneviève and Lisette. Le Marquis, Jurieu, and Octave express the desire to win Christine's love. Noticing Christine's dispassionate attitude towards himself and her lenience towards Jurieu, le Marquis commits adultery, and Geneviève encourages him. Lisette allows the poacher to chase her around, for she rejects both Octave and Schumacher (her husband). Through these intrigues involving women, Renoir foregrounds the connection between genre and gender.

**Codes and conventions**

Renoir did not confine the various classes to their assigned social settings, unlike the French national cinema of the thirties. Thus a tramp is forced to live in a bourgeois
atmosphere as in *Boudu sauvé des eaux*, and the dandy aristocrat Henri de Chevincourt spends a night with the gypsies and even uses the help of a gypsy woman to rescue Rollan in *Éléna et les hommes*, in which the traditionally "outcast" and socially extraneous gypsy woman occupies center stage and resolves the problems in the plot. Likewise, women in his films play a role quite different from that of the traditional housekeeper, the "perfect" mother to the male protagonist's children, or the very obedient housewife. Madame Lestingois in *Boudu sauvé des eaux*, for example, avenges herself on her husband because of his infidelity. She does this with the help of the tramp Boudu without openly confronting her husband.

Among the films that Renoir made in Hollywood, the enormous self-confidence with which his women speak and act is impressive. In *This Land Is Mine* (1943), for example, in the scene in which the invading (German) army bomb the neighborhood of the school, the reliance upon women is emphasized. In this scene, while Albert, the male school teacher, shudders with fear because of the bombings, Louise assembles the children and sings a patriotic song to boost their morale. Again, in *The Diary Of A Chambermaid* (1946), Celestine emphatically declares that she is not going to love any more, but rather, she is going to avenge herself against evil men. Such a confident challenge to the male bastion of social control is rare in Hollywood films. *Craig's Wife* (Dorothy Arzner, 1936) or *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945) are such exceptions. The above departures of his women from their [traditional] stereotypical characteristics is a clear indication that Renoir either deliberately or subconsciously addressed his films to both men and women. To men, the message was to think of women as both equal to them in social status and at the same time independent of them. To women, the message was to take the initiative to act independently. Renoir, while establishing the correlation between codes and genders, demonstrates their incongruities.
Gestures

As mentioned earlier, Renoir was deeply concerned with the study of gestures of the French people in general and of women in particular. Renoir's study of gestures focused on those of women, for as is visible in many of his films, women's gestures constitute an important part of the charade. Gestures often edify the morphology of the characters. Bazin notes that Renoir photographed his wife and actress Catherine Hessling from all possible angles in order to study her appeal and her gestures. He sought to bring out the "woman" in her. To quote Bazin:

One cannot wonder how much of the credit for Jean Renoir's work belongs to this woman, who was both his wife and his favorite actress. It is true that the remarkable doll faced girl with the charcoal circles under her great bright eyes, and the imperfect but strangely articulated body reminiscent of the figures in certain Impressionist paintings, was an extraordinary incarnation of femininity.\textsuperscript{17}

The medium close-ups of Elsa in \textit{La Grande Illusion} are of particular importance in regard to gestures. The scene in which Maréchal prepares to bid her adieu presents a very compassionate study of Elsa's pain. The expressions on her face make her lamentations more full of sorrow and apprehension for the future. Her repeated losses (she lost her husband, and now she loses her new found love in Maréchal, who has to escape) destroy her hopes of happiness. Words are unnecessary to explicate her sadness. She thus speaks in German which Maréchal (who does not speak German) understands perfectly, as he tries to comfort her. The tears in her eyes, her pain-ridden face make the tragedy she expresses manifest itself in a universally comprehensible language.
The facial contortions of Legrand before Lulu's murder in *La Chienne*, revealed in medium close-up, augment Legrand's tension and desperation. Gestures in Renoir's films are clearly essential elements of gender roles.

**The star as sign**

The presence of the stars in films signifies the expectations of the spectators, for the "stars are the mediators between the real and the imaginary."18 Hayward uses the term "star" to imply actors and actresses who attain national recognition for their performances, or for those with exceptional physical attraction and personal qualities. Gabin in the thirties, Belmondo in the sixties, and Depardieu in the seventies and eighties represented the "male types" in France. Likewise Arletty, Signoret, and Bardot represented various sexual images of women.19

In Renoir's films representations of stars are conspicuous. The sexual imagery represented by Catherine Hessling is quite different from that of Janie Marèze (in *La Chienne*) or Valentine Tessier (in *Madame Bovary*) or Simone Simon (in *La Bête Humaine*, 1938) or even from the other foreign (non-French) stars in his films such as Paulette Goddard and Ingrid Bergman. Catherine Hessling represents the simple "feminine" eroticism.20 This implies that she was the "classical woman;" very attractive, a reflection of innocence and grace, docile, and easily accessible. Janie Marèze, in *La Chienne*, represents the "femino-masculine" eroticism which implies that a shrewd mind and a desire to do evil things color her feminine eroticism. Simone Simon, who plays Séverine in *La Bête Humaine*, represents a blend of "feminine," "femino-masculine," and "female-in-her-own-right" eroticism.22 These traits imply that she is an attractive woman who combines eroticism with self-confidence and acts independently.
Faulkner's discussion of Renoir's choice for Séverine in *La Bête Humaine* shows Renoir's interest in exploring the different kinds of erotic imagery represented by the stars.

Renoir's actresses discussed here were more than just leading ladies. They all attained national recognition because of their physical appeal on screen. Faulkner writes, "Gina Manès was the choice of the producers for the part of Séverine, but casting against type Renoir asked for Simone Simon, who returned from Hollywood for the role."\textsuperscript{23} Renoir testifies to this fact when he comments about Paulette Goddard's participation in the lynching scene at the end of the film *The Diary Of A Chambermaid*. Renoir says:

Yes, of course, . . . I was interested in seeing an actress work towards this, an actress who does not normally do this in her films and whom I like very much.

She's an extraordinary working companion, a really good associate, and so I wanted to push her in this direction. . .\textsuperscript{24}

Renoir's choices of his leading women have two implications. First, in an attempt to create star personalities and to establish their plastic "value" in French national cinema, Renoir, as noted earlier, portrayed women in the traditions of an impressionist painter. Second, by casting against the grain (for example, by casting Valentine Tessier) he criticizes the star phenomenon.

**Cinema of the center and cinema of the periphery**

Compared to the Hollywood films, Renoir's productions were initially at the periphery. Renoir never wanted to compete with the giant Hollywood industry. In fact, he showed signs of breaking with Hollywood film practices. Two of the most important traits in Renoir's film making which go against the Hollywood grain are his extensive use of long shots and long takes, and the optimistic endings in his films never attempted to resolve all the problems and tensions that ensued from the discourses in the films.
The first difference can be detected in Renoir's framing of the first meeting of
M.Bovary with Emma at Emma’s house in Madame Bovary. This scene introduces an
unusual style in a sound film. Emma offers Charles a parting drink. Emma instead of
Charles finishes the drink first. She drinks and giggles at the same time, while Charles
looks on. Emma holds the glass to her lips for an unusually long time (at least by present
day standards). Charles joins Emma in sharing her laugh after she finishes the drink. Only
after they have enjoyed the sudden burst of laughter does Charles finish his drink. In the
following shot, Charles leaves. Emma decides to accompany him to the door. Near the
exit, there is an extended pause. Emma drops her umbrella. They both stoop to pick it up
and get very close. Time passes, they exchange suggestive glances, they look at the
umbrella, then at each other again, and then pick up the umbrella and then get up. The
physical proximity suggests the exchange of the first kiss, but nothing happens. Emma
returns to her room very frustrated after Charles' departure. One can perceive Renoir's
distance from the standard Hollywood practice of the physical expression of first love. He
does not edit the long pauses to increase the pace of events. In a similar sequence in
classical cinema, the time that Charles and Emma spend together, would result in more
physical intimacy between the two.

Renoir does not dismiss the segment as insignificant. He shows Emma collapsing
on her bed frustrated at Charles' indifference. It is also interesting to note here that both
the male and female characters in this sequence show remarkable restraint, even though
their body language, expressed through their sharing the drink, the laugh, and their
suggestive physical proximity, calls for a more passionate display. Each expresses his/her
desires very differently. Emma collapses on the bed, while Charles asks for Emma's hand
from her father. This differentiation in gender specific comportment in turn reiterates the
claim that Renoir's films are addressed to both men and women. As a consequence, they urge serious considerations from both genders.

A second prominent difference appears between Renoir and classical filmmaking in instances where Renoir avoids a “perfectly resolved” melodrama, even in films where the end suggests that the protagonists will live happily ever after all the turbulences they have experienced. In Le Crime de Monsieur Lange, for example, the "people's court" exonerates M.Lange of his crime of shooting Batala. Estelle and not Lange pleads for compassion of the community and wins Lange his freedom. Lange and Estelle walk away into the horizon with a hope for a happy future. A reasonable doubt remains, however, as to whether this escape will be for a happy family life for the couple. Renoir does not dwell on that. Also important here is that, instead of the woman following the man as they walk into the horizon, as is usual in classical Hollywood plots, Lange seems to follow Estelle's lead.

Maréchal, in the last sequence in La Grande Illusion, while walking across the border into freedom, still hopes to come back to Elsa after the war ends. Elsa, in spite of the fact that she is a German woman whose husband was killed in the war against the French, gives Maréchal (a Frenchman and an enemy), comfort, love, and a new life. Maréchal wins his freedom because of Elsa. Elsa could have turned him in, but she does not. The future may be dreary but Maréchal walks away with hope for the best. Renoir leaves the final conclusion to the spectator's imagination. What happens to Elsa or Maréchal's life is not for the diegetic discourse to resolve. Under similar circumstances, in standard Hollywood practice, it is natural to assume that the war would have ended, Maréchal's wife (if he were married) would have been obliterated by an act of fate, and Maréchal would have been united with Elsa in a newly found, ready-made family. All pressing desires of the melodrama would have been fulfilled.\(^{25}\)
Cinema as the mobiliser of the nation's myths and the myth of the nation

Renoir's films echo an ever-pervading ambiguity in mobilizing the nation's myths and the myth of the nation. In his attempt to venerate the preeminence of French women he comments on the myths surrounding them. Bazin has elaborated on how Renoir glorified the physical appeals of Catherine Hessling, a French star. Renoir treats the subject of French feminine grace in an interesting manner in *Le Caporal Epingle* (1962). Towards the end of the film, the German soldier, in a drunken stupor, celebrates the myth of the French feminine beauty, exoticism, and grace. Without trying to sound offensive, the German soldier almost dismembers the French woman as he brags about the beauty of her specific body parts, beginning with her slender legs. The fact that he is German may suggest the universal appeal of the myth of the French beauty. However, the soldier's intoxication makes his comments ironic, exaggerated, and thus dubious.

French anti-semitism is a matter of historical record. In *La Grande Illusion* Renoir stresses the generosity and tenderness of Elsa (a German woman) for a French Jew, Rosenthal, an enemy by two counts (first a Jew and second a Frenchman). Renoir points to the fact that any race, even the proud Aryan German, can be compassionate across the war-zone. The implication is that the sentiment of nationalism, racism and even religion that creates all the divisions and animosity among human beings is only a "grand illusion." By glorifying the generosity of a German woman towards national enemies, Renoir tries to dispel prejudices against other nationalities. This is embodied by Elsa, who exercises her independent rationale in her interaction with people. In *La Règle du jeu*, Christine's reconciliation with and acceptance of her Jewish husband, le Marquis despite all his imperfections suggests her tolerance. This, again, is an address to both
genders to diffuse the stereotypes and misconceptions, especially those associated with women.

These demonstrations of the Hayward typologies at work provide a reasonable framework for showing that many of Renoir's films were addressed primarily to women. Some of them, one may suggest, gave aspiring women the impetus to act in their own social spheres. *The Diary Of A Chambermaid* is a good example. One can surmise that Celestine's attempt to break down the stranglehold on society held by a few evil men almost suggests a social revolution -- a kind of "social cleansing" initiated by women. Éléna's skillful scheming in *Eléna et les hommes* may signify the importance of women as key political players, influencing national socio-political conditions. Louise's lead in *This Land Is Mine* to shape the children's intellect to become better citizens may also suggest the acknowledgment on Renoir's part of the importance of women, especially the French women, in nation building. Éléna, Celestine, and Louise are all positive characters in the sense that all of them take the initiative to leave a lasting impression on the society by their leadership qualities.

Renoir's obsession to experiment with the images of women stems from other factors as well. His integration of nature with the indoor settings and his examination of the relation of women to both nature and to their particular social settings (indoors or outdoors), led Renoir to illustrate the nature-woman bond in *La Grande Illusion*. After spending a night at Elsa's shelter, the fatigued Maréchal, now refreshed, feeds Elsa's cow. He then goes into the backyard to stretch out in the open while appreciating the beauty of gentle nature with its quiet, sprawling greenery. The mild rays of the rising sun point to a calm day and probably a peaceful future. The mooing of the cow is followed by a bird's whistling a little later. Renoir illustrates all of this by using a soft focus and a very poignant mix of sound. Far from the devastation of the war, Maréchal forgets his
anxieties and pain for the moment. As Maréchal enters the house, he finds Rosenthal at play with Lotte, Elsa's daughter. Rosenthal is oblivious of his injured foot and battle weariness. The poetic realism of this particular sequence suggests that the natural splendor of Elsa's safe haven and her selfless affection provide a healing touch to Maréchal's and Rosenthal's wounds. Here the tranquility of nature merges with Elsa's affection.

Renoir also gives the impression that some of his women characters are representations of the possible ideal woman. In Renoir's films, a woman decides the kind of life she wants to lead. By allowing his women this independence, Renoir attempted to establish an equality between the genders. Renoir's women show considerable courage when they make independent decisions. This is not to suggest that he was a feminist, or that he advocated some social reform in favor of women, but rather that he clearly put a woman's view of the world into "deep focus."  

The term "deep focus" has been defined as a technique that exploits depth of field to render subjects near the camera lens and far away with equal clarity. David Cook says that, "Orson Welles' *Citizen Kane* (1941) is one of the earliest and most famous films to use deep focus shots as a basic structural element."  

Sesonske writes that:

Noticeable, too, is Renoir's preference for organizing the action space of his scenes in depth. In a few scenes that use this great depth this takes the form of constructing parallel planes of action receding in depth, but this leaves the space between these panes devoid of energy. . .More frequently, the action ranges through the depth of the space, fully penetrating it and activating the whole field of deep space.  

An example of the distinctiveness of Renoir's "deep focus," is found in the scene, in *La Chienne*, in which Legrand steals from his wife's cabinet for the first time. Legrand
shaves in the foreground, keeping an eye on his wife who is in the other section of the house, engaged in household chores. Seated by a window, a little girl, whose identity is never revealed, plays the piano. Assured that his wife does not notice, Legrand keeping an eye on both Adèle and the little girl steals his wife's money. While focusing on Legrand's action, Renoir appropriately draws the viewer's attention to the other two actions in progress in the background. All the three characters, Legrand, the little girl, and Adèle, are busy with their morning chores. Instead of a standard cut from Legrand's action to that of the little girl and then to Adèle's, the "deep focus" allows spectators to watch concurrently the three different actions of three different personalities with three different motives.

The term "deep focus" has been used in a metaphorical sense in this study. In Renoir's films, several different actions take place concurrently. Women obviously contribute to this multiplicity of actions and intrigues. The multifold action necessitates the "deep focus" in terms of cinematic technique as well as metaphoric interpretation. Renoir’s deep focus allows one to analyze his films at several textual and contextual levels. His deep focus also reveals how women function enhancing the complexity of the discourse. It is true that Renoir uses deep focus equally artistically regardless of whether women are in the shot or not, but in shots like the one just mentioned, the influence that women have on the outcome of different situations are accentuated by the use of deep focus on them.

Renoir's repeated play with the images led him to create a distinct aesthetic in his films. Renoir, who started his career as a ceramic artist, following in the footsteps of his father, the famous painter, switched to film making because of a particular aesthetic interest. He claims, "I began my career in films because of my love of special effects. In
the beginning, I had no intention of writing, of being a writer, of inventing stories. My ambition was to create special effects and I did quite a few, right from the start."29

The desire to create special effects for women is conspicuous in Renoir's films. His experiments with his first wife Catherine Hessling as leading lady have been cited. Similar interest in enhancing the "plastic value" is noticeable in many of his films. In Eléna et les hommes, a sound film while devoting attention to the inner workings of the plot Renoir emphasizes not only Eléna's sensual appeal to the men around her (a combination of "female-in-her-own-right" with "femino-masculine" imagery), but also the popular appeal that Ingrid Bergman holds even to this day with spectators around the world.30

From the feminist perspective, it may be argued that the creation of a spectacle of women by Renoir resulted in a kind of voyeurism. Even though Renoir was very fond of the plastic value of women, he does not rely on an excessive erotic exhibition of a woman's physical attributes. Exposing parts of the female anatomy is rare in Renoir's films (an exception is found in La Carosse d'Or, 1952). The woman in Renoir's films does not remain a passive object merely to be looked at. Even though she is conscious that men admire her sensual appeal, she sometimes does not seek men's endorsement of her beauty or attractiveness. Lulu in La Chienne, for example, despite her attractiveness to men does not ask the question whether Dédé or Legrand will love her if she were not "beautiful." Indeed, she is completely submissive to Dédé's desires, but only because she loves him. She hints that regardless of what Dédé thinks of her, she will remain with him because of her infatuation for him.

Behind the apparently tender and attractive women in Renoir's films, hide shrewd manipulators of men who often dictate their terms of association with men. Before being murdered by Legrand, Lulu humiliates him by adding that the only reason she indulges
him is that he can provide her with a lot of money. Instead of Legrand making demands on her, as might have been the case in a male-dominated society, Lulu sets the criteria for her association with Legrand despite the fact that he provides for her. Legrand agrees and ruins himself. As a result, Lulu becomes the *femme fatale* for Legrand. Lulu's character points to the fact that "Where as before ["before" implying in the male-oriented classical cinema] an actress had to satisfy the expectations of the audience, now the audience must conform to her." Renoir thus sets the stage for a very different kind of image of women early in the life of cinema and in his own career.

Renoir is often ambiguous about the extent of women's independence. Lulu, while being sarcastic towards Legrand in *La Chienne*, is irrationally tender towards Dédé. Eléna, in *Eléna et les hommes*, who seems very business-like and ruthless in her dealings with men, divides her affection between both Henri and Rollan. In the end, she chooses Henri. This does not imply that in the end, it is male desire that wins (over the other) and gets the prize woman. Rather, it implies that it is for the woman to decide whom she likes or loves. Once she makes her choice, she may surrender herself to the man she desires. On the one hand, this dichotomy allows a woman's expectations to be fulfilled, rather than those of the audience or of the male lead characters. On the other, however, her surrender to the man of her desire seems to diminish her total independence somewhat. The case of Mme.Lestingois in *Boudu sauvé des eaux* illustrates this dichotomy. Instead of languishing in sadness because of her husband's adultery, she seizes the chance to fulfill her sexual fantasies with a tramp. Mme.Lestingois's disapproval of bourgeois hypocrisy apparently is contrary to the so-called "traditional male expectation" that the woman/wife should accept the social circumstances she finds herself in without any complaint. The satisfaction of her desires is thus obtained by help from a "non-conformist" male.
Another aspect of Renoir's ambiguity about the extent of women's independence is manifested in the results of the independent actions of women. Often the woman's actions cause irreparable damages, thus creating doubts of how much liberty should be afforded to women. In *La Chienne*, Lulu destroys Legrand, and by extrapolation, Dédé. Eléna by flirting with both Henri and Rollan endangers their lives in *Eléna et les hommes*. Likewise, Séverine catalyzes the destruction of Roubaud, Grandmorin, and Lantier in *La Bête Humaine*. Valerie, in *The River*, in order to express her love to Captain John and to test if he reciprocates, injures him.

Renoir's focus on women raises questions of spectatorship (both male and female), in relation to the expression of feminine desires and "correct" femininity. Despite Renoir's attempts to create a representation of women, his films do not follow the style of classical Hollywood films (projecting the attributes of the IMR, or the Institutional Mode of Representation, as observed by Burch). A case in point is the film *Eléna et les hommes*. Renoir, instead of allowing the dominant male desires to prevail over Eléna, empowers Eléna to prevail over her potential male suitors.

Similarly, the desires of Legrand and Dédé in *La Chienne*, of Jurieu and the Marquis in *La Règle du jeu*, and of Captain John in *The River*, are redefined. In *La Chienne*, Legrand's cravings for Lulu and all other women are restrained. Legrand's association with Lulu provides him the leisure to paint and attain intellectual satisfaction, for Lulu, unlike Adèle, is interested in his paintings. Dédé's desire for Lulu is purely commercial. She pawns her body to be a constant source of revenue for Dédé. In *The River*, the situation is somewhat unusual. In this film, instead of multiple male suitors for one woman, three women pursue one man. Renoir explores the desires of three aspiring women at many different levels. Valerie awaits transition from adolescence to womanhood. Her desires for Captain John are nebulous. She views Captain John merely
as an "object" to play with. Valerie's apparent cruelty towards Captain John is almost a sadistic attempt to make herself noticeable. She is not as much in love with Captain John as she is with the first man (any man) in her life. She thus laments that with Captain John, "it," i.e., "love" goes.

To Harriet, The River is the story of her first love. Her poems, written in appreciation of love and of admiration for Captain John, coalesce with her emotions concerning the movements of "the river," and the flowers and various other attributes of nature. The desire for Captain John, who is family friend and a father figure, is also associated with mother nature. In fact, when Harriet runs away after her brother's death, Captain John meets her on a river boat and brings her back home. Captain John's kiss on Harriet's forehead is emblematic of the paternal embrace in the bosom of mother nature (the river being the representation of mother nature).

Melanie's desires are again different from those of Valerie and Harriet. Her western education and heritage and her independent womanhood induce her to reject the Indian tradition of arranged marriages. She thus refuses to marry Anil, her father's choice for her groom. Her obfuscated attraction for Captain John stems from her reluctance to adapt to western social etiquette. Melanie declares the sentiment of love of an Indian woman by stating that an Indian woman gives her love once and forever. She knows that Captain John, however, is willing to experiment with both Valerie and Melanie, as is evident from his physical intimacy with Valerie. Dating in the Indian society, especially at the time the events take place, was almost unheard of. Frequent change of partners and shifting loyalties in love was not (and is still not) accepted in the Indian traditions.

Under Indian social customs the potential Melanie-Captain John romance poses another complex problem. Captain John is a cousin of Melanie's father. Melanie's union with him would imply an incestuous relationship which is not permitted in Indian society.
Unable to express her love and yet not prepared to let Captain John go, Melanie exclaims she hates herself for not knowing herself. By foregrounding the dilemmas in the desires of all three women, Renoir urges women, regardless of their racial and social situations, to look at themselves, to assess their personal choices and to decide on an independent course of action based on their personal philosophies of life.

Renoir's experiment with the feminine imagery also has social consequences. Renoir treated seriously the plight of women and planned his films to present their images to the world at large. His own writings, quite like his films, indicate his concern for the traditional position given to women for ages in the western society. As historians have pointed out, women were looked upon as bearers of children and as care-givers. While writing about his father, Renoir remarked, "Women gave birth to children in pain, in accordance with the decree of the Creator. Poor women nursed their babies at the breast; the rich hired a wet nurse whose hair was tied up with little bows of different colored ribbons."^35

Renoir was also deeply concerned with the assumed roles of men and women and with the rules by which they were forced to play. These rules necessitate pretenses and conjured appearances. In particular reference to women, Renoir disclosed that he thought every woman wore a mask. To quote Renoir, "She [Gabrielle] taught me to realize that the very unreality of those entertainments was a reason for examining real life. She taught me to see the face behind the mask, and the fraud behind the flourishes. She taught me to detest the cliché."^36 The notion that women wore masks reinforced his ambiguity about the extent of the authority of women. Thus, his women have a tendency to vacillate between the incarnations of "good and evil". Women's masks pushed Renoir to present the unstable images of women.
Renoir, however, does not seem to blame his women for the ambiguity of their social identities. Rather, he tries with sympathy to understand the reasons for their actions. Even though Lulu, Christine, and Eléna appear to seduce the men in their lives and cause hardships for them, their actions are actually products of the circumstances that they find themselves in, not the characteristics of their personalities. Lulu, in *La Chienne*, is literally *coerced* into swindling Legrand. Eléna, in order to maintain the life of opulence, tries to conquer the men in her life in *Eléna et les hommes*. Christine, in *La Règle du jeu*, allows her admirers into her household in order to avenge herself of her husband le Marquis' adultery (much like Mme. Lestingois in *Boudu sauvé des eaux*). Under these circumstances Renoir seems to support Zola's "Nana". She was not the embodiment of evil in herself, she played with the men who played with her. Chitnis writes that Zola's "Nana:"

[in a dynamic process] explodes on the Paris society, releases sexual desire wherever she is seen, breaks into and destroys the elegant, respectable tenor of the life of Muffat de Beuville family, and with her insatiable consumerist desires and their imperative desire for sex, projects all her upper-class wealthy admirers towards the abyss, and with them all the values and institutions they uphold---family, religion and the Empire itself—in fact patriarchal society as Zola knew it.  

Renoir's women try to master the game men play with them. In many ways, Lulu, Eléna, Séverine, and Celestine appear to be mirror images of "Nana". Once exploited by men, they try to get even with their tormentors. Renoir probably wanted to find out how women themselves conceived their own images by casting them in such femmes fatales roles. The eroticism of these women serves as an effective weapon to challenge unreasonable male authoritarianism. From a moralistic stand point it seems that Renoir
accepted the idea that the ends justify the means. Estelle thus pleads Lange's case with the 
community in *Le Crime de Monsieur Lange*.

This research will focus on *Nana, La Chienne, Madame Bovary, La Règle du jeu, The River*, and *Eléna et les hommes* to interpret the image of Renoir's women. These 
films make possible a tracing of the development of the image of women in Renoir's 
films chronologically. *Nana* (1926) is the earliest, of the series. *La Chienne* (1931) made 
after his enormous success with *On Purge Bébé* (1931) achieved recognition much after 
its first run. *Madame Bovary* (1934), made when Renoir began to identify himself with 
the Popular Front, incorporates a nineteenth century novel into the fast changing world of 
the twentieth. *La Règle du jeu* (1939), which anticipates German occupation, is an 
attempt to analyze the politics of human relations. *The River* (1951), which explores the 
Hindu concepts of the eternal journey of life, and *Eléna et les hommes* (1955) made after 
the success of *La Carrosse d'Or* with Franco-Italian assistance, traces the thematic and 
technical specificities the development of his creative feminine imagery. While the 
primary analysis will be focused on these six films, the ensuing discussions on the films 
will necessitate occasional cross-references with other films.

This analysis proposes that Renoir designed great roles for women in his films for 
namely two reasons, (a) he was in favor of optimistic women and (b) he wanted to reward 
these women in the films. The success of most of his male characters moreover, resulted 
from the support, inspiration, and challenge offered by their leading women, who 
motivate or discourage and lead or mislead the men to their peaks of success and honor 
(or their abyss of failure and shame). At the outset, any general theory about Renoir's 
women will remain unstated for as Faulkner points out:

> Given the ideological (and thematic) incompatibility of the prewar and postwar 
films, we must, then, reject any critical approach to Renoir's work that begins by
insisting upon the wholeness of art and the artist. There is no transhistorical
Renoir "vision" or "world-view," no essential Renoir personality that shall be the
univocal source of measure and value of every text indiscriminately. 38

The summary of the analyses

The second chapter analyses the obstacles that Nana, an aspiring actress, has to
struggle with. Misunderstood and disliked by her colleagues and admirers, Nana is driven
from the theater. In order to survive in a cruel society and in order to seek a revenge on
the men who ruin her dreams, Nana becomes a prostitute and inflicts heavy and even fatal
damages on those men. Unfortunately, her life is cut short when she dies of a small pox
infection. Adapted from Zola’s celebrated novel, Renoir’s Nana explores the struggles of
a female artist by elucidating the bad treatment Nana experiences in the male-dominated
society around her. Renoir does not delve into the psychoanalytical study of the severe
impairments hereditary alcoholism causes to Nana’s family, that is the center of Zola’s
focus.

The third chapter focuses on an analysis of Renoir’s representation of the life of a
prostitute in La Chienne. This film is a love triangle that builds upon Lulu, a hapless
woman who has been forced into the life of prostitution by her lover Dédé, who corrupts
her and uses her to live a life of luxury. This relationship hinges on the shifting of power
from a man to a woman and back. Lulu cannot emerge out of Dédé's hypnotic grip on her.
She endures all the abuses, for she loves Dédé and dreams of having a very comfortable
life with him someday. One night Legrand rescues her from Dédé’s beatings and then
becomes infatuated with her. Legrand, in order to provide for her, filches from home and
office and eventually his crime is discovered. Meanwhile, Lulu rejects Legrand. Enraged
by the rejection, Legrand stabs her to death. This film will be read on several different
levels. It is critical to interpret the connection between Adèle (Legrand's wife) and Lulu (the prostitute) as well as Legrand's affection for them. However different, both women are unusually submissive to their excessively demanding first loves.

The fourth chapter explicates the importance of Madame Bovary as adapted by Renoir. A comparison with the original novel by Flaubert will be inevitable to understand Renoir's departure from Flaubert's point of view. The development of the character of Emma attains a special significance given Renoir's choice of Valentine Tessier, who was at the time not considered to be the emblem of "plastic beauty." This allows an examination of Renoir's claim that he looked for special effects in films (in terms of imagery). The character of Charles Bovary emerges in this context. A reasonable doubt may arise about whether either Charles or Emma represent their respective images as presented by Flaubert. In effect how can Renoir's digression be justified? These issues are examined along with the significance of Charles' first wife and his mother.

The fifth chapter tries to determine the "rules of the game" that women are forced to play in order to preserve their independence. La Règle du jeu, is the case. Significant is an understanding of how Christine fends off her admirer Jurieu, who might wreck her marriage. Her husband, the Marquis, is also involved in a long-standing extra-marital affair. Behind the intrigues of these aristocrats are the games in which the servants (the housemaid, the poacher and the caretaker) participate in. From the proscenium of this film the "rules" of social norms extend to a broader panorama of the woman's survival in the game.

The sixth chapter contrasts the aspirations about life of two young women and an adolescent girl in a rural-industrial area in India. Two of the women concerned are of British origin while one is of Anglo-Indian origin. This film will also illustrate a comparison between the appropriation of the desires of an Asian woman in particular
(and probably others in general) and of several western women. Also of note will be
captain John's desires and options vis-à-vis the three prominent women characters. The
image of women in this context will be refined through an analysis of the role of Harriet's
mother and the governess Nan and their perceptions of women's roles. The issues of child
birth and death are skillfully borrowed from the principles of Indian stoicism and the
polemics of western philosophy and are simultaneously grafted into the film. Renoir's
exposure to Hindu and Indian mysticism provided him with newer perspectives on
women. In India, women are quite active in shaping social conventions contrary to the
popular western beliefs. This led Renoir to compare the women in India with the western
women in The River. A brief exploration of Indian philosophy furthers an understanding
of this aspect of his filmmaking.

With the subtitle "The Dangerous Relations," the seventh chapter explores the
intrigues of the film Eléna et les hommes. Eléna, a Polish princess and spendthrift, is
connected to the elite society in Paris. Her expensive habits drain her resources and she is
forced to marry Martin-Michaud, a shoe-trader. With her refined tastes, she cannot bear
to be the wife of an astute businessman, whose passion for patriotism stems from the fact
that France's eminence in the political arena will ensure profitable exports for his
company. However, Eléna pretends to like him, and Martin-Michaud either does not see
through her pretense or remains in denial about Eléna's sarcasm. Martin-Michaud has to
give up any desire of marrying Eléna, for Eléna is required to devote herself to national
politics and has no time for Martin-Michaud. The wealthy businessman accidentally or
perhaps subconsciously admits later in a scene with the charming Henri de Chevincourt
that when the call of duty for the country arises, one has to sacrifice personal interests
implying in this case even sacrificing one's fiancée, in this case, Eléna.39
In this film, one is not sure if Renoir's primary intention is to make a mockery of the existing social system of using women as commodity or to portray woman as willfully accepting her position as social merchandise and even participating in maintaining the status quo. All men of comparable social status within whom Eléna comes in contact with want to have a sexual relationship with her.

Conclusion

In announcing the special Hollywood Oscar for Jean Renoir, the Academy of Motion Picture Arts and Sciences declared that Renoir was "a film maker who has worked with grace, responsibility and enviable competence through silent film, sound film, feature, documentary and television." Braudy emphasizes Renoir's finesse when he concludes "Renoir's variety has influenced directors as different as François Truffaut and Philippe de Broca, Roberto Rossellini and Luchino Visconti, Robert Aldrich and Arthur Penn, Fritz Lang and Luis Buñuel." The most famous Indian film maker Satyajit Ray, who interacted with Renoir as a friend and occasional assistant for his film The River, observed, "To Renoir, there is nothing more important to a film than the emotional integrity of the human relationship."

The human relationships have blossomed primarily through Renoir's treatment of woman's image, which has evolved throughout his forty-one films. His primary concern with the feminine figure on screen has been to create a "plastic" facade. He admits that this obsession was acquired quite early in life, in the following words:

...years and years before that, in his Foolish Wives, von Stroheim pointed out something to me that I had not known at all... It changed things... After Foolish Wives I began to look. I mean, the movements of a woman washing her hair that
we might see through this window... I found that they were terrifically valuable plastically.43

Renoir experimented in order to explore and even to defy the classical Hollywood studio code of the image of women. Renoir also attempted to avoid any set pattern or stereotype in his treatment of women. His obsession to shape cinema and the art of film making as a set of "rules of the game" has prompted him to explore how women adapt to the politicaillerie (the petty political games) that go on in daily life in almost every society. His notion that women wear masks is critical in understanding his experiment.
The casual treatment of the characters, may be attributed to the fact that Renoir never followed any predetermined pattern of directing while shooting his films. His scripts were constantly changed and adapted to the conditions in which the shootings were done. An example of this is the much talked about Une partie de campagne (1936), which was originally written for sunny weather, but was appropriately modified because of the continuous rains during its shooting.

13. Renoir, Renoir on Renoir 3.

Renoir’s influence on the New Wave directors have been documented by the proponents of that movement themselves. To cite an example, the frequent experiments with framing devices led Truffaut, an avowed admirer of Renoir, to create his celebrated freeze-frame. The treatment of women to by Godard, Resnais, Truffaut and Bresson and others may be proved to have been inspired by Renoir. Renoir's films thus became from the initial cinema of the periphery to the center of the French national cinema. This in turn created the possibilities of representing women in lesser and lesser stereotypical fashion.

Although Bazin does provide evidence to prove that Renoir exhibited moralistic tendencies in several of his films like Le Crime de M.Lange, Une Partie de campagne, La Grande Illusion and La Règle du jeu. Bazin’s claim may allow some critics to claim that Renoir does advocate a new political status for women but that is beyond the purview of this study. cf. Bazin 17.


One may equate this with poetic justice.


By personal interests he implies even love, family fortune.


CHAPTER 2

Nana: the maligned performer

Made in 1926, Nana is a silent film by Renoir. During the credits, Renoir declares that it is a film influenced by Zola. This implies that Renoir, while creating the visual representation of this novel, was not keen to follow Zola’s experiment and details in their exact forms. Rather, Renoir embarked upon his own experiment to recreate the image of Nana. Bergan writes that Renoir stated, “Catherine and I dreamed of developing a French cinema free from all theatrical or literary encumbrances.”\(^1\) To him, the only way to get to the heart of a subject was to recreate it.\(^2\) In so doing, he attempted to create a veritable authorship for himself. It was only his third film,\(^3\) the first based on a celebrated literary work, made while he (Renoir) was yet almost an unknown figure in the film world. Even though he was young and inexperienced, Renoir was ambitious and full of novel ideas. He was not going to hesitate adapting important literary works for the screen. Bertin writes, "Encore rempli de son admiration pour Folies de femmes [1922, Erich von
Stroheim], Jean Renoir décida de transposer pour l'écran l'une des œuvres les plus connues de naturalisme: Nana."\(^4\) The work was important to Renoir, for as Bertin observes, "D'après Jean Renoir, Nana est son premier film << qui vaille la peine qu'on en parle>>"\(^5\). Renoir, in Sesonske's opinion, "displays the attitude . . .[that] he seeks to make a film, and not to film a novel."\(^6\)

According to Sesonske:

Zola's heroine, Nana, destroys, corrupts, and humiliates the men who surround her, driven by forces she neither controls nor understands--forces vaguely related by Zola to the sordid squalor of the degraded generations from which she sprang. . . The men she devours afford her neither fulfillment nor joy. By turns good natured, cruel, vulgar, generous grasping, impetuous, submissive, arrogant, Nana retains a sort of innocence in her inability to recognize or accept responsibility [in the novel].\(^7\)

Sesonske believes that "Renoir's film does not accord Nana the same scope of destructiveness" in comparison to the novel.\(^8\) Sesonske further states:

Nana falls short of full achievement in Renoir's Nana; one must work it out, rather than find it on screen. Nevertheless, Nana marks a significant moment in Renoir's career, for she is the first edition of a series of women who will live in Renoir's films, the later ones more completely, more subtly, more deeply embodying characteristics Renoir sought to bring to life here.\(^9\)
Durgnat believes that:

His (Renoir’s) Nana, offended by her insufficient success as an actress in the role of une honnête femme, flatters her worldly vanity by becoming a courtesan. Each of her victims is also a victim of his own lies: the advantages of social superiority are the principle lie. Her conquest becomes a function of an instinctive egalitarianism. Nana’s fate, is not quite the agonized death which her victims wish upon her. She, too, becomes a victim of the self-leveling of privilege and of nature. Her aspiration to be “une honnête femme”—like Muffat’s wife—was hubris, and largely social, an aspiration to the bourgeoisie. It was not an unnatural one, for, wherever her true happiness was to be found it was in her relationship to a man she loved and to a social category.10

While briefly describing the making of Nana, Bazin and Leprohon avoid any direct comment on the characteristics of Renoir’s Nana. Sesonske and Durgnat by contrast, view Nana as vengeful even though to a much lesser degree than what is found in the novel.

A brief recapitulation of Renoir’s treatment will help to properly contextualize the arguments of this chapter. Renoir’s film obviously centers on Nana, who is introduced in a play at the Variétés Theater as a seductive star. Her successful debut as a blonde Venus will later confine her to be typecast as a vamp. Nana’s strong protests fall on deaf ears. Then, Nana coaxes her paramour, Count Muffat, to buy her the role of La Petite Duchesse in the play of the same name at the same theater. Unfortunately this play fails at the box-
office. In utter disgust, Nana quits acting and resigns herself to the life of a mistress of the Count Muffat. She cannot remain devoted to Muffat, however. She next contemplates an affair with Count Vandeuvres. Nana, strangely enough, denies Georges, Vandeuvres’ nephew, any sexual favors, even though she encourages his frequent and prolonged presence in her household. The difference in age between the nephew and the uncle is not reflected in their behavior(s). For example, while Georges contemplates suicide on being rejected repeatedly by Nana, Vandeuvres not only commits suicide but also kills the prize horse Nana. Vandeuvres seems completely obsessed with the name Nana. Nana, the horse, was his prize possession. She brought him fame and riches. Vandeuvres had thought of repeating his horse racing success with with Nana the actress as well. His failure to secure Nana the actress proves fatal for him. By killing Nana the horse along with himself, Vandeuvres achieves certain objectives. First, he obliterates the horse from being a constant reminder of the person Nana. Second, by dying with her, he fulfills his vicarious satisfaction of being united with her. Third, the loss of the person Nana seems so unbearable for Vandeuvres that he sacrifices his most favorite possession in the form of the horse Nana. No doubt this horse is a metaphor for Nana, the actress. Like Nana, she is the center of public attention. Vandeuvres uses her as a bait to lure Nana to his side, implying that just as he has created a niche for Nana (the horse) in sports, he can potentially provide Nana (the person) with the same fortunes in society.

Vandeuvres, in order to steal or win Nana from Muffat, arranges for illegal betting on his own horses. After his win, Vandeuvres is publicly disgraced as people discover his duplicity, leading to his ruin. Nana, having witnessed this scandal, abandons him.
Following that, Vandeuvres' and Georges' proposals for marriage are sententiously rejected by Nana, leading to the double suicide of the dejected suitors. Overcome with grief over this double suicide, Nana goes to a "French cancan" party, captivates the audience with her dance, but faints after her performance. She is brought back to her house very sick and is declared to have contracted deadly smallpox. She dies shortly thereafter in the presence of her patriarchal patron Muffat.

In his screen adaptation, Renoir attempts primarily to foreground some of the themes of the novel, such as the reasons for which people, especially women, wear masks. He also presents the aspirations of an artist to be a creative contributor in the art of staging plays or in the art of entertainment. In so doing, Renoir advocates the defense of the personal life of a public woman who is much misunderstood and maligned by her compatriots, as well as by her competitors, colleagues, and neighbors. Along with these primary themes, Renoir also focuses on how women react to Nana's presence. Nana protests against the injustice which people inflict upon her. In revealing Nana's fighting spirit, Renoir anticipates a different role for women in society. From this perspective, Nana conveys a somewhat feminist message that willful women can fight for their rights.

The basic contention in this chapter is that Renoir's interest was to examine the interpersonal relationships among the various characters. Renoir firmly believes that society creates all the rules and mores of interaction. This situation often places a burden on individuals. Society, to Renoir, is the culmination of a series of rules, which bound men and women to various roles. These rules are put in place by a selected few who command enormous social power. It is difficult to escape those rules other than by
flouting them or by destroying them. These rules keep changing with time. In the face of
the challenges from the constituents of the society, who grow tired of these charades
hindering their independent existence, the rules are challenged and changed. Renoir's
films propose that women have a vital role to play in this cycle of definition and
redefinition of rules. He thus embarks upon *Nana* early in his career, inspired by Nana the
actress who symbolically challenges the decadent Second Empire. It is worth noting,
however, that Renoir's Nana does not seem to be as dangerous as she seems in the novel.
She apparently causes the death of two members of the affluent class, nonetheless.

Renoir's choice of shots, bringing Nana into close-up and or keeping Muffat in a
long shot, is designed to explore the possibilities of scopophilia in the audience. Renoir,
clearly was taking the position that it is not only men who look at women as objects, but
that women look at other women too. In *Nana*, Renoir also wanted to study why the
conflict occurred between men and women in specific circumstances. This chapter will
therefore examine what Nana represents and how she articulates her protest against the
injustices she experiences.

As a film *Nana* does not fall into any particular genre of films, especially those of
the decade in which it was made. Some important stylistic elements in the film are the
low lighting, dark backgrounds, and the depth of field. Astruc confirms this observation
when he says, "Nana porte la griffe du Jean Renoir que nous aimons. On peut le dire: c'est
son seul bon film de la période muette. Que s'est-t il passé? D'abord ceci: Nana à sa date
Renoir faced the problem of situating a nineteenth-century novel in a twentieth-century context. Moreover, in working with film he was employing a relatively new medium of artistic expression, to dispel any misunderstanding about Nana. Finally, he wanted to be creative. As a consequence, Renoir alters and condenses a number of segments in the story. Since Renoir was concerned with the world immediately around Nana, he altered the story to suit his needs. For example, Renoir does not attach much importance to Nana's close friendship with Satin who is very prominent in the novel. Diminished in importance are also Bordenave and Fauchéry. Bordenave, though very influential at the theater does not appear for long in the film. Fauchéry's clout as a celebrated journalist who can make or break performers' careers is not overtly explicit. La Faloise is an intermediary for Vandeuvres and not a wily politician cousin of Fauchéry (unlike in the novel). La Faloise is seen very briefly at the race course when Vandeuvres commits fraud. Astruc writes that Renoir made all these changes in order to emphasize his personal interpretation of the novel. To quote Astruc, "Renoir nous donne finalement beaucoup plus de lui-même que d'un roman qui est un prétexte: et c'est tant mieux." In an interview with Bonneau, Renoir said,

Dans le livre de Zola, vous verrez une vingtaine d'hommes ou de jeunes gens qui gravitent autour de Nana. J'ai pensé qu'une telle multitude de caractères si différents ne pouvait, au cinéma, qu'égarer le spectateur, l'écarté de l'action
essentielle, et faire perdre au film tout intérêt. Aussi ne verrez-vous dans Nana,
que trois principaux personnages: Vandeuvres, Muffat et Nana.

Careful attention must not only be paid to Nana's relationship with the theater, with Muffat and Vandeuvres, but also with her relationship to the theater itself. In the film Nana is fully dedicated to her career in the theater. She cannot bear to lose her possible stardom as an actress with the *La Petite Duchesse* which she fights to get. She is unsuccessful, and in the end buys the role with Muffat's influence. She is forced to quit the theater after the failure of *La Petite Duchesse*. Thus her love for and relationship to the theater may be said to be her primary interest. In this way, Renoir uses two significant intertitles to announce the failure of *La Petite Duchesse* and to illustrate the gravity of this loss in Nana's life, "Mais fidèles dans le malheur Ils ne purent que l'accompagner à l'enterrement d'illusions prématurées." The box-office burial of *La Petite Duchesse* almost destroys Nana. After her withdrawal from the theater, her several affairs may be seen as a means of seeking revenge on men for having lost her first love.

When Nana eventually quits the theater, the intertitle declares she does so "pour se consacrer à la galantrie." This intertitle is immediately followed by a cut to the interior of Nana's house. The camera zooms from a long shot from behind a tree through a window into Nana's bedroom. Lavish gifts are piled on her bed. The word "galantrie" suggests almost Arthurian conquests. Only here the roles are reversed and a woman, Nana, attempts the conquest of men. By dismissing Muffat along with the servants, Nana
dismisses any class difference between the Count and her servants. In her rage, she does not hesitate to insult even her patron. Sesonske believes that “Nana abandons the stage to exploit her true talent, sex.” This notion can be easily challenged by countering that Nana resorts to prostitution only when she fails to succeed to establish a reputation for herself as a gifted actress. She is not a prostitute by choice.

Renoir's attempt to delve into the life of an aspiring artist makes the film raise questions about entertainment and the people involved in the business of entertainment. Nana, for Renoir, symbolizes the struggles that an artist experiences in her/his attempt to establish herself/himself. Through Nana, Renoir also appeals to the viewers, to the society and to the people who make decisions to give a woman the opportunity to lead life as she pleases. Renoir does not intend to assign her a role that they perceive befits her. Nana in fact would provide an inspiration for Renoir to expound on similar ideas in many of his future films like La Chienne, La Règle du jeu, French Cancan, Elena et les hommes. The artist in this film, Nana, a victim of trying circumstances, abandons her acting career and ends up being caged into a life of prostitution. This is a dark but true revelation of the society around Nana. This society gambles with Nana's life and career only to extract its fair share of the profits. Nana was for Renoir the preparatory ground for the later film La Chienne. To quote Astruc, "L'influence morale de Stroheim et la rencontre de Zola ont fait le reste, en donnant à Renoir une audace, un tonus qu'il ne retrouvera que cinq ans plus tard, avec << La Chienne>>."
Nana's indulgence in a dangerous game of duplicity (even with her protectors), is a direct reaction to the wrongs done to her. The very director of the theatre who dismissed her acknowledges that she is not someone without talent. By creating this Nana, Renoir tries to encourage the viewers to evaluate every actor/actress or artist on his/her merits and not to abide by popular beliefs about them. An example of such a treatment can be found in the sarcastic intertitle, which can be contrasted to another intertitle much later in the film. When Nana is introduced to the viewers, the intertitle declares, "Nana une débutante /Qui remplaçait le talent/ Par une verve populacière." There is an immediate cut to Nana in a medium shot. The camera shows her being tied to ropes and chains around her torso. She wears revealing clothes. Nana's introduction to the theater's cast was to enhance the ratings and to draw spectators interested only in the seductive appeal of a débutante. Nana becomes a sexual commodity to increase the revenues of the theater, which was not doing well financially. The theater values Nana not for her talents but for her physical endowments. This is followed by an immediate cut to the audience (at the theater in the film) waiting for Nana to appear.

Later, Nana's success as a "vamp" prompts Bordenave, the director of the theater, to cast her in a similar role in a future venture. Nana's protest and claim for respect as an artist are met with ridicule orchestrated by the director and echoed by other members of the troupe. Nana elicits an appreciation of her talents from the bourgeoisie when Bordenave in the end calls her an artist. Towards the end of the film, however, this very group of people, while consoling Nana, tells her that she as an artist should not be
unsettled by events such as the suicides. To quote from the intertitle, “Tu es une artiste!/Il faut savoir paraître.”17

The introductory intertitle suggests that in the eyes of the producers of this play or the directors of the theater, it is of primary importance for an attractive débutante like Nana to establish her seductive appeal. They believe that she is not talented and that she can captivate the viewers with her physical attributes. This film is an eye opener for film viewers about film in particular and the artists who perform the different roles in general. The fact that Nana succeeds in her role as the seductive Venus does not imply that she is only a sensual object. Rather, it is Nana’s rendition of Venus's sensuousness which deserves more credit than her role as a vamp. Even as a débutante, Nana is not afraid of the audience when she performs as the sensuous Venus. Even though Renoir does not take a moralist stand, he still indicates that Nana is used to generate an entertainment of the lowest common denominator, to arouse the sexual instinct of particularly the male spectators towards her. The aristocrats and the intellectuals among the audience identify with this collective libido. The focus on the gaze of the spectators reveals that instead of looking for Nana’s acting prowess, their collective gaze remains fixated on Nana’s physical endowments. That is why the intertitle declares that Nana evokes “verve populâcière.” By describing the typecasting of Nana by Bordenave, Renoir also pays particular attention to Bordenave's chauvinistic attitude towards women in general and Nana in particular. In the novel, Bordenave says that “Est-ce qu'une femme a besoin de savoir jouer et chanter?”18 According to Bordenave, a female artist's success rests not on
her physical features, but how she uses her physical endowments to attract the audience. It is ironic that even though Bordenave does not think much of Nana beyond her cosmetic value, he does have a room reserved exclusively for Nana with her name on it. There is an interesting shot when Bordenave leaves Muffat and Nana together. As he steps out, he turns and in a medium shot, Renoir shows his towering body covering or rather eclipsing Nana's name on the door. It may be the prelude to Bordenave's later rejection of Nana for the role of the "La Petite Duchesse." Bordenave later makes no secret of his lack of respect for Nana’s acting capabilities. This shot demonstrates Bordenave's unquestioned power in dictating the events at the theater.

One may interpret the Nana-Muffat relationship at two levels: in the physical world and in the world of arts. At the physical level, this relationship is seen as reflective of the oedipal drama. Muffat, childlike, surrenders himself to Nana's charms. His tearful breakdown while pleading for Nana's attention, his burying of his face in Nana's lap, and his ready acceptance of the child-play with Nana, indicate his willingness to retrace his childhood and to retrace his frolic relationship with his mother. Nana treats Muffat like an infant and an animal. She sarcastically dismisses Muffat's love and does not feel any apparent attachment for him at all. Muffat does not impose himself on Nana either. From Nana's point of view, the relationship may be looked upon as that of a daughter with her father. She also depends on Muffat for her survival in the theater, and by extension, in life. Muffat looks after her well-being as a worrisome guardian keeping vigil on his erring daughter. Sometimes these two functions clash. Nana certainly does not like his over protection and experiments with other men in her life. From Muffat's perspective the
clashes are not a deterrent in his continuing a relation with Nana. He generally accommodates her whims. However, when Muffat discovers Georges’ dead body in Nana’s quarters, he loses patience and abandons her, accusing her of being dishonest and unfaithful.

The scene depicting the first encounter of Muffat and Nana is both funny and significant. Before Bordenave leaves he tells Muffat that Nana is shy at the beginning. The intertitle suggests that Muffat for the first time in his life, finds himself alone in an artist’s quarters. He thus is speechless. He stands in between the watchful Zoé and François, Nana’s maid and hairdresser. Nana looks out from behind the partition while changing her clothes. She looks at Muffat with a surprised and curious look. Influenced by Bordenave’s meaningful wink, she does not seem embarrassed to have a stranger in her dressing room. Apparently Nana is used to having men around her while she changes and does her make up, as is evident through the presence of Francis and Bordenave in a later scene when Zoé tightens her corsets. The exaggerated expression of a pleasant surprise for this honored guest makes her look somewhat pretentious. Muffat cannot quite decide what to say. He is drawn by her seductive appeal, yet he cannot express it. Renoir makes two quick cuts, from action to reaction, between Nana and Muffat. Nana remains in a close up shot, suggesting that she is open to public scrutiny and is waiting to be invited by the Count. The reaction shots on Muffat are long shots, which indicate the initial distance of Muffat from Nana and also from the viewer’s scrutiny. This distance also suggests the class distinction between Muffat and Nana. Nana is more at home in
these surroundings than he is, especially with her two attendants around, for she comes from a lower social and economic class.

Nana finally breaks the ice by asking Francis to give her a comb. She displays her long hair and gestures the need to comb. Her dark eyes, with heavy mascara, and her measured, yet spontaneous smile, seduce the count. Once again, the close-up on Nana provides an air of intimacy. Her seductive appeal is easily accessible even to the viewer. Muffat seizes this opportunity to get physically close to Nana. He takes the comb and hastens to give it to Nana. The close up on them closes the gap between the two. He makes a few remarks as he hands the comb to Nana. Nana returns the comb to Muffat to clean. Renoir cuts to Zoé and Francis who watch every detail with intense curiosity. A cut back to Muffat and Nana shows that Nana takes the comb. At this point, Muffat sighs, and while giving Nana the comb touches her hair, establishing the first physical contact with Nana. At this juncture, Renoir draws the viewer's attention to another event by fading to the empty room where Sabine and Fauchéry flirt under Bordenave's surveillance. Renoir cuts between the actions of Muffat, Nana, Bordenave, and the servants in order to maintain the viewer's curiosity.

In this scene, Renoir plays on the tactile senses of the personalities and the viewers. The comb becomes the medium of initial physical contact between Muffat and Nana. In a Freudian interpretative, the comb may even be considered a fetish of Muffat’s attraction to and affection for Nana. By abruptly cutting from the physical contact between Nana and Muffat to that of Sabine and Fauchéry, Renoir balances the sexual power between Muffat and Sabine. When Sabine and Fauchéry also turn their backs to
the camera and move towards the door to exit, Renoir cuts to a shot of a door opening. As the door opens, there is a close up on Muffat and a medium close-up of Nana.

The description of the first encounter of Muffat and Nana is more erotic in the novel. Zola writes:

D'un mouvement, elle s'était penchée, ne s'étudiant plus; et son peignoir ouvert laissa voir son cou, tandis que ses genoux tendus dessinaient, sous la mince étoffe, la rondeur de la cuisse. Un peu de sang parut aux joues terreuses du marquis. Le comte Muffat, qui allait parler, baissa les yeux.^^

The closer shot of Muffat in the film suggests that during this interval Muffat has become more intimate with Nana. Nana invites him to their show the next day and Muffat accepts the invitation. As Muffat leaves, Nana almost jumps in exaltation and closes the door. Renoir follows up this shot by cutting to a joyous Bordenave barging into Nana's dressing room and announcing that the theater should see better days, for Muffat has been charmed by Nana.

Muffat is Nana's patron at the theater. His support alone buys her the role of the Petite Duchesse. Muffat's failure to give Nana a berth in the theater ends her hopes of a career there. Muffat, in other words, is her protector in the world of art and creativity. It is ironic that in a fit of rage at her failure in the theater, Nana throws her closest servants Zoé and Francis out of her house and with them dismisses Muffat too. Her rash acts are seen here as the actions of a raging daughter unwilling to understand her father's or Muffat's fondness and devotion for her. Only when the double suicide of Georges and
Vandeuvres occurs, does Nana express any feeling of psychological dependence on him. Muffat at this juncture, however, disgusted at Nana's lack of fidelity towards him, leaves her. This act accelerates her demise.

In the opening credits of this film, Renoir signals Nana's meteoric rise and her highly eventful life full of burning controversies by designing the title "Nana" with burning candles or tiny burning lamps. This opening is significant both stylistically and metaphorically, for it anticipates Nana's "burning" and destructive presence in society. Association with her brings a fiery ruin for Vandeuvres, a tragic suicide for Georges, and considerable emotional upheaval for Muffat. Vandeuvres sets fire to his horse Nana and decides to perish with it. This particular opening is followed by a cut to the preparations for Nana's appearance on stage.

In the novel, Zola describes Nana with "cheveux roux" and as extremely clumsy, lacking any talent at acting. While watching Nana, the members of the audience forget her hair color. Regardless of what the viewers think of her acting, they enjoy her stage presence. Zola's description of Nana's awkward voice devoid of any emotion is not detectable in the silent film for obvious reasons. The audience's reaction to her histrionics is not understood clearly. The way Renoir introduces Nana points to her vulnerable situation from the moment of her appearance.

Bordenave and his assistant do not let Nana descend all the way to the ground even though the intertitle announces "La descente du Vénus sur la terre." There are malice and negligence on Bordenave's part and his assistant which result in the ridicule of Nana while they reap the benefit of her instant rapport with the audience. Nana is tied
to very strong ropes and metal rings which may hurt. She is clad in revealing clothes. As she is lowered into the stage, she clasps Bordenave's legs very briefly. Both Bordenave and his burly assistant tower over her, creating a very threatening ambiance. The horizontal steel bars supporting the upper section of the stage with the dark walls behind them and Nana's body hanging from the rope give the impression of a sacrifice at the gallows. Nana is being set up for a spectacle—her dignity is about to be sacrificed at the altar of public attention. Nana's brief clutching of Bordenave's legs indicates simultaneously his authority over her and her appeals for mercy from him. Later she almost falls to Bordenave's feet and begs to get the role of La Petite Duchesse. The dark background hints at the possible gloomy future for Nana at the theatre. Further, the grid that is formed by the bars and rope gives an indication of Nana's entrapment. This scene comes across as very tortuous for Nana.

The sequence that follows elucidates Nana's helplessness even further. As she is lowered down, the gestures of the audience suggest that they chant her name and whistle at her. (This being a silent film, one can only interpret the gestures.) Men and women alike watch her with rapt attention. Half way into the operation, Bordenave's assistant ties the rope to the bars on top, and Nana hangs in the air half-inverted and trying desperately to maintain her balance. The entire cast, members of the audience and members of the chorus alike, all ogle her as she hangs in suspension. At this point as she turns and wiggles, and in doing so seems like a bait used to lure the catch, —in this case, the audience and rich financial patrons of the theater. In the novel, the description of this uncomfortable scene is made more painful:

51
Elle continuait à se balancer, ne sachant faire que ça. Et on trouvait plus ça villain du tout, au contraire; les hommes braquaient leurs jumelles... Alors, sans s'inquiéter, elle donna un coup de hanche qui dessina un rondeur sous la mince tunique, tandis que la taille pliée, la gorge renversée, elle tendait le bras. Des applaudissements éclaterèrent. Tout de suite, elle s'était tournée, remontant, faisant voir sa nuque où des cheveux roux mettaient une toison de bête; les applaudissements devinrent furieux. 20

It is quite significant that in the film they keep her hanging in mid air. Later in the film this takes on a symbolic dimension as Bordenave keeps Nana’s career hanging. Medium close-ups on the chains and Nana’s dangling body accentuate Nana’s helplessness and frustration. Even though she is brought for a star appearance to boost the theater’s ratings and revenues, she is not given proper respect as a star and revenue earner. The audience’s simultaneous mockery of Nana and relishing of her presence are caught in medium shots and close-ups. Nana, however, can fight for her rights, and she does not tolerate negligence on Bordenave’s part for long. She yells at him to correct the mistake. Her please to Bordenave to handle her properly are also to arouse the opposition of the audience and the film viewer to her sorry state. Catherine Hessling’s exaggerated gestures augment the gravity of her situation.

The cut to Bordenave and the assistant with the ropes shows their decision to lower her further. Nana is treated much like the animals and clowns in a circus, or like a human puppet dancing to the pulling of strings. In fact, in that sequence she does dance in
order to retain the audience's excitement that has already been aroused (suggesting the familiar cliché of dancing to others' tunes). She seems to be an instrument ready to amuse people, devoid of any feelings or emotions. And while at the theater, the role she plays and how she plays it will be decided by Bordenave and his fellow assistants. Nana will be a reflection of their whims.

In order to challenge Bordenave's belief that Nana does not even know where to put her feet Renoir focuses on her feet on two occasions. The first takes place when she is shown being prepared for the descent. Bordenave's contempt for Nana (despite her success) is well explained in the novel. In the novel, during his conversation with La Faloise about Nana, Bordenave declares, "Elle!... Un paquet! Elle ne sait où mettre les pieds et les mains." She tries to adjust the ropes, which entangle her feet. The second time that Renoir focuses on Nana's feet is, when she is lowered all the way to the stage, she is shown to be making a perfect landing and then dancing to the audience's amusement. The close-up of her bare feet, through the slits in the tunic she is wearing, also shows Nana's sensuous appeal that Zola describes so vividly in the novel.

When the audience is shown in the reaction shot, it seems that the crowd considers even her inconvenience to be a source of amusement. Through the dispassionate reaction of the audience towards Nana, Renoir points to the disrespect by the viewers for a performer, especially a woman performer. To the viewers, a performer is just an object or puppet on display. The spectacle of this whole incident and the misapprehensions of the people are highlighted by the fact that men and women alike
begin commenting on her appearance. The spectators in the theater put their viewing
glasses on to have a better view of her. Renoir’s cuts to Nana and the audience capture
this ridiculous and humiliating scrutiny of Nana. The spectators’ penetrating and
ravishing glances on Nana are revealed by the repeated cuts on the spectators. This focus
on the spectators makes them the objects of the film-viewers’ gaze. The arousal of
eroticism among the spectators is described later in the novel:

Un frisson remua la salle. Nana était nue... Une simple gaze l’enveloppait; ses
épaules rondes, sa gorge d’amazone dont les pointes roses se tenaient levées et
rigides comme des lances, ses larges hanches qui roulaient dans un balancement
voluptueux. . . Tout d’un coup, dans la bonne enfant, la femme se dressait,
inquiétante, apportant le coup de folie de son sexe, ouvrant l’inconnu du désir.
Nana souriait toujours, mais d’un sourire aigu de mangeuse d’hommes.23

Renoir’s use of these shots is intended to demonstrate spectatorship both in the theater
and in films, and both in the nineteenth and the twentieth centuries. By bringing Nana
into so many close-ups and capturing the audience’s reactions immediately, Renoir
foregrounds the film-viewers’ reaction to the character of Nana on screen.

Of particular importance in this context is the reaction of Countess Sabine Muffat,
who labels Nana’s appearance as a mark of cheap exhibitionism. She draws her husband’s
attention to this fact. When he, Muffat, uses the glasses to focus on Nana, she seems to
pull away the glasses like a jealous lover. Curiously enough, while Sabine brands Nana’s
exhibitionism as cheap, she either does not realize or ignores the fact that Nana’s
appearance is under the direction of Bordenave. Sabine, in her dislike, overlooks the
director's responsibility, who forces Nana to play such a role. Fauchéry, who courts
Sabine, shares Sabine's dislike for Nana. He either genuinely dislikes Nana or does this
out his devotion to Sabine to please her.

Through this scene, Renoir also elucidates the evolving sexual politics among the
various characters in the film. When Nana first appears, Muffat has his back turned
towards the camera while talking to some people in the box behind, while Fauchéry
surveys the theater for gathering scoops and scandals on the rich and famous. Once
Sabine draws his attention to Nana, Muffat will not give the glasses back, and Sabine
wants them back. Fauchéry, who will later be critical of Nana's acting talents, keeps his
gaze fixed on Nana. Other members of the audience react likewise. In short, Renoir
suggests in this sequence that Nana captures everyone's attention and arouses his or her
curiosity, particularly the Muffats for whom she will become a source of family
disharmony. Nana's arrival also reveals the sexual politics between the spectators and
Nana in particular and between the spectators and the actresses in general. As discussed
earlier, the producers of the theater exploit the spectators' indulgence in scopophilia. In
the film, this sexual tension and liaisons among other characters are implied more clearly
when Bordenave's wink at Nana and the meaningful snigger are matched by the
Fauchéry's quintessential smile, when commanded to accept Nana as la Petite Duchesse
by Muffat. By this time, Fauchéry has established sexual contact with Sabine. Thus
Fauchéry reluctantly agrees to Muffat's wishes for he knows he can at least get his
revenge on Muffat by sleeping with his wife, a countess, whereas Muffat, an aristocrat, seeks sexual gratification with a prostitute.

The camera centers on the shot and reaction shot between Nana and the audience. She continues with her histrionics as long as the audience enjoys it. She learns the art of catering to the audience's pleasure very soon. In fact, since Nana becomes the central attraction of the play, Renoir gives little importance to the continuation and the conclusion of the play. Abruptly thereafter, he announces Muffat's visit to Nana following the performance by way of an intertitle. The play does not have too much to do with what Nana does to the audience's desire. Zola describes the situation in the novel as follows:

"Quelques mains battirent, toutes les jumelles étaient fixées sur Vénus. Peu à peu, Nana avait pris possession du public, et maintenant chaque homme la subissait. Le rut qui montait d'elle, ainsi que d'une bête en folie, s'était épandu toujours davantage, emplissait la salle. A cette heure, ses moindres mouvements soufflaient le désir. . ."24

It is significant too that at the point where Renoir cuts off the play, both Jupiter and Vulcan admire Venus along with their followers, and Nana (Venus) begins to dance. This implies that the entire cast (along with the audience) also becomes absorbed in Nana's magnetic presence. Also, the triangle that Renoir alludes to among Jupiter, Vulcan and Venus, foreshadows the triangle among Muffat, Nana and Vandeuvres, along with other less powerful and less fortunate admirers like Georges.
The brief tussle between Muffat and his wife over the eyeglass, with Fauchéry watching both of them and Nana, is especially significant. That very evening Muffat visits Nana and succumbs to her charms. Before cutting to Nana's door through a fade, there is a cut to the box with Muffat, Fauchéry and Sabine. These cuts are very significant for while Muffat visits Nana, Sabine flirts with Fauchéry.

Renoir develops this extra-marital affair very meticulously. Bordenave shuts Nana's dressing room door, and asks the attendant to leave. Before leaving Muffat and Nana, he winks at Nana, expecting that relation to bring in some benefits for the theater too. Bordenave's gesture is not exaggerated, for in the novel, he refers to the theater as "mon bordel." This refrain may imply that he is not ashamed to encourage prostitution and that he considers his artists to be prostitutes and nothing else. This is certainly reflective of the esteem he holds for his performers. Renoir does not use this refrain in any of the intertitles, but one can begin to understand Bordenave's attitude towards Nana from his treatment of Nana during her descent.

At the time when Bordenave leaves Muffat and Nana, there is an abrupt cut to the door of Sabine and Fauchéry's room. The intertitle suggests that Sabine and Fauchéry converse under the watchful eyes of Bordenave. The attention of the viewer is directed towards Sabine and Fauchéry through an iris shot of them suggesting Bordenave's view through the peephole of the door. As Sabine and Fauchéry leave, there is an extended suggestive pause as they exchange meaningful glances. Fauchéry puts the overcoat on Sabine with some excessive warmth and affection. As they leave, the iris shot closes. Bordenave closely monitors their close association.
An interesting contradiction here is that while Bordenave leaves Muffat and Nana alone and even asks the attendant to leave them, he peeps through the eyehole in the room where Sabine and Fauchéry are conversing intimately. The shots are composed very carefully to maintain continuity and also to give the impression of surveillance of Fauchéry and Sabine. When they are seen next, the next morning at Sabine's house, the iris shot opens, and Sabine writes a note at Fauchéry's instigation. By then Bordenave announces to Nana that Muffat really likes Nana and that Fauchéry will be able to keep Sabine away from the theater.

Fauchéry's embrace of Sabine and his passionate kissing of Sabine's hand suggest a sexual contact between the two. It follows that while Muffat looks for mistresses (among artists and other women), Sabine cavorts with other men. In the novel, Zola describes the casual attitude that people have towards extra-marital sexual relationships. Fauchéry analyzes Sabine as he talks to his cousin La Faloise: “Dis donc? la comtesse ne couche avec personne?” Zola anticipates both the sexual liberty and the debauchery of both the men and women in the social milieu he depicts.

Even though Sabine enjoys considerable liberty in the film, it seems as if she feels jealous that Muffat should fall for someone (Nana) whom she considers very cheap. Her lover Fauchéry, who does not like Nana, influences Sabine. Once again, in order to suggest that society, Bordenave and even the viewers of the film are watching Sabine's moves, Renoir ends this scene by closing the iris on Fauchéry and Sabine.
In the note, Sabine declares "Cette situation ne peut durer. Je suis maintenant décidée à abandonner mon foyer." Sabine's anger is very relevant in this context, for from this scene Renoir cuts to a newspaper clipping of financial trouble at the Variétés. Muffat will provide patronage to the theater as a condition for getting Nana the role of La Petite Duchesse. Sabine is opposed to Muffat’s involvement with the theater only to support Nana. The newspaper article irks her for she realizes that Muffat will lose money for something she does not want. The dark background, with candles burning on the table, makes the situation simmer with tension. This reminds the viewer of the opening credits with the burning candles around Nana’s name. The darkness and Fauchéry’s grateful acknowledgment of Sabine's declaration, also imply some dark intention on part of someone (in this case Bordenave and Fauchéry) for some not-so-honorable cause. Sabine reveals her anger and frustration as she writes the letter. She does not realize, however, that it is actually a scheme of Bordenave to ensure Muffat's patronage of the theater by using Nana as the bait for him and by using Fauchéry as a bait for Sabine.

The connection between Bordenave's wink at Nana, in the scene in which he left Nana with Muffat and Fauchéry's passion for Sabine becomes more apparent here. It is clear that Nana is used for soliciting patronage from the wealthy members of the audience. Bordenave succeeds in his first step by trapping Muffat, as is apparent from his confident declaration to Nana. This declaration is immediately followed by a cut which shows Sabine writing the afore-mentioned letter in Fauchéry's presence. Fauchéry must have fomented Sabine's hatred for Nana in order to force her to declare her decision to give up her box at the theater. Both the women, Sabine and Nana, thus become
instruments of personal interests, in the hands of Bordenave and Fauchéry. Fauchéry either lies or does not disclose to Sabine the proper motive for his association with Sabine. Later, Fauchéry will use his influence on Bordenave to remove Nana from the theater. In the novel, Zola draws a significant physical similarity between Nana and Sabine to indicate the proximity in terms of their social situations. At Sabine's residence, while scrutinizing Sabine's character, Fauchéry makes a remarkable discovery: "Mais un signe qu'il aperçut à la joue gauche de la comtesse, près de la bouche, le surprit. Nana avait le même, absolument. C'était drôle. . . N'importe, cette femme ne couchait avec personne." Sabine's sex life haunts Fauchéry. Unlike in the novel, as noted earlier, in the film Fauchéry is more intimate with Sabine and has a sexual rapport with Sabine.

Renoir cuts from the scene with Fauchéry and Sabine to a scene in the theater which shows Bordenave distributing roles for La Petite Duchesse. In Bordenave's opinion Nana is incapable of expressing the high emotions in one particular scene in which she, as La Petite Duchesse has to resort to a tirade. Bordenave's real intention may have been to use Nana as a seductress for wealthy donors for his theater and then to dismiss her. When Nana expresses her displeasure, she is ignored. Nana protests against her stereotyping and expresses her anger against the establishment in a brilliantly executed tirade. The entire troupe still makes fun of her, and Bordenave menacingly chases Nana out of the theatre.

Renoir's reconstruction of Nana's attitude is very suggestive of her combative energy. Nana is shown on the left of the screen while Bordenave and the troupe members are behind him on the right. Just behind Bordenave is seated Fauchéry, another strong
opponent of Nana. Nana directs her tirade first at Bordenave and then against the entire troupe. It is ironic that Bordenave refuses to give the role of La Petite Duchesse to Nana, for he does not have confidence that she will be able to perform the tirade of the duchesse.

Here, Nana gives a great performance when she rebukes Bordenave and his lackeys. Nana thus takes on not only an individual dictator, but also the collective obstacle to her career in the theater. By challenging her adversaries in the theater, Nana prepares herself for struggle in a bigger arena, society at large. For Zola and Renoir, theater and cinema stand as metaphors for society. When she turns to the other side, Nana challenges and reproaches the rest of the members of the cast. At this time, Nana is seen on the right and all others on the left. Bordenave finally gets the better of Nana by threatening and chasing her out of the theater. Bordenave advances with clenched fists suggesting that he will strike her. And in doing so Bordenave ignores Nana's brilliant performance as a belligerent woman. Renoir implies here that the only option left for Bordenave to stop Nana and her performance is brute physical force.

To underline how other actresses also conspire to hinder Nana from getting roles where her acting is tested, Renoir shows the confrontation between Nana and Rose. Against Nana's accusations which read, "Vous avez beaucoup rigolé pour jouer les roles elegants et il y encore que moi," Rose just hangs her head and remains silent. Her silence is her quintessential acceptance of her guilt in conspiring against Nana. As is evident in the novel, Renoir shows that even Nana's colleagues try to prevent her achieving success and fame. It is here that Bordenave, who had maintained a sarcastic attitude thus far, gets
up and chases Nana with clenched fists. Bordenave thus probably implies that Nana may have been right in her accusations and that the remedy left to control her dissidence is to dismiss Nana. By rising up against Bordenave and the rest of the conspirators, Nana shows her courage in challenging the status quo. Her protest also reiterates her demand for respect from the theater community.

The choice of Catherine Hessling may seem somewhat incongruous with the personality traits of Nana as described by Zola, but Renoir was bent on breaking with clichés and intended to do something different. Renoir was sensitive to and very conscious of his own creativity. Reminiscing about Nana, he said, "Nana a été le premier film dans lequel j'ai découvert qu'on ne copie pas la nature, mais qu'il faut la reconstituer, que tout film, que tout travail à prétention artistique doit être une création, une création bonne ou mauvaise." The choice of Catherine Hessling as Nana helped Renoir to achieve several elements. First, it helped him to blend Catherine Hessling's adolescent "feminine" eroticism with the devastating image of Nana that Zola paints. Even though Zola's Nana is very young in age, she projects a very mature and vile image of herself. Second, it follows that Catherine Hessling's apparently naive expressions help her (and Renoir too) to draw the audience/spectators' interest for Nana. This, in turn, diminishes the reader-spectators' hatred for Nana and dispels preconceived notions about the character. Renoir would also try to arouse this sympathy for Lulu in La Chienne. Third, by casting Catherine Hessling in such a role, a rising star, who did not quite represent the all-consuming prostitute, Renoir also wanted to avoid typecasting. He experimented with
the casting of actors and actresses in roles which did not match either the star's
idiosyncrasies or fit the literal description of the character in a novel. Renoir would repeat
his unusual casting methods with Valentine Tessier in Madame Bovary, Paulette Godard
in The Diary of a Chambermaid and Simone Simon in La Bête Humaine as Séverine.
Commenting on this aspect of the film Astruc writes:

Catherine Hessling n'est pas la Nana, violemment sensuelle, la déesse de la chair
ensorcelante et vulgaire que Zola a décrite. Elle est plus fine, plus femme-enfant.
Mais chacun peut se forger une image de Nana, avec ses propres nostalgies, ses
amours décus.29

Renoir was seemingly consumed with the idea of popularizing his wife's physical
appeal. "Jean est conscient des sentiments divers que suscite la beauté de son épouse. Il a
envie de faire admirer et convoiter davantage cette femme qu'il aime, plus belle encore,
plus insolite qu'elle n'apparaît à première vue."30 From this perspective, it may be
suggested that launching Catherine's career in a celebrated literary work such as Nana,
Renoir intentionally (or unintentionally), created as much commotion among spectators
and critics as did the fictional unknown Nana on her first appearance on the Paris stage as
Venus. It may be suggested here that by so doing Renoir unknowingly played the role of
Bordenave. Bergan offers a new perspective on why Renoir decided to cast his wife as
Nana. Bergan writes:

Jean was not attracted to the work [Nana] as a basis for his next film out of any
desire to draw any social or political analogies between Zola's time and postwar
France; his prime motivation yet again was the need to find a role that would satisfy his wife, because he was finding it more and more difficult to satisfy her in other ways.31

By casting his wife, Renoir encountered a new phenomenon during the making of the film. "Catherine est aux anges. Chaque jour, elle a une nouvelle idée pour son personnage de Nana qu’elle mime pour Pierre Lestringuez et Jean, déjà au travail."32 Given Renoir's desire to work very independently, it is not hard to imagine that Renoir found it difficult to complete his project while keeping his star-wife satisfied as he focused on his vision of Nana. In principle, during the course of this film Renoir wanted to produce something creative, quite different from the novel. He writes, "Le mélange Catherine Hessling-Werner Krauss dans la distribution est étonnant. Jean Renoir a laissé à ses interprètes une apparente liberté et Catherine-Nana est plus imprévue que Werner-Muffat."33

Catherine Hessling's exaggerated gestures often seems Chaplinesque. Bertin writes about Renoir's Nana that, "La fascination que le couple Jean-Catherine éprouvait à l'égard de Charlot, on la trouve dans ce film où Catherine se laisse aller à mimer son personnage avec une conviction et une candeur au second degré qui donnent à cette misérable fille, victime d’elle-même, de son délire narcissiste, une dimension séduisante."34 The Chaplinesque interpretation is very pronounced in almost every sequence involving Catherine Hessling. An example is the first meeting between Muffat and Nana. In this sequence, Catherine, in order to express her so called "bashfulness" (as
declared by Bordenave) receives Muffat very coyly. When Bordenave announces Muffat’s arrival, at first she peeps from behind the partition of her greenroom while she changes her attire after the show. In the beginning, she notices that the Count sees her bare shoulders. She looks at him with a welcoming gesture, then perhaps suddenly realizing that her change is not complete, quickly dips behind the partition with a sly, innocent yet provocative smile on her lips. She emerges from her hiding after a little while, asking for a comb. Her miming is similar to the miming of Chaplin’s happy tramp, who ducks, pops, runs, smiles, and engages in a discourse with his caller. Leprohon writes that, “Renoir affiliated himself with Chaplin, who also had little interest in the possibilities of the visual language. Perhaps Renoir’s memories of puppet shows and his father’s paintings were at work, in the sense that, for him, a film is a spectacle, a show, just as paintings were in the days before abstract art took over.”

Reaction among critics of this film about Catherine Hessling’s performance is generally negative. Durgnat describes Hessling as:

Lady of Misrule, transcends Zola’s blond Amazon to become a pocket Venus of sulk, cajolery and command. With her prettily Napoleonic posturesd, her limbs light as petals, her air of fin-de-siecle Lilian Gish, Hessling’s expressionistic pantomime of gestures becomes, precisely through its air of arbitrary, irrational selection, vitalist, and false.36

Sesonske in a similar vein declares:
For many viewers [the] outline of the character of Nana will seem much clearer than what they find in the film. The performance does get in the way. But my willingness to dismiss Hessling’s acting as ludicrous stems from my confidence that this performance does embody Jean Renoir’s conception of the role...The character differs considerably from Zola’s Nana, but the basic childishness of the characterization is suggested in the novel. I suspect that Renoir found this childishness in Catherine Hessling and built the role upon it.\(^{37}\)

Regardless of the reception of this film, it has to be said that this film establishes an auteur status for Renoir. Sesonske believes:

_Nana_ is not a bedroom comedy, and Nana not a simply, honest whore. Rather, a consistent performance by Catherine Hessling gives rise to a shifting perception of the character portrayed. At first, the combination of childishness, comedy and sex gives Nana a certain charm.\(^{38}\)

Coming from Sesonske, this statement may sound like a contradiction. However, this chapter supports his position. Catherine Hessling’s childishness makes Nana more acceptable and less vicious than the Nana described by Zola in the novel.
Notes


3 Christopher Faulkner records Nana as the third film, whereas the Bernard Cherdère edition of Premier Plan: Jean Renoir issue, considers Nana to be Renoir's second film. Probably they do not consider Catherine to be Renoir's first film given the controversy surrounding the film. I accept Faulkner's enumeration of Renoir's films.

4 Bertin 85.

5 Bertin 88.


7 Sesonske 20.

8 Sesonske 25.

9 Sesonske 25.


12 Astruc 61.


21 It may not be inappropriate to suggest that especially in nineteenth century with the coming of the Industrial revolution, human beings were being gradually turned into almost automatons losing their independence of living, independence of thinking. Zola's La Bête Humaine (also filmed by Renoir) is an allegorical exposition of this fact of life.

22 Zola 8.

23 Zola 30.

24 Zola 31.

25 Zola 65.

26 The name Fauchéry can even be interpreted as "faux chéri" or as a "false friend" or as a "loved impostor."

27 Zola 31.


29 Renoir, Premier Plan 62.

30 Bertin 77.

31 Bergan 79.
32 Bertin 85.

33 Bertin 63.

34 Bertin 64.


36 Durgnat 39.

37 Sesonske 25.

38 Sesonske 24.
Renoir based *La Chienne* on Georges de La Fouchardièrè’s very popular novel of the same name, published in 1930. According to critics, Georges de La Fouchardièrè was well-known as a comic writer. Durgnat believes the novel to be a tragicomedy. Renoir turns the comic nature of the novel into a blend of a murder mystery, social satire, and irony. This novel was also adapted for the stage by André Mouézy-Éon as a three act play in 1931. The impact of the play on Renoir’s film is difficult to evaluate. No major critic, including Faulkner, compares Renoir’s film to the play. It is clear, however, that Renoir’s film remains more faithful to the progression of events in the novel than Mouézy-Éon’s play does. Sesonske states that, “By summer of 1931, the novel had lost its currency.”

This clearly suggests that Renoir’s film at least did not compete with the play for either critical recognition or commercial success.

Renoir made *La Chienne* shortly after achieving great success with *On Purge Bébé* (1931). The producers put enormous pressure on Renoir to complete the film according to their demands. During its first release the film was a failure at the box office. An astute businessman later re-released the film and through clever advertising helped Renoir attain commercial success.
For Bazin, *La Chienne* evokes a realism of manners. Bazin is not keen on psychological realism for to him it is incomplete realism. Faulkner considers *La Chienne* to be a film based entirely on property relations. He writes, “It is a film that illustrates how the economic forces of society determine personal and social relations.” Faulkner does not believe that a psychological reading can explain the violence in the film.

Sesonske avoids classification of the film into any particular genre. For Leprohon, “*La Chienne*, prefigures *La Bête humaine*. For Leprohon this film is a sociological critique “possessed of [a] spirit of fatality, inexorability, in the sense that they are dominated, not so much by a woman, as by one aspect of the nature of woman.” For Leprohon, the “nature of women” in both *La Chienne* and *La Bête humaine* (1938) constitutes childlike sweetness and tender abandon that rise to the surface, obscuring their sometimes harsh words spoken with a naïveté and grace all the more touching because “these women seem to be victims of some strange fate, or more simply and precisely victims of their own nature.”

Durgnat suggests that:

> Legrand’s preoccupation with cigarette ends concludes a tragicomedy of myopias, of temperaments which are absurd if they are closed to one another and tragic if opened to one another. It certainly climaxes the blackness which Renoir indulges more often than recent writing suggests: in *La Chienne, La Petite Marchande d’Allumettes, La Nuit De Carrefour, La Bête humaine, Woman on the Beach* and in certain motifs (the death of animals) in other films.

*La Chienne*, like *Nana*, cannot be classified into a particular genre of film. Viazzi writes:

> Au début, les discussions sur le caractère du film (est-ce un drame social, un drame moral, est-ce le traditionel triangle, ou tout cela à la fois), témoignent de l’intérêt de Renoir sous la forme de déclarations-manifestes: ce qui lui tient à
It is apparent that in the film Renoir believes that it is very difficult for a prostitute like Lulu to escape her dangerous life in the demi-monde. Unfortunately, the only way she escapes her continued degradation is through death. On first viewing, the story appears to be that of a simple case of murder, resulting from the protagonist Legrand’s failure to secure Lulu and her love even at the cost of his personal finances and reputation. Under the surface of the triangular relationship among Lulu, Legrand and Dédé are several complications. Lulu is a prostitute, who is completely infatuated with her pimp Dédé, who mistreats her. Legrand, a middle class clerk, accidentally gets entangled in the complications of Lulu’s life and eventually murders her. The viewers should understand Lulu’s social circumstances and how society, and especially the justice system, often turn a blind eye to the facts of a case and impose their biases and flawed judgments on unsuspecting, innocent individuals. Renoir demonstrates that even a prostitute merits proper understanding and acceptance in the eyes of society. A prostitute, he suggests, is one of the ordinary people who are most numerous in society. This is one of the primary reasons that Renoir introduces the film as a story of "Vous et moi."

Renoir’s draws the viewer’s attention for he suggests that Lulu, Legrand and Dédé could very well be the viewers’ neighbors.

Briefly, La Chienne is the story of Legrand, a middle-class henpecked clerk, in an unhappy marriage, who involuntarily gets involved in Lulu's troubled life when he rescues her one night from Dédé's beating. Legrand falls in love with the prostitute Lulu, in order to escape the drudgery of his married life. Dédé, Lulu's lover and pimp, uses Lulu to extort as much money from Legrand as possible to fund his own pleasurable
pursuits. Lulu cannot (or does not want to) escape from Dédé's hypnotic grip. She bears with his abusive behavior, for she dreams of a happy conjugal life with Dédé. Shortly after the rescue, Legrand provides Lulu with a luxury apartment, decorates it with his paintings, and lives beyond his means for her upkeep -- all with the hope of someday marrying her.

Painting is almost second nature to Legrand. Legrand paints to escape from the frustrations of his troubled marriage. Faulkner draws attention to Harcourt's evaluation of both Legrand's painting and his passion for Lulu as "retreats into fantasy" from the frustrations of his petit-bourgeois works and days. Faulkner writes:

[For Legrand], the painting and the romantic idealisation of Lulu are compensatory pleasures in a luckless existence. Both must seem colorfully apposite distractions for a man caught in Legrand's oppressive daily round of unimaginative office routine and loveless home life.⁹

Lulu is not at all interested in sharing her life with Legrand. She gives Legrand company only with the intention of earning money for Dédé. When she does not get cash from Legrand, she lets Dédé sell Legrand's paintings at a premium. Dédé, a con artist, sells Legrand's paintings to an art dealer Wallstein, as the works of Clara Wood, a fictitious American painter, without Legrand's knowledge. Clara Wood acquires instantaneous recognition in the elite society. When Wallstein wants to meet Clara and introduce her to his prospective clients, Dédé passes Lulu off as Clara. One day Legrand accidentally notices his paintings displayed on Wallstein's gallery window and finds out about Clara Wood from the gallery assistant. Lulu manages to carefully divert Legrand's suspicions about this matter. In the meanwhile, Legrand also accidentally meets with Godard, his wife Adèle's former husband, presumed dead but actually an army deserter and impostor. Legrand cleverly devices a plan to unite Godard with Adèle, in order to escape from his
troubled marriage and to begin a new life with Lulu. On the fateful night of his escape, when Legrand arrives at Lulu’s he finds Dédé and leaves in great disappointment. The next morning he returns to reclaim Lulu but Lulu remains firm in her rejection. Suddenly, in a fury of being rejected by the woman for whom he staked his life, marriage, and honor, Legrand stabs Lulu to death. A strange turn of events, coupled with Dédé’s stubbornness and refusal to be diplomatic at the trial for Lulu’s murder, leads to Dédé’s conviction for Lulu’s murder. Legrand escapes arrest and conviction for the ghastly act. But, in the end, he becomes a penniless vagabond.

Both Mouézy-Éon and Renoir made some changes to the novel. For example, the play and the novel differ about the actual age of Legrand. In the play Legrand declares “j’ai cinquante-deux ans,” whereas in the novel Legrand claims that “j’ai 42 ans.”¹⁰ Renoir never declares Legrand’s actual age in the film. The only reference to his age is made when Lulu describes him as an old man. The play provides a lot of prominence to Dédé’s friend Gustave, who appears very briefly in the film. Also in the play, Legrand’s fantasies about women, briefly mentioned in the novel, are elaborated in his (Legrand’s) prolonged discussion with his friend Destours, who is not present in either the novel or the film. The play on the other hand, just like the novel, uses flashback after Dédé’s trial to reveal Lulu’s murder. In the film, Renoir shows Lulu’s murder before the trial. The novel begins with Legrand describing his “adventure” one particular night, in his generally uneventful life. To quote from the novel:

Hier au soir, le personnel de la Maison Jules Henriot, où je suis cassier-comptable, offrait un banquet au patron qui venait de campagne électorale. Ces dîners d’hommes sont d’une gaieté sinistre; on commence par parler politique; ensuite on dit des saletés. . .A une heure du matin, je me suis retrouvé tout seul sur l’avenue Trudaine, sans intention définie. . .J’avais résisté à l’insistance de mes
In the film, the action begins with Legrand at the party with his office colleagues, almost following the beginning of the action in the novel. The play, however, begins differently, with the first scene describing a passerby approaching Lulu for her services in front of a bar. According to the stage directions, on a deserted street at one o'clock in the morning, in front of the Excelsior bar, Lulu paces up and down and at times tries to peek inside the bar. A passerby approaches her.

Le Passant. Bonsoir, la gosse... T'as pas peur de t'enrhumer à rester comme ça, dans le courant d'air?

Lulu. Je vous cause pas, Monsieur.12

Soon after, Legrand and his friend Destours emerge from the café, cannot get onto the bus and sit on a bench to discuss Legrand's conjugal life. The play omits several scenes and details found both in the novel and the film. For example, in capturing the essence of the novel, Renoir, in the prologue to the film, describes the personalities of Legrand, Dédé, and Lulu exactly the way they have been described in the novel. The play does not provide any such description of the different characters. Again, Renoir's film differs from both the novel and the play in its omission of Legrand's visit to a brothel after rescuing Lulu. In the film, Legrand is shown to be more restrained and withdrawn from his milieu than the Legrand in the play and the novel. Each chapter in the novel has the title Lui (Legrand) or L'Autre (Dédé) or Elle (Lulu). The narrative advances with each character either describing mostly in first person the events in his/her life, or through his/her conversations with his/her friends. In the film, Renoir uses Legrand's voice-over only during the first scene at the office party the rest of the events in the film progress through the interaction and conversations of the various characters.
The intrigues of the plot in the film may be understood as the functions of elements such as property, that act together with the secretive plans and the private conspiracies the characters hatch to take advantage of others. These actions are based on the characters' personal desires. For example, Dédé exploits Lulu for the pursuit of his revelrous life. Lulu exploits Legrand to provide money for Dédé and to retain his (Dédé's) affection. Legrand dupes his wife and embezzles from the company he works for to provide for Lulu. A careful examination of their personal characteristics and intentions must be undertaken in order to understand where Lulu stands and why she endures what she does.

Among the critical elements that enables an understanding of the image of woman in this film: first, the relationships among the male and female characters, and what their characters represent—in effect, how gender politics shapes the message of the film and its events; second, the constant psychological battles involving the characters, with the aim of controlling others—the power struggles; third, the functions of the body and its multiple images, i.e., its relationship with the society and the world outside—the "screen space" that each individual's body occupies; and lastly, the function of sound in the film at important junctures.

Additional factors come into focus in the "when" and "why" scenes depicting actions that are interrupted by the different characters. For example, Lulu's actions are interrupted by those of Adèle. These scenes center on the perception that each character has of others i.e., the importance of the look. As is common in many of Renoir's other films, most of the action in this film is stimulated by more than one woman. This chapter identifies and demonstrates how the relationships influence the power dynamics between the leading characters in this film. This chapter argues that the two women initiate most of the interaction that occurs in these relationships and significantly affects their
outcomes. The multiple images of the two leading women are very important in understanding how they affect the relationships in La Chienne.

One has to consider how the relationship of each individual towards the other fits in the bigger picture. The following four critical relationships require analysis: first, Legrand's relationships with Adèle and Lulu: centering on how his relations with one woman affects those with another; second, Lulu's relationship with Dédé and why she acts differently with Dédé and Legrand; third, Adèle's relationship with Godard (her first husband); fourth, the connection between Lulu and Adèle.

The relationships define the positions of each individual vis-à-vis the other. For example, in the film, the events in Legrand's life are definitely, but not exclusively, influenced by Lulu. There is another woman Legrand's wife Adèle who drives Legrand to flee from their stormy marriage. Anytime Adèle encounters Legrand, she greets him with a torrent of admonitions. Legrand’s fears and frustrations about his wife are quite explicit in the novel:

Sitôt après avoir quitté mes camarades, j'avais marché dans une direction opposée au domicile conjugal, où ma femme m'attendait, debout, accumulant les griefs et fourbissant les reproches, prête à découvrir, sur la manche de mon smoking une tache de poudre de riz au niveau de l'épaule, et démêler un parfum suspect par-dessus l'odeur de naphthalie.¹³

Evidently, Legrand is in awe of his wife’s suspicions and vigilance. After all, he admits in the novel that his wife gives him an allowance everyday. In the play too, Legrand’s distress is expressed in his conversation with Destours:

Destours. Tu es un peu naïf, Legrand.

Legrand. Ma femme me le répète souvent... avec moins de formes.

Destours. Comme cela?
Faulkner concludes that La Chienne is a film essentially based on property and the economic interactions of the various characters. This chapter suggests that except for Adèle, the economic interactions among the various characters and their behaviors are direct functions of their social relationships, i.e., the interpersonal relationships determine the economic interaction among the characters, not vice-versa. For example, Dédé's exploitation of Lulu as a prostitute is a direct function of the unquestionable authority he has over her, i.e., a power relationship. Lulu's leverage over Legrand, due to her charms, gives her the privilege to force Legrand to indulge in her material demands.

The analysis of these relationships also enables an understanding of Renoir's attempt to rehabilitate Lulu in society. Lulu is, in a sense, a reflection of Zola's Nana. She tries to dominate men like Legrand, who lack self-confidence. She uses her sexual appeal to drive men into indulging her demands and thereby into committing criminal acts. For example, she forces Legrand to provide for her to the point that he is forced to steal.

Wallstein's client, who wants his portrait painted by Clara Wood (the fictious American painter), actually pays Lulu (who assumes Clara Wood's identity) for sleeping with him, and not for painting his portrait. In the end, Lulu, like Nana, dies a pathetic death, but not without inflicting damage on the men who destroy her. Dédé is executed and Legrand becomes a tramp. Here, a description of what Legrand, Adèle, Lulu and Dédé superficially represent is appropriate.
Legrand represents a petit bourgeois, who wants to achieve intellectual satisfaction (and perhaps distinction someday) through his painting. Painting for him is a means of relaxation and relief from the mundane atmosphere in his office and in his conjugal life. Although separated from the people around him, Legrand is not separated from the common indulgences in life. During the film's party scene, Renoir explains through Legrand's voice over that he is not averse to carnal pleasures, but he does not enjoy sensual pursuits in a group, as his colleagues do. The novel explains too, that Legrand is not above carnal pleasures, even though he seems aloof from the ordinary people who surround him. He admits that he frequently indulges in prostitutes to satisfy his physical desires. De la Fouchardière describes:

Mais quelquefois la femme se retourne et fait des avances que ma timidité m'empêche de repousser. . .Je dois être franc avec moi-même. . .Je ne le suis pas seulement par la crainte absurde de paraître rompre sans cause un engagement que j’ai volontairement contracté. . .Mais parce que ma sensualité n’est pas seulement cérébrale. Et dès qu’elle est satisfaite, l’illusion se dissipe. C’est l’écœurement.16

In the play, Legrand uses the exact words to describe his passion for sensual pleasures in life.

Adèle, a bourgeois housewife, has concern only for practical things in life and does not demonstrate any passion for artistic exercises like painting. She is very upset that Legrand's past time costs her a considerable sum of money. She is also opposed to Legrand's hobby, for she cannot tolerate either him or his ways. She thus represents the monotony and mediocrity of the routine life of an ordinary housewife who does not show any intellectual ambition in life. In the novel and the play she is described by Legrand as a tyrant in the household.
Lulu, the hapless prostitute, wants to leave her ignominious existence and lead a happy conjugal life with Dédé. She is willing to sacrifice her own pleasures and comfort to save enough for the happy future. She represents a fallen and struggling woman's aspirations for a respectable existence. In the preface of the novel, de la Fouchardière describes her as:

Elle, c'est une petite femme qui a son charme à elle et sa vulgarité personnelle, mais qui peut inspirer tout de même une passion et faire flamber de partout un être resté neuf et combustible. . .Elle raconte les choses, quand c'est son tour de parler ou d'écrire, dans une lettre ou une conversation avec une copine. Elle est toujours sincère; elle ment tout le temps. 17

There is no description of Lulu in the play. In the prologue of the film, the voice-over uses this exact description, as in the novel, to introduce Lulu to the viewer.

Dédé, the lazy pimp, has no interest in living a decent life. He is lucky that he has a prostitute who worships him, because he constantly tries to exploit her to pay for his expensive vices like drinking and gambling. He has chosen to avoid an honest living. Various crimes provide him with immense happiness. His pride and arrogance in being a successful con artist prove to be the reasons for his conviction and execution. He represents the irate anti-social tyrant whose disrespect for others ultimately causes his own downfall. In the novel Zola describes Dédé as “c'est un type de nouveau-voyou, jeune marlou correct d'après guerre.”18 For Dédé too, Renoir uses the same voice-over technique to describe him while the play refrains from an introduction for Dédé.

The personal traits of the characters reveal themselves in the ensuing explications of their relationships. In the film the origins of the Legrand-Adèle marriage are never revealed. The reasons for Adèle's deep contempt for Legrand and her infatuation with her
first husband Godard thus remain unexplained. The novel is quite explicit about this relationship. Legrand declares:

Ma femme, l’implacable veuve de l’héroïque adjutant mort au champ d’honneur
et dont chaque jour j’entends dénombrer les vertus par opposition avec mes
faiblesses, ma femme que chaque nuit j’expie l’erreur d’avoir épousée par crainte
de la solitude et par inaptitude à conquérir une vraie femme. ¹⁹

In the play Legrand laments his and Adèle’s union saying, “J’ai rencontré Adèle dans un
moment de cafard... j’ai l’impression de dormir à côté d’un frigidaire.” ²⁰ Adèle, it
seems, has an inheritance (and administers some rental property) which provides her with
a decent income. She controls the household finances and reminds Legrand at every step
that he is living on her property and that she provides for him. Why Legrand does not or
cannot provide for them remains a mystery. Her attitude towards Legrand and their
marriage reveals an intriguing gender politics. Her domination over Legrand stems from
her economic independence and the maintenance that she gives to him.

The departure from the traditional family structure in this relationship is clearly
evident. Under the traditional structure it would be very common to assume that the man
would be the bread-winner and thus the head of the household. The woman in turn, would
be in charge of the household affairs. Adèle, however, fulfills both the roles. This gives
Adèle the courage to scoff routinely at her husband. Legrand’s lack of ambition for
material success increases his wife’s wrath. Her complete lack of respect for Legrand and
her constant berating of him point to a role reversal of the spouses and a further departure
from a traditional marriage, in which the husband usually assumes the dominant position.

Adèle is always shown in the confines of her neatly organized apartment. She is
mostly occupied with the household chores and with controlling the household budget.
She has organized habits—early to bed and early to rise to look after her obligations. She
reads, especially before going to sleep. However, she does not like the idea of being married to a person desiring to be an artist. Life for her is too full of problems to indulge in intellectual pursuits. She is the symbol of order, discipline, and austerity. In effect, she rules with an iron fist. Adèle's repeated beratings drive Legrand away from her.

From Adèle's acerbic remarks to Legrand, it seems that she might have had some compassion for Legrand had he been like Godard—involved in military service or some kind of physical activity. Adèle declares her easiness with the knowledge that Godard was a womanizer. Regardless of her own physical attractiveness, she expresses her desire for a handsome man. This further indicates a reversal in the usual man-woman relational dynamics. Legrand never protests against Adèle's deliberate sneers. Before delving deeper into the reasons and circumstances of their marital problems, a probe into Legrand's life and personality is necessary.

In the first scene of this film, at the office's staff dinner, Legrand's colleagues make fun of him because he fears his wife and abides by her directives. They cannot drag him to a night of revelry for Legrand wants to return home. A close-up of his facial expression shows his reluctance to part company with his colleagues and at the same time shows his wish to abide by his wife's orders. Legrand is probably not averse to revelry, but does not want to upset his wife. He cannot, however, assert his choice and prefers to absorb all the ridicule that his colleagues (and also his wife) shower on him. According to the prologue to the film, Legrand distances himself from his friends, because he seems above their mundane existence. As the colleagues leave, the camera captures only Legrand tipping the maid for handing him the overcoat, while the others disperse without any public display of their appreciation for the maid or for his concern for ordinary people.
After rescuing Lulu, Legrand's attempt to return home quietly without waking up his wife proves futile. Stumbling over one of his canvases, he gets caught by his wife. It is important to note that his wife hates his painting. She accuses him of wasting his time on a lost cause, for she considers Legrand to be lacking in talent. (This lack of talent prevents him from getting his works sold despite wasting his wife's money.) Legrand, in order to protest his wife's admonition, sets about painting instead of going to bed. The novel makes no reference to this sequence.

In the film, disregarding Adèle's command to go to bed immediately, Legrand decides to paint. He begins to paint because he feels extremely pleased after meeting Lulu. Painting, for Legrand, is a means of escaping the pain and frustration of his marriage and an expression of the small pleasures of life. In the novel Legrand declares, "A mes moments perdus, je barbouille des toiles, pour m'évader de la cage où, dix heures par jour, j'aligne des chiffres." Legrand hangs his pictures all around Lulu's apartment, in order to create an environment of idealized conjugality. Faulkner writes, "Painting is but a palliative for his frustrations." The paintings in Lulu's apartment give that space a new meaning. According to Faulkner, painting for Legrand is "a metaphor for his idealised relationship with Lulu, [and] is a representation of bourgeois domesticity of circa 1931. This space is the myth, the ideal, the 'naturalized representation of his conjugal life.'" Legrand's paintings also allow Dédé to earn money for his upkeep and keep Legrand's hopes of having Lulu's company alive. As long as Dédé earns money from Legrand's paintings, he does not mind Lulu's services being offered to Legrand. It is of profound shock for Legrand to chance upon the name of Clara Wood, on his canvases in the window of Wallstein's gallery. Until then he does not notice the disappearance of the paintings from Lulu's apartment. Strangely enough, he seems satisfied when Lulu lies about how she sold the paintings through her cousin Ferdinand.
Legrand's leniency towards women in general and towards Lulu in particular is demonstrated in this scene.

Like Lulu's love, painting becomes for Legrand a commodity under these circumstances. It is his painting that gives Lulu, who is otherwise not groomed for life in high society, respect in the art world and therefore in the realm of intellectuals and social elites. Lulu pretends to like Legrand, only on the condition that he paints for her, for Dédé's upkeep. Painting is a sacrifice he is ready to endure for exacting some pleasure from Lulu and for some peace at Adèle's home. In short, painting is the currency for what Legrand calls happiness. Faulkner points out that painting cannot fulfill Legrand's need for a peaceful domestic environment. This explains he feels so happy in Lulu's company, for she offers to provide the missing element in his domestic tranquillity. Painting, according to Faulkner, becomes a trap for Legrand just as Lulu becomes one in the film.

Legrand is generally very respectful of women. In the film Legrand's colleagues attempt to drag him along for nocturnal pleasures, he declares that the crass pleasures are not beneath his tastes but "l'illusion d'un amant parfois se poursuit au-delà la vision d'une chambre crasseuse, mais il ya toujours le reveil." 24 Egged on further by his colleague about spending the night with women, he utilizes a poetic metaphor to refuse the invitation in the following words, "Je sais que parfois on peut retrouver dans la nature le bouquet fané et la fiole de parfum dans la forêt mais c'est absolumment necessaire qu'on songe quelquefois seul." 25 In other words, he indicates that he regards women as innocent creations of nature, and is not interested in relishing the physical aspect of this creation with a group of acquaintances in a public place like a brothel. For him, the enjoyment of a woman's company requires solitude wherein he can cherish that company as a dream. That is why he rents an apartment for Lulu to have some private enjoyment with her. Furthermore he decorates it to his heart's content to enjoy his dream. Both in the
play and in the novel, however, Legrand declares that he frequents brothels and indulges
in prostitutes.

To emphasize Legrand's carefully concealed love for women, Renoir uses a very
subtle imagery. A month after the beginning of Legrand's liaison with Lulu, the
employees make fun of him at the office. Legrand enters his cubicle and peeps through
the netted window and briefly sniggers as they joke about his being with a young girl.
The snigger on Legrand's face fades into a portrait of a woman. The camera pans to the
left of the portrait and a cheerful Lulu appears with her friend. Again, it is clear that while
Lulu jokes and criticizes her new found client, Legrand maintains respectful silence about
the entire affair. From Lulu's perspective, the entire affair has been a game from the
beginning. It may not be far-fetched, too, to infer that Lulu does not refrain from sharing
personal information in public, whereas Legrand avoids it.

On his return to the apartment, as alluded to earlier, Legrand is met with a barrage
of tirades from Adèle for being late. Adèle treats him like an infant. She interrogates him
on why he has returned late, and commands him to get the paintings which she considers
garbage out of the apartment, or she will give them away. She does not for a moment
suspect that he may have spent some time in rescuing a woman and in establishing an
affair with her. This scene is reminiscent of the Nana-Muffat scene in Nana. The more
Adèle vents her anger, the more the subdued Legrand defends himself. He declares that
he is not late and that he was at the office with colleagues. When Adèle yells that with
Godard she never had any worries, Legrand repeats her words quite sarcastically, almost
like a disobedient child trying to make fun of his guardian.

The composition in this scene is quite significant. While Adèle in her boisterous
manner holds the upper hand here, Renoir breaks with the methods of traditional shot
composition. Instead of providing a high angle for Adèle, (where the camera would have
looked up at Adèle), Renoir frames Legrand looking down on Adèle as he chuckles while repeating Adèle's remarks about Godard. Even though Adèle occupies much screen space for the most part and menacingly approaches Legrand as if to corner and beat him (which may make Adèle appear to be an abusive spouse), Legrand gets a more prominent position than Adèle in terms of the camera angle. This may be an indication that the apparently timid, henpecked Legrand actually retains his equal rights in the relationship. Legrand's apparent timidity is not a reflection of his real nature. This takes us back to the prologue where it is announced that Legrand is not what he looks like. He wears a mask. In general, he listens to his wife to maintain conjugal harmony. He does not actually fear Adèle.

There is another implication in this scene. Perhaps anticipating a possible relationship with Lulu, Legrand feels more confident of himself and does not feel intimidated by his wife. To assure himself of this self-confidence, Legrand starts to paint while humming a happy tune in the middle of the night.

Another example of a basic infant-parent drama is apparent one morning when Adèle returns with the rent collection. Seeing Legrand at the easel, Adèle once again scolds him for wasting her money on a bad habit. Legrand faintly retorts that it is their money. She angrily asks what Legrand did with a few missing paintings. Legrand lies by saying that he has sold them to the junk collector, even though in actuality he decorates Lulu's apartment with them. Like a guardian, she asks for the amount received from the sale. When Legrand offers her the hundred francs, she reminds him that he spends much more than that amount of her money every week. In this scene too, Adèle corners him. In the final analysis, the infant-parent drama may be stretched to imply that Legrand is unable to take care of himself. The night he leaves Adèle's
protective shelter, Legrand's downfall begins. Lulu rejects him. He is momentarily rendered homeless, commits a murder, and turns into a vagabond.

Adèle's aggression is another indicator that unlike traditional marital relations, outwardly the wife wields more power than the husband. Legrand, however, manages to change the balance of power with Adèle. A strange turn of events helps him. As noted earlier, Legrand accidentally meets Godard who tries to blackmail him. Legrand pretends to be intimitated by Godard and agrees to have the extortion money at home if Godard visits him on a particular night, when Legrand and Adèle would go to a theater performance. He actually tricks Godard into visiting Adèle's house when both Legrand and Adèle are present. He exposes Godard's dishonesty and makes a daring escape from his pitiful existence with Adèle. Regardless of the fact that Adèle occupies more screen space than Legrand when they are together, in the end the balance tilts towards Legrand's side—at least temporarily. This relationship can clearly be interpreted from another perspective. Adèle probably looks upon Legrand as one of her possessions too. This is yet another reminder of the break with the stereotypical conjugal situation. Thus she patronizes him, allows him into the house, but keeps him under watchful eyes and places him with the rest of the neatly arranged items in her house. Legrand's haphazardly arranged paintings have no place in her world.

Property definitely plays a major role in defining the actions of the players. Lulu enjoys the apartment that Legrand rents for her, while depriving him of any pleasure he might seek there with her. Dédé treats Lulu as his property or merchandise ready for trade. Adèle imposes strict controls over Legrand and reminds him at every step that he lives in her house and lives off her. However, it is too reductive to conclude that "it is a film that illustrates how the economic forces of society determine personal and social relations" only. For example, one can point to the fact that Lulu tells Legrand that he
spends too much money for her. Indirectly and unwillingly, Lulu alludes to Legrand's waste of his time and money on her. Lulu faces Dédé's wrath when she cannot get the money from her clients. This implies that Lulu does not conduct her business in the strictest sense. She even asks Dédé to give up his greed and go away somewhere else so that they can have a quiet life. Lulu wants to earn a dignified living, but she is forced to do otherwise. Legrand decorates Lulu's apartment with his paintings to create the atmosphere for his dreams. Legrand does not consciously exchange his paintings to curry favor with Lulu. Actually, Lulu trades them in without even asking permission from him. For Legrand painting serves several purposes: first, it provides him with a diversion from his dreaded marriage and second, it allows him to create a dream atmosphere in Lulu's apartment. For Lulu the painting provides her with both supplementary revenue and fame as an artist.

Adèle's constant expression of hate drives Legrand to look for some source of happiness and diversion outside his marriage. Lulu provides that opportunity. It must be said that Adèle fails to see the romantic in him and her constant berating throttles his expressions of love over time. He is not withdrawn from the world as he himself declares in the beginning. Rather, he reveals himself only in specific circumstances. Legrand can be passionate in love and can express his sexual urge with ardor, but both Adèle and Lulu discourage and obstruct him from following through with his passion. For example, one night after his accidental meeting with Godard, Legrand flirts with Adèle. Adèle very strongly discourages Legrand from advancing any further and retires to bed.

Before Legrand rushes to Lulu's aid, the camera, in a medium shot, reveals Dédé walking with Lulu. Dédé's contempt for Lulu is very genuine. From Dédé's perspective, his relationship to Lulu is merely that of a pimp to a prostitute. Legrand does not know that Dédé beats Lulu because she did not get the money for Dédé. He prevents the
attacker, Dédé, from causing serious physical injuries to the woman, Lulu. In this critical situation, Legrand risks helping a woman whom he does not even know.

This gesture emphasizes his genuine compassion for women. He clearly takes the risk without even knowing Dédé's identity and nature. He could well have put himself in danger, but he is courageous in the face of a crisis and wants to do the right thing. This act again supports his description in the prologue that he is not what he seems. Lulu, apparently helpless, accepts his offer for a cab ride a little later. They drag an inebriated Dédé into the cab and head for her home. Then she refuses Legrand's offer to walk her home, but hurriedly embraces him and leaves. The hurried embrace, the possibility of exchanging letters with Lulu, and the prospect of meeting her in future all enchant Legrand.

Sesonske clarifies this ambiguity in the Legrand-Lulu affair. Lulu and Legrand meet by accident; and from that instant, confusion and misunderstanding continually cloud their interaction. Sesonske believes that Legrand sees Lulu as a maiden in distress, and Lulu thinks Legrand to be another of those middle-aged men who offer a helping hand only for sexual gratification. At the first meeting, the close-up of Lulu is used to elucidate her charm. Lulu does not appreciate Legrand's help and sees it rather as an intrusion. Her first reaction to his question, "Vous-êtes blessée?" is a feeling of disgust: "Vous l'avez fait mal." She sets the tone of their interaction right there.

The lighting and framing accentuate the first encounter very dramatically. Legrand is in half darkness, and Lulu's face is brightly lit. Light, or lack of it, separate the two. Lulu's face is then moved into half shade, half light. The camera moves to the lighted stair behind Lulu. A close-up on Lulu and Dédé's hats follow. Lulu looks after Dédé who is in half darkness, she accuses Legrand of having hurt Dédé.
The contrast between light and darkness on the three characters at important junctures foregrounds the contrasting characteristics of the three personalities. The light on Lulu's face stresses her attractiveness. Legrand's lack of attractiveness is hid in the darkness. The light and darkness can be interpreted as metaphors of the personalities and life styles of Legrand and Lulu. Lulu will knowingly dupe Legrand with her charm and thus the darkness is an indication of her dark side. The darkness may be seen as a symbol of Legrand's lack of knowledge about Lulu.

The focus on Dédé's and Lulu's hats foreshadows the fact that both wear different hats to con people. Legrand is their innocent victim. Again, the interrupting light and darkness may be construed as similar to the frequent and rapid interruptions during the first encounter between Nana and Muffat in Nana. Even though Lulu looks upon Legrand as an intruder in her life, she does not hesitate to seize his offer to take her and Dédé home and does not feel embarrassed to ask for money for taxi. Legrand's naïveté and his willingness to overlook the wiles of a charming woman are revealed here. He does not, for a moment, suspect the nature of two individuals who could resort to publicly displaying physical assault; nor does he question the background of a woman who praises the inebriated male companion who beats her and then seeks the taxi fare to take him home.

After dropping Dédé off at the hotel, Legrand and Lulu walk back towards her apartment as the camera dollies back, keeping Lulu in focus as she looks at the camera while she talks to Legrand. Her shadow falls on the wall in between the lines of the bricks and Legrand. They approach the stairs to go down towards her apartment. There they pause for a moment. Legrand caresses Lulu's hand; and she then gives him a quick hug, dances down the stairs, and disappears into the dark as Legrand looks on. Her disappearance into the dark cover of night is another hint of the mystery and obscurity.
that surround her. As Legrand walks back, the waiting taxi calls him for the fare. This is, beyond question, a premonition that Legrand will assume a financial responsibility for Lulu.

Even though Lulu expresses her displeasure at Legrand's handling of Dédé during the first encounter, Legrand is bewitched by her beauty. Lulu too begins her game with Legrand. Sesonske suggests that Lulu is reminiscent of the Nana character—she is "the destructive enchantress."28 She ignores the inner-self and lovable nature of Legrand and causes him to break down completely. However, she alone cannot be blamed for Legrand's undoing. Legrand is fully responsible for his troubles. Legrand ignores his opportunities to avoid the risks in his association with Lulu.

After the rescue that night, Legrand tells Lulu to contact him at his office address. Absorbed as he may be in his own world, he once again validates the description in the prologue that he is not as imbecilic as people think him to be. Little does he realize that he is involved in a dangerous game. He does not act in time to protect himself from any grave consequence. It is ironic that a man who can plan an opportune escape from his troubled marriage by trapping his wife's former husband and who can even plan a skillful, brutal murder, is the same man who believes in a woman he accidentally meets under questionable circumstances.

From a moralistic perspective, it can be assumed that Lulu is not at fault for being a destructive enchantress. Legrand's naiveté about Lulu, his inability to communicate well with (his) women, and his own willingness to get involved in Lulu's game are the real sources of his problems. In terms of moral values, he should have refrained from stealing at home and at the office to provide for Lulu, especially when Lulu shows practically no interest in him and often refused him sexual favors. The desire to please Lulu does not justify his pilfery at the office and at his home. Legrand's efforts (and crimes) to secure
the love of a woman who does not even want him, can at best be pitied. He can be viewed as morally weak. If he needs money to please even his mistress, he can very well try to sell his paintings or look for other sources of additional revenue.

Legrand is shackled in his social milieu and between women. However, Legrand is fettered by his own choice. Faulkner points to the fact that Legrand is shown literally "boxed" in the cage at his office. (Interestingly, the first time that Renoir shows Legrand literally boxed in his small cubicle is a month after his meeting with Lulu, when his colleagues make fun of Legrand for being with a young girl because his wife beats him.) This framing indicates Legrand's imprisonment. At home Adèle corners him, at work colleagues make a mockery of his lack of enthusiasm for socializing and in this liaison, Lulu and Dédé figure ways to fleece him. Legrand is the prototype of a man who falls in love with the woman he rescues, who later despises him for his ugliness.

The reference to the space occupied by Adèle and Legrand necessitates a description of the spaces occupied by Lulu and Legrand. With Legrand, Lulu is almost always framed outdoors implying their relationship is only functional on the exterior. The exchanges between them are usually interrupted by external agents. Anytime Legrand expresses his passion for Lulu, either the sound of water flowing through rainwater pipes underlines their conversation, or a church bell sounds indicating late night.

The dark comedy of this relationship is the fact that even though Legrand rents the apartment for Lulu and pays for its maintenance, Lulu rarely lets him come in. Legrand never enters the apartment while she is not present nor does he force his way into it in her presence, indicating that he respects Lulu's privacy. While Legrand respects Lulu's privacy, Lulu shows scant respect to her benefactor by depriving him of the use of his property. If one looks at this as a film based on property and possession, it would seem
that this amounts to an usurpation of Legrand's property by Lulu and her accomplice, Dédé.

From the gender perspective, there is no question that, as in his marriage, Legrand yields ground to his female partner. The only time Legrand arrives without Lulu's knowledge is on the night of his escape from Adèle's house. That night proves to be an exception for by then Legrand thinks he has escaped to freedom and to the opportunity to fulfill his dreams with Lulu. That night, too, their encounter is interrupted (as noted earlier) by Dédé's presence and by Legrand's rude awakening to Lulu's duplicity. Unable at first to bear the thunderous shock of seeing Lulu's lover, Legrand makes a sad but quick exit in the rain. Metaphorically, the exit in the rain calms the brewing storm in their relationship. On his return, Legrand asks Lulu to elope with him. Lulu refuses and showers further insults on him. Legrand loses his composure and repeatedly stabs Lulu until she dies.

Renoir frames Lulu's murder with as much suspense as is seen in the novel and the play. When Legrand picks up the letter opener and springs upon Lulu to stab her, Renoir cuts first to a black kitten on the window sill and then to the chorus in the street. Then the camera comes back into the interior of the room to reveal Legrand grieving over Lulu and exiting shortly thereafter. By contrast, there is no direct description of Lulu's murder in either the novel or the play. De la Fouchardière describes the events leading to the murder in the following way:

Un étrange espoir me pénètre... Et peut-être Lucienne, comme cette misérable pierreuse qui, à côté de moi, gémit sous les coups, est-elle l'esclave résignée d'une terreur... Je me jette sur le lit sale et puant...

(Now at the office) Un personnage comique, moi?... S'il savaient!
Mais soudain, Bernard pousse un cri:

93
Clara Wood a été assassinée!

Je ne bouge pas...

[Later after the trial, Legrand laments:]

Je l’ai assassiné et, je ne sais pas comment la chose a pu se faire, bien que dix fois chaque nuit, au cours d’un rêve affreux, je répète le geste que j’ai fait lorsque je l’ai frappée... Ce que j’ai fait alors, j’en ai du remords plus que de mon crime.

Sans dire un mot, de mon poing fermé, je frappai Lucienne au visage. Elle gémit.

Je l’injuriais. 29

In the play too, Mouézy-Éon proceeds from the Legrand’s tricking Godard back to Adèle to Legrand’s appearance at the court; where during interrogation, Legrand places the blame for Lulu’s murder squarely on Dédé. Later in Scene Four of Act III, Mouézy-Éon dramatizes Legrand’s return to Lulu’s apartment and the rest of the tragic end.

Unlike in the novel or in the play, in the film, Legrand’s remorse for Lulu’s murder is never prolonged. Only at the time of his exit from Lulu’s apartment after the murder, does Legrand release a brief expression of grief and disappear. While the ends in the novel and the play seem like flashbacks, Renoir combines the flashback with the actual event of the murder and reveals the crime much before the film concludes.

In the film, Lulu allows Legrand to spend an entire night with her only once just before her murder. Earlier, on that particular night, Dédé insults her and leaves. The night spent at Lulu's increases Legrand's infatuation. He begins to believe that he can start his life anew with her. Legrand's indoor encounters with her are all grand disappointments for him. Of the three times that Legrand is allowed in her apartment, the first time he finds that she has sold off his paintings, the second time he finds Dédé in her bed; finally, the third time, Lulu scoffs at him and his ugliness which leads to her murder.
The Dédé-Lulu relationship is a reversal of the Legrand-Lulu alliance. She does not define her relationship with Dédé on financial terms, but Dédé does. She is madly in love with Dédé, even though Dédé does not reciprocate. Lulu’s continued association with Dédé defies logic. Lulu is at liberty to leave Dédé for she gains nothing in that relationship. Dédé tortures her and wastes her hard-earned money on gambling and other pursuits. He makes it clear to her that he possesses her body, which he uses to trap clients, for his own pleasures. It is an irony that Legrand, Adèle, and Lulu, all three remain attached to people with whom their relationships do not work at all. Judging from Legrand’s, Lulu's and Adèle’s bad experiences with their so-called lovers, this film is about men, and women who love men, and also about women who despise them.

Other than for business reasons, Dédé despises Lulu's company. He neither enjoys conversation with Lulu, nor does he seem interested in sex with her. Legrand, on the other hand, has almost a fatal obsession for Lulu. Otherwise, she must be in desperate need of a man to have settled with someone like Dédé, who for all her sacrifices for him treats her with utmost disrespect. She feels proud to abide blindly by Dédé's commands to earn money. She indulges in self-elation at Dédé's insults and abuses. Like Legrand, she chases an impossible dream— to have a happily married life. There is no doubt that Lulu submits to Dédé’s authority out of fear mixed with her love.

With Dédé, Lulu is seen both outside and inside. Whether in the apartment or outside, Dédé is most often seen physically battering her to express his displeasure despite her efforts to please him. It is interesting that neither Lulu nor Dédé is ever seen at each other's residence; they meet either at Legrand's apartment or outdoors. Given their goals in life to use other people for a living, their existence in the public eye is not surprising. Renoir’s framing of Lulu and Dédé is very interesting. Renoir does not frame either Dédé or Lulu in a high or low angle, i.e., in terms of framing neither of them gets
any privilege. Most of the exchanges between the two take place in a "head to head" shot-counter shot. Dédé does not occupy more screen space than Lulu, but in most of the encounters, Dédé dominates the proceedings through his actions. Dédé's disdain towards Lulu remains unchanged regardless of the screen space they occupy.

In order to understand more fully the role of women in this film, a critical examination of the Adèle-Godard relationship is required. In the film the Adèle-Godard relationship remains shrouded in mystery. The reasons for Godard's marriage to Adèle and his desertion are as unclear as Legrand's decision to marry Adèle. It may be conjectured that Legrand rescued Adèle from her despair, just as he volunteered to help Lulu. In the novel Godard is quite open about his reason for marrying Adèle. Godard says, "...j'avais épousé Adèle parce qu'elle avait un peu d'argent..."\(^30\) In the play also Godard fairly unabashedly declares that he changed his name during the war with a fallen comrade to escape his wife.

Alexis: Qui m'a sauvé d'Adèle... En septembre 1914, j'ai été porté mort au champ d'honneur... J'étais prisonnier en Allemagne sous le nom d'un camarade tué dont j'avais ramassé le livret. J'avais mis le mien à la place... Pour échapper à ma femme...\(^31\)

There is a cruel irony in the various relationships among the several different characters. The fact that Lulu insults Legrand may imply that she wants to seek vicarious pleasure by torturing a seemingly docile person who lives with all her abuses. Since she cannot get even with Dédé, Lulu sees in Legrand the ideal recipient of her anger. Likewise, Adèle seeks revenge on Godard by subjecting Legrand to humiliation.

The body and its attractiveness are of significant importance in this film. For Renoir, men and women have equal rights in deciding their sexual preferences. Both Adèle and Lulu deny Legrand sexual favors because of his ugliness. Furthermore, Lulu
ridicules Legrand for his ugliness without hesitation. Adèle openly compares Godard to Legrand and declares Godard to be a really handsome man. Strangely enough Legrand does not comment on Adèle's loss of physical appeal. Lulu's (beautiful) body provides her with the money for Dédé's vices. It is only through the commercial use of her body that Lulu maintains contact with the society. As is usual in a traditional patriarchal society, Dédé despises the body, Lulu's body, that he trades for personal profit.

Legrand is attached to Lulu because of her plastic value. It has to be kept in mind that he is a painter and has fully developed romantic emotions. These unfold and bloom when he sees the young, neatly dressed Lulu, with her matinee idol looks. Her coy expressions and her pretended affection for him are more attractions for him. He contrasts these with those of Adèle, whose age shows, and who projects the image of a rough and tough petite bourgeoise—a middle-class woman, who in the face of the life's problems, has lost the joy of living.

However, this beauty is very destructive. Clearly, underlining Lulu's coy sensuousness, is her willful or reluctant (when forced by Dédé) tendency to exploit and even to unknowingly harm the men in her control. However, she does act of her own volition. The text reveals that physical ugliness buys its existence. Legrand pays heavily to get Lulu's company, just as Adèle pays for Legrand's upkeep and other habits in order retain her married status.

Lulu, as Sesonke points out, seeks a justification for her profession. She says that she tries to help Dédé who does not have money and cannot afford to give her the nice things in life. "Described as 'helping him', her prostitution becomes a bourgeois virtue and need not disturb Lulu's image of herself as a loving wife (for Dédé)." She seems to wear different masks and to mold herself into different characters according to Dédé's beck and call. When Dédé creates the character of Clara Wood, she slips into her artist's
personality. In Wallstein's gallery, Lulu's first appearance conveys a picture more of a seductress than an artist. Lulu's body language seems more agreeable to her true professional attitude. She seems to be more interested in enticing Wallstein and Wallstein's client to her physical appeal rather than to her "artistic" work.

The shots of Lulu and Wallstein in the studio are of interest. She is almost always framed in between two men, implying perhaps her ability to create these illusory love triangles. While she is listening to the piano, she is flanked by the pianist and another client. She socializes with both with an easy aplomb. Next, at Dédé's behest, she plants herself on Wallstein's lap while the art critic remains close to her. When the art critic withdraws, Lulu and Wallstein are joined by the client who wants his portrait made by Clara Wood. Lulu very easily persuades him to go to bed with her and earns a huge check for her "artistry." At the studio several times, she is framed against a wall on which there are two portraits of two very conservatively dressed women. Those two pictures provide an interesting contrast to Lulu's flirtations.

Renoir draws the viewer's attention to Lulu's abuse by her lover. Her death at the hands of her patron Legrand is actually a martyrdom for the sake of Dédé's love. It is not too far-fetched to imply that the love song to which Renoir deliberately cuts, at the time of her murder, provides a tribute to her love. Legrand's continued acceptance of her rejection should free Lulu of any guilt. Contrary to the description in the prologue that she lies all the time, Lulu confesses to Legrand that she never had any love or attraction for him. All she cares about is when Legrand will complete the paintings. The admission of this blatant truth will cause her own destruction. At Dédé's trial for suspected murder, the greed of the businessmen who inquire about Lulu's paintings from her mother evokes further sympathy for her. This, as noted earlier, is Renoir's attempt to rehabilitate Lulu
into society. Lulu was forced into a profession she wanted to escape from but could not, except through death.

Lulu is not the embodiment of evil. She tried to trade with the men who traded her. Like the mirror image of Nana, once exploited by men, she tries to get even with them. However, she makes one exception. Blinded by her love for her pimp, she sacrifices her life for him. She succeeds in easily deceiving Legrand and in using the products of his talent to keep her hopes alive of a happy and prosperous future with Dédé.

In much the same way that Nana used Muffat to get to Vandeuvres, Lulu uses Legrand to get to Wallstein in order to get to Dédé. The difference between Nana and Lulu is that while Lulu commits herself to Dédé, Nana is smarter in that she does not make any commitments in particular to anyone.

Given this tragic end to Lulu's life, it is not clear if Renoir is debating how much liberty a woman should have in her actions. He is probably uncertain about the results of the independent actions of a woman. Both Lulu and Adèle do dominate him, but this domineering does not do any good either to Legrand or to the women. Unable to bear Adèle's endless criticisms, Legrand leaves her and exposes her absconding ex-husband's true nature. Then, rejected by Lulu, he is driven to a desperate act,— a crime, to hide his identity, and to avenge his loss. However, since Renoir leaves the implications open to the viewer's interpretations, it can be argued that while on the one hand the two women may have caused the ruin of one man, on the other, they have faced hardships from the men of their dreams. Thus, the complicated balance of power "evens out" the outcome of these relationships.

The behavior of women towards Legrand is very intriguing. Adèle, who does not realize that Godard disappears only to escape her, and Lulu, who refuses to give up Dédé despite his lack of respect for her, both mistreat Legrand. In a sense, Legrand becomes
the scapegoat of their wrath against the unfaithful lover (Dédé) and the missing husband (Godard). It is ironical that while Lulu wants to see herself in the role of Dédé's wife, he showers utter contempt on her. By contrast, Adèle, who is never seen to be mistreated by Legrand, is disgusted with his company.

Throughout the film, the men and women who are involved in the different relationships try to control each other. In this film as in Nana, love-hate triangles are set up between the protagonists. This is evident among the triangles of Lulu-Dédé-Legrand, and Legrand-Adèle-Godard. Adèle nearly succeeds in converting Legrand into a henpecked spouse, until the reappearance of Godard. Lulu attempts to dominate Legrand until Legrand leaves home and loses his social position on account of his theft at his office. Dédé's control over Lulu ends with her death. It is also implied that Adèle maintains a strict vigil over Legrand because she failed to do so with Godard. Lulu dominates Legrand for she wants to compensate her lack of influence over Dédé. The difference in Lulu's and Adèle's domination over Legrand is that Lulu provides Legrand with the dream of liberty and the urge to enjoy life, while Adèle thwarts any such idea. Thus, Legrand while escaping from Adèle's apartment, yells "Liberté, Lulu." At that juncture, Liberty and Lulu seem synonymous to Legrand.

While providing Legrand with a breath of fresh air and an escape from his turbulent marriage, Lulu promotes her own selfish agenda. She uses Legrand to succeed in her love affair with Dédé. Lulu drives Legrand to steal from the post-office in La Chienne and even appears to be the cause of her own murder. In the prologue, Renoir declares that this film does not fulfill the traditional role of proving that vice is punished and that men and women ought to abide by moral values and so on—rather, it is a film of ordinary people "comme moi, comme vous." Renoir tries to make this film as believable for common people as possible. This refers to the earlier point that Lulu, Dédé, and
Legrand are all characters that viewers can easily identify with. Their aspirations and failures are very close to those of the ordinary viewers who watch this film. Many of the intrigues in their lives are similar to those that Legrand, Lulu, and Dédé experience.

Sesonske writes that "Seen now, this prologue appears to be a Renoir manifesto renouncing both the character types and the stories with which film-makers, including Renoir, had heretofore filled the screen--puppets, good and evil, manipulated to demonstrate the dubious clichés of conventional morality." This implies that Renoir does not have any particular agenda or objective to prove in this film. For him, this film is more than a film about property, morality and stereotypes. "Rather than merely designating character types, these introductions [in the prologue] make complex claims which create questions we can resolve only by perceiving the characters ourselves." Upon critical examination it is clear that in this film property, the masks that people wear, and even candid feelings are all important factors and are all inter-related.

In this context it is not clear why Legrand wears the mask of an "imbecile" with pinched mouth, down-turned eyes half-hidden steel-rimmed spectacles, even though it is generally true that both men and women wear the mask to lose their assigned social identities. One can understand that Lulu is forced to wear the mask in order to earn a living, to build a dream of a happy life and even to be recognized by her future partner. Legrand could have left Adèle without endangering his life, and reputation. Lulu could have left Dédé for a more compassionate lover. It appears that men and women under the cover of their masks lose sight of propriety. Their vision becomes blurred. While women end up sacrificing their own good chasing impossible dreams, men contribute to their miseries.

The importance of "the look" can be more fully understood in the context of each character's perception about others. As explained earlier, one can establish a chain of
reactions based on what each character perceives the other to be. While Godard looks at Adèle as a source of finance, through blackmail, Dédé considers it his unquestionable right to exploit Lulu. Lulu, in turn, finds it quite normal to use Legrand as a source of her material and spiritual security. Only Legrand seems to be out of touch with this vicious circle. He fails to get any credit for his marriage to Adèle and or his sacrifices for Lulu.

The selection of Janie Marèze as Lulu injects the spirit of innocence in Lulu's character. Her feminine grace and her tragic end, are in a way, attributes reminiscent of those of Nana. In Renoir's eyes, lack of attraction has a special significance. Renoir will, in all the works in this research, suggest the viewer to look beyond the superficial attributes of beauty. Beauty, according to him, is not skin deep and is not common among ordinary men and women. Thus, he uses Legrand as representative of the common middle-aged married man and Adèle to be the housewife of the same age. The wrinkles on both their faces indicate their weariness due to the pressures of life. Since Renoir declares that this a film about common men and women, it may be assumed, that the images of Legrand and Adèle are reminders to ordinary men and women to be more self-conscious and to have less illusion about their projected selves.

In the final analysis, it is clear that Renoir reminds viewers that the power dynamics between men and women may or may not be balanced. Circumstances which arise from complicated economic and social interaction among the characters involved determine finally who assumes control. Thus both Lulu and Adèle can dominate Legrand and in turn be dominated by Godard and Dédé. Legrand's apparent seizure of control by deceiving Adèle, and murdering Lulu is balanced by his ruin. Likewise, the strange punition of the offending characters acts as redemption for the victims. Lulu's murder at Legrand's hands does not balance her sacrifice for Dédé. As is apparent however, in both Nana and La Chienne, women often catalyze the flow of events.
1 Sesonske 78.


3 Faulkner 17.


5 Leprohon 55.

6 Leprohon 55.


9 Faulkner 18.


11 de La Fouchardiére 13, 19.

12 Mouézy-Éon 6.

13 de La Fouchardiére 17.

14 Mouézy-Éon 6.

15 Faulkner 17.

16 de La Fouchardiére 18.

17 de La Fouchardiére 11.
18 de La Fouchardi ère 11.
19 de La Fouchardi ère 17.
20 Mouézy-Éon 6.
21 de La Fouchardi ère 29.
22 Faulkner, 20.
23 Faulkner, 20.
25 Renoir. La Chienne.
26 Faulkner 17.
27 Sesonke 84.
28 Sesonke 82.
29 de La Fouchardi ère 203, 204, 230, 303.
30 de La Fouchardi ère 143.
31 Mouézy-Éon 30.
32 Sesonke 84.
33 Sesonke 79.
34 Sesonske 79.
35 Sesonske 79.
CHAPTER 4

Madame Bovary: the melancholic soul

"Madame Bovary is another disputed work in Renoir's career, critical opinion ranging from total rejection to near exaltation."¹ Making a film from such an epic work is clearly a difficult task. Renoir is the first director who attempted a film version of this novel. Since then there have been three other attempts by Gerhard Lamprecht (1937), by Lucent Minnelli (1949) and most recently by Claude Chabrol (1991). The controversy over what Madame Bovary's film image should be still remains. Blakely asserts that, "the prospect of making a movie raises all the horrors that lovers of literature usually associate with the dubious art of literary adaptation for the screen."² Leprohon draws our attention to the fact that some critics like Georges Champeaux and Lucien Wahl have considered Renoir's Madame Bovary to be a complete failure in terms of its portrayal of Emma Bovary. On the other hand Leprohon also reminds us that Eric Rohmer (of Le Genou de Claire fame), Jacques Siclier, and Armand Cauliez all hailed Renoir's Madame Bovary as
a film to remember. In short, Renoir evoked strong passions among the leading film critics of his time. That both Flaubert's and Renoir's Emma evokes a plethora of interpretations is beyond debate. A proper evaluation of this enigmatic woman eludes even literary critics. It is no surprise therefore that film critics cannot agree on an acceptable image of this wandering soul. This chapter will delineate Emma's characteristics as found in Renoir's film. At the outset it should be made clear that Renoir's Emma, while capturing the essence of Flaubert's most famous heroine, is completely independent of the novel. This examination therefore will focus on the woman that Renoir's Emma presents on screen.

The role of the woman is very critical in this film. Few films invite as intense an analysis as do the relationships that Emma gets involved in with the three male protagonists in the film. Renoir depicts the most important relationships that shape Emma's destiny: Emma's relationship with Charles, with Rodolphe; Léon and with her daughter. Also important in this film are Charles' relationships with his first wife and his mother. In each marriage, Charles' attempt to balance his obedience to his mother with his support for his wife influences both of their attitudes toward him. His compromising attitude and lack of assertion in favor of either his mother or his wives create a tension in his conjugal life. Emma's lack of respect (and love) for Charles dictates her surrender to the charms of her lovers. These love-hate dynamics bring hope at first, despair later. Eventually they ruin Emma's life.
This chapter's unpacking of these tangled relationships finds no research value in joining the debate about the verisimilitude of the novel's heroine to that of the one on screen. Rather, it shares a journey with Renoir's Madame Bovary in an attempt to unravel the passions of her restless heart. This journey, however, clearly involves some reinterpretation of both the Flaubert and the Renoir images of Madame Bovary. Several critics have reproached Renoir's unusual treatment of this literary masterpiece.

Bazin never analyzed this film in detail. His passing references to this film have been mentioned by other critics. For example, Durgnat records Bazin's comments about Valentine Tessier. Durgnat himself believes that "Madame Bovary depends on a certain dreamy negative, faithful to that lassitude Flaubert attributes to bourgeois culture." Durognat further states that:

If Renoir's half-film [on account of the cuts and the elliptical style of story telling] dissatisfies, it is in a way which tantalizes to repeated viewings. It becomes complement to the novel, not, a rendition of it. One almost sees Emma elegiacally, as an intelligent, sensible farmer might have seen the meanings which she does not, might have understood her inadaptability and still loved her.5

Sesonske notes that "Rather than making a theatrical film, Renoir was seeking a cinematic equivalent of Flaubert's style." Sesonske justifies Renoir's innovative style in this manner: "this is Madame Bovary; perhaps it is an interesting idea to take a story whose central character is the most hopelessly romantic individual in French literature and frame it in a coldly classical style."7
Leprohon reports Georges Champeaux’s and other like minded critics’ adverse comments:

[the film contains a number of] scattered images, that don’t even have the merit of being pleasing or suggestive. . . The film no more succeeds as an evocation of atmosphere than it does as a psychological study. Renoir reveals neither Mme. Bovary’s passion nor ennui of provincial life. He tells the dull story of a woman who kills herself because she doesn’t have 8,000 francs.⁸

For most critics several significant changes from the novel appear to be problematic. Sesonske explains some of these changes:

Renoir has eliminated the period of Charles Bovary’s residence in Tostes and changed the order of some events. . . Renoir invented some scenes where Flaubert omitted all detail, such as the chance meeting at which the Marquis invites the Bovarys to Vaubyessard. A few details have been added, a few more altered. Occasionally, Renoir has put several incidents from the novel into a single scene.⁹

Another notable change is that while in the novel Léon had made Emma’s acquaintance and had even gotten intimate with her, he appears in the film only once momentarily before the opera in Rouen. Sesonske is quick to defend Renoir’s choices because he seems to agree with Blakely’s opinion that: "The cinematic adaptation of any novel requires a certain amount of condensation and cutting."¹⁰ Sesonske believes that Renoir freed himself from any single notion of how films should be made and did not want merely to replicate the novel on screen, but rather to present the central theme.
Besides, the changes adopted by Renoir does not disturb the core of the story. To quote Sesonske:

..., but even the version of this film includes almost all of the major incidents of the novel: Emma's courtship (with Charles); the ball at Vaubyessard; the agricultural fair that inaugurates Emma's adulterous interlude with Rodolphe Bologna... while Charles fails in his operation on Hippolyte's clubfoot; the opera at Rouen and Emma's subsequent affair with Léon; her gradual entanglement with Lheureux; and its outcome in her suicide.*

It must be noted here that one cannot be too sure of what the finished version that Renoir chose looks like, because "over one-third of the original film has been lost." Sesonske further refers to an interview with Renoir in which the director declared:

To tell you the truth, there too the film has been destroyed in the cutting. and this was not the producers, who fought as much as they could; but the distributors didn't care to release a film that ran more than three hours... Unhappily I am sure that the integral copy has disappeared in the cutting. When they made cuts in the copy, then in the negative, the cuttings were all thrown out and burned.13

This situation dictates that many a judgment on this film will always remain purely conjectural and therefore often unfair to the director. If the cuts are ever discovered, a reinterpretation will be made. Even if it is believed that the mutilated version available to viewers is the Renoir approved version, Sesonske defends Renoir's choices in his remark, "The connecting scenes have disappeared, but we hardly miss them."14
Flaubert's dislike for painted images liberates the reader from imagining any particular image for his women and allows one to better relate and compare (if necessary) the descriptions in the text with the screen images. At the time Flaubert was creating his literary masterpieces, photography was gaining popularity as one of the newest means of artistic expression though the film camera had not yet been invented. Literary critics and filmmakers almost unanimously agree that Flaubert’s ornate descriptions seem to have a moving quality in them which inspire film adaptations. Flaubert, however, was fiercely opposed to any other form of representation of his literary characters. Blakely cites numerous examples from Flaubert’s letters which assail the use of illustrations. For example, writes Blakely, "In writing to another author who sent him a book of hers to read, Flaubert says he finds it “charmant... Mais je suis hindigné contre vos illustrations.” Flaubert believed that any attempt to represent his characters would destroy their pristine existence in his as well as the readers’ minds. He declared that, "Jamais, moi vivant, on ne m'illustrera, parce que la plus belle description littéraire est dévorée par le piètre dessin." In the absence of any Flaubert-approved image of Madame Bovary, Renoir acquired more freedom to create his own Madame Bovary. In fact, Flaubert’s aversion to painted images opens up Emma’s image to a multiplicity of interpretations and can help one understand Renoir’s insistence on the differences. Blakely draws our attention to the fact that while discussing Emma, Flaubert declared "une femme écrite fait rêver à mille femmes."
Even though Madame Bovary is well known among readers around the world, a brief recapitulation of the facts will help simplify the explanations. As noted earlier, the film differs from the novel at certain places. In order to understand certain cinematic situations better, excerpts from the novel will be used to provide the missing links. The novel describes in great details the following events: Charles' childhood; his schooling; his struggle through his medical education; the commencement of his medical practice at Tostes; his first marriage at his mother's behest; Emma's arrival in Charles' life; their marriage; the beginning of Emma's frustration with her marriage; their relocation to Yonville; Emma's pregnancy; Emma's confusion about her daughter's care; her involvement with Léon, Rodolphe and then Léon again; her rejection by both, her enormous debts; and her eventual tragic suicide. The first scene of the film begins with Charles' troubled marriage, because of his first wife's suspicions of his association with Emma. This film eliminates Charles' childhood, his father's callous laziness, his mother's austere lifestyle and her painstaking sacrifices to provide Charles a comfortable life.

The Charles-Emma relationship sets the tone of the film. Renoir centers the film around Emma and thus he does not lose time in establishing Emma's position early in the film. The first scene following the credits is situated at the Rouault house. Charles and Emma converse while they stand on either side of the curtain and the doorway at Emma's house. The camera pans around in the farm and then as a cow moos, cuts to a shot of the back of Charles's head. Exaltation is apparent in Emma's voice as she draws Charles' attention to the picture frames on her wall. A curtain separates the two, and slowly, the camera pans and tilts to move from the back of Charles' head to reveal Emma. The
movement of the camera in this sequence is extremely suggestive as are many other
scenes throughout this film. As the camera moves in towards Emma, she and Charles
approach each other. However, as the camera motion stops to give a medium close-up of
the two, the couple stops as well. Charles and Emma remain on either side of the curtain.
Emma stares at Charles with romantic animation. In order to gauge his appreciation for
arts and his love for intellectual pursuits in life, Emma starts asking Charles questions
about the paintings, about natural splendors, the gallantry of men, and so on. To each of
her exuberant questions, Charles replies with placid affirmation. Then Emma talks about
chivalrous men and suddenly asks Charles if he visits his patients on horseback. Charles
declares that it is quite convenient to cover the landscape on a horse. Charles' utilitarian
answer smothers the (de)light of her eyes momentarily. She regains herself immediately
to comment that riding horses is more elegant than comfortable.

The curtain in this sequence foreshadows an invisible barrier between the two. In
the film, shortly after her marriage Emma completely loses her infatuation for the
apparently "great physician" she had seen by the door the first time. Her "wall of misery"
will keep Charles out of her realm. Charles, unaware of this, remains obsessed with
Emma's beauty. He endures her whims. He assumes that his devotion will make Emma
appreciate him. For Emma, the passage of time in the marriage and the appearance of
various other men in her life dissipate her previously held exotic images of Charles. The
dialogue in this sequence too clearly anticipates the communication gap between Charles
and Emma, which widens progressively after their marriage. While Emma talks about
elegance, natural splendor, and the romantic side of life, Charles replies in ways that
reflect his basically utilitarian view of existence. For Charles, cohabitation only increases his infatuation for Emma and creates a spiritual dependence on her. For example, when Charles' goes to operate on Hippolyte, he asks for Emma's encouragement. Even when the operation proves a failure, Charles returns to Emma, seeking her moral support.

Concerned with her own infatuation with Rodolphe, Emma, however, dismisses Charles. The fact that Renoir decides to open the storyline with this interaction between Emma and Charles indicates that a relationship between the two is imminent and extremely important in this film. Emma is clearly the center of all attention in the film from the beginning.

After this encounter with Emma, Charles returns home to witness a quarrel between his mother and his first wife. What Charles does not witness is that the disagreement between his wife and mother intensifies when his wife expresses concern about his mother's knowledge of Charles' visits to Emma's house. Avoiding Héloïse's concerns, the elderly lady scorns her daughter-in-law for not having brought a large enough dowry. Mother Bovary, despite being a fairly "independent" woman herself, could not disregard many of the social evils of the time. One expects that her austere life due to her lack of wealth ought to have evoked some sympathy for her daughter-in-law someone of her own gender. Charles hears the end of the quarreling as he enters the house. He steps in between the two women and looks down on them. He tries to pacify them both. In a chiding tone and a grave voice, he asks his mother to restrain herself for the sake of his wife's health. His mother acts hurt and leaves. As his mother leaves the living room, Charles follows in a gesture toward appeasing her. His wife immediately
admonishes Charles and forces him to promise not to go to Emma's house. Charles, completely taken aback by this request, and literally cajoled into swearing to his wife's request agrees.

This scene reveals the existence of arranged marriages (an unfair social tradition towards women) and the underprivileged status of French women in those times. Strangely oblivious of the agony that the bride's family may go through in order to arrange the dowry, Mother Bovary berates Héloïse. The practice of demanding a dowry from the bride was quite prevalent in Flaubert's time. Forcing the bride to pay a dowry undermines her position in a marital relationship. Neither the difference in age between the groom and the bride nor his/her marital status was a major concern in deciding the matches. Before her second marriage to Charles, Héloïse had been sought after by several suitors. Her inheritance was a major factor in her popularity; a factor which Mother Bovary also had taken into serious consideration, in arranging her son's matrimony (to get her son a fortune). Héloïse's ugliness is euphemistically described in the novel: "Quoiqu'elle fût laide, sèche comme un cotret, et bourgeonnée comme un printemps." In Héloïse's case, as is evident in the film too, money is seen as a compensation for her ugliness or other shortcomings. One may speculate that since Madame Bovary herself squandered her inheritance on Charles' worthless father, she probably accepted this cruel custom without protest. The novel explains her great difficulty in bringing up Charles and her desire to assure a comfortable future for Charles. In this scene, Renoir indicates without moralizing about the situation that using a bride to secure the son's future is
unjust. For the earlier mentioned reason, Mother Bovary’s refusal to accept her daughter-in-law’s sorry plight is surprising. It is natural to expect that a woman in Mother Bovary’s position should show sympathy and solidarity for her daughter-in-law and work with Charles to allay his wife’s fears. Instead, she accuses Héloïse of not bringing adequate dowry. The underlying indication here is that Héloïse has lesser or no control on Charles’ behavior because of her lower monetary gift. In short, Mother Bovary indicates that a wife’s position in marriage is measured by her financial worth.

It is evident from Héloïse’s remarks in this scene that she seems convinced that Mother Bovary has full control over Charles and thus asks her to restrain Charles from going to Emma’s place. The novel actually explains Mother Bovary’s management of Charles’ life in the following passage:

Mais ce n’était pas tout que d’avoir élevé son fils, de lui avoir fait apprendre la médecine et découvert Tostes pour l’exercer: il lui fallait une femme. Elle lui en trouva une: la veuve d’un huissier de Dieppe, qui avait quarante-cinq ans et douze cents livres de rente.19

In the beginning, Mother Bovary may have felt relieved at leaving her son in the care of an older woman for she always felt that her son needed to be well looked after. An older, matronly woman in her view could serve better in this role.

The interaction between Charles’ first wife and mother further reveal Héloïse’s dependence on her mother-in-law for her feeling of security in her marriage. Her suspicions about the real intentions of Charles’ visit to Emma expose her vulnerability.
the light of these revelations, Charles' mother may, on the one hand, appear to be an uncomprising tyrant when she condescendingly dismisses Héloïse's fears; on the other hand, Héloïse may be accused of being unnecessarily inquisitive and suspicious of her husband's behavior. She suffers from the insecurity of middle-age. The novel explains in greater detail how Héloïse spied upon her husband and always feared for Charles' infidelity. Flaubert writes:

Dan les premiers temps qua Charles fréquentait les Berteaux, Mme. Bovary jeune ne manquait pas de s'informer du malade, et même, sur le livre qu'elle tenait en partie double, elle avait choisi pour M. Rouault une belle page blanche. Mais quand elle sut qu'il tenait une fille, elle alla aux informations; et elle apprit que Mlle. Rouault, élevée au couvent... C'est donc pour cela, se disait-elle, qu'il a la figure si épanouie quand il va la voir, et qu'il met son gilet neuf, au risque de l'abîmer à la pluie? Ah! cette femme, cette femme!20

In addition to the advent of her anxiety about Emma, Héloïse runs into an unexpected misfortune. The novel explains that Héloïse's financial manager flees after swindling her. Her house is mortgaged which further affects her fortunes. Mother Bovary, influenced by Charles' father, gets upset with Héloïse and considers her unworthy of their only son. From Mother Bovary's perspective only money could make her ignore Héloïse's dowager status and her ugliness. A subtle and intense struggle develops between Mother Bovary and Héloïse. This tension is well captured in the agitated tones of the two women and Héloïse's pacing around the room.
In this scene, by chiding her daughter-in-law, Mother Bovary relegates Héloïse to a position subordinate to Charles and to herself. By taking this stance Mother Bovary also acquiesces to Charles' possible infidelity. Relying on the information provided in the novel, it may be assumed that Mother Bovary wants to mold Charles' wife after her own image. In his description of Mother Bovary, Flaubert writes, "Sa femme (Charles' mother) avait été folle de lui (Charles' father) autrefois; elle l'avait aimé avec mille servilités qui l'avaient détaché d'elle encore d'avantage." She did not let Charles' father's lack of interest in her end her marriage. She let Charles' father spend time in debauchery at her expense without protest.

Alors elle s'était tue, avalant sa rage dans un stoïcisme muet, qu'elle garda jusqu'à sa mort. Elle était sans cesse en courses, en affaires... et à la maison, repassait, cousait, blanchissait, surveillait les ouvriers, soldait les mémoires, tandis que, sans s'inquiéter de rien, Monsieur, continuellement engourdi dans une somnolence boudeuse dont il ne réveillait que pour lui dire des choses désobligeantes.

She too, like Héloïse, came from a wealthy background at the time of her marriage. Charles Senior squandered her wealth on account of his laziness and lack of common sense, yet she bore with everything in order to save her marriage. Consequently, she expected her daughter-in-law to follow suit and to accept Charles' actions without protest. Mother Bovary's unsympathetic reaction to Héloïse and her own personal mute sufferings record the helplessness of the unequal conjugal relationship between the spouses.
The tension between his mother and Héloïse causes some emotional inconvenience for Charles. It is evident in the film that Charles is torn between the two women. His devotion to his mother stems from his gratitude for the care she shows for his well-being. He does not want to annoy his mother. However, Mother Bovary's tactless scorn for his first wife's humble means exasperates him. His sense of duty towards his wife compels him to ask his mother to be more sensitive to his wife. The film, like the novel, does not disclose whether Charles finds it comfortable trying to appease both his mother and his wife. No matter how understanding Charles seems of these two women's perspectives, his voice betrays frustration as he addresses his mother in a commanding tone. Renoir frames Charles' annoyance very subtly. As Mother Bovary leaves the room, the camera angle situates Charles as looking down upon both women.

This sequence is followed by a cut to the farm where Emma takes care of the animals as part of her daily chores. There is a cut back to Charles's first wife in the yard hanging clothes. This creates a significant contrast between the two rival women at work. Emma hums as she runs among the animals, while Charles' wife seems ill at ease. After her return from the convent, when her mother passes away, Emma assumes charge of her father's household. Flaubert describes that, "Emma, rentrée chez elle, se plut d'abord au commandement des domestiques, prit ensuite la campagne en dégout et regretta son couvent." Renoir leaves this detail out of the film and situates Emma directly in the middle of her farm, to show her involvement in the management of her household. In marked contrast to the novel, Emma is shown to be in exceedingly high spirits as she
goes about her chores. In this scene wherein the two women, (Charles’ first wife and Emma) are contrasted, Emma wears a white outfit while Héloïse wears black. Renoir demonstrates this contrast to signal the imminent change in Charles’ life. It may be assumed that Emma’s white outfit represents the brighter side of life, and Héloïse’s dark outfit her gloom and misery. Suddenly, Héloïse suffers from some pain, collapses, and dies shortly thereafter. Flaubert describes that after Héloïse’s ruin, the Bovary parents accuse Héloïse of having lied to them. Charles defends her. Flaubert writes:

Elle avait donc menti, la bonne dame! Dans exasperation, M. Bovary père, brisant une chaise contre les pavés, accusa sa femme d’avoir fait le malheur de leur fils en l’attelant à une haridelle semblable, dont les harnais ne valaient pas la peau... On s’expliqua. Il y eut des scènes... Charles voulut parler pour elle. Ceux-ci se fâcherèrent, et ils partirent... Mais le coup était porté. Huit jours après, comme elle étendait du linge dans sa cour, elle fut prise d’un crachement de sang, et le lendemain, tandis que Charles avait le dos tourné pour fermer le rideau de la fenêtre, elle dit: ‘Ah! mon Dieu!’ poussa un soupir et s’évanouit. Elle était morte!

Quel étonnement!

Renoir eliminates this unpleasant outburst of the Bovary parents against their daughter-in-law and Charles’ subsequent defense of his wife. However, the dramatic demise of Héloïse in the novel compares well with the suddenness of her collapse and the exaggeration of her parting gestures in the film. The viewer is led to believe that some radically serious physical or mental crisis causes Héloïse’s unexpected death.
Even though thrust into this marriage, Charles shows more sensitivity and patience for his wife than his parents, even though he is the one who stands to lose on account of Héloïse's misfortune. By showing Charles' concern and compassion for Héloïse, Renoir reveals the softer side of Charles. However, by ending Charles' association with Héloïse quite early in the film, Renoir shares Flaubert's haste to bury that episode of Charles' life. The fast pace with which the events follow in the film remains true to the pace generated in the novel. Thus, Renoir's treatment of Héloïse—unusually quick as it may seem, captures the essence of Flaubert's description of her situation. Héloïse in her anxiety and agony over Charles' fidelity becomes extremely nervous. Her sudden death is an effect of the internal turmoil she endures after being insulted by Mother Bovary.

From the shot of the first wife's collapse there is a cut to her coffin. As the funeral procession moves with the coffin, Charles is seen almost boxed in the stairwell. While Héloïse is confined in a coffin, Charles remains cornered in his surroundings. Charles is framed behind the rails of the stairs in a medium shot. The stairs that enclose him and the gloom that hangs over him together confine Charles almost into a witness stand accused of causing his mother's discontent, his wife's suspicion, and sufferings and ultimately her death. The framing of Charles in such a manner may also suggest that during this marriage he was completely cut off from the rest of the world. This scene reflects Flaubert's description of Charles' married life:

*Charles avait entrevenu par le mariage l'avènement d'une condition meilleure, imaginait qu'il serait plus libre et pourrait disposer de sa personne et de son*
argent. Mais sa femme fut le maître; il devait devant le monde dire ceci, ne pas
dire cela, faire maigre tous les vendredis, s’habiller comme elle l’entendait,
harceler par son ordre les clients qui ne payaient pas. Elle décachetait ses letters,
épiait ses démarches, et l’écoulait, à travers la cloison, donner ses consultations,
dans son cabinet, quand il y avait des femmes.25

Also, Héloïse’s suspicions about Charles’ visit to the Rouault household indicates
Charles’ difficult position and lack of freedom. In short, Héloïse replaces his mother in
continuing the strict regime over his life.

This scene also foresees a new attempt on Charles’ part to (re)gain the freedom he
wanted through marriage. He is now free as he walks down the stairs to choose what he
wants in life. In many ways this scene bears remarkable similarity to the scene of
Legrand’s escape in La Chienne (1931). As Legrand descends the stairs with his
belongings, after duping Goddard back to Adèle, he chants "Liberté, Lulu." Charles does
not recite Emma’s name, but the following sequences speaks for his real plans and
yearnings.

The cut from this sequence situates Charles in Emma’s household where Charles
dines and converses with Emma’s father. It is followed by the scene where Charles and
Emma share a drink leading to Charles’ proposal for Emma’s hand. One cannot decipher
from Emma’s exaggerated gestures that she actually drinks only a droplet of the liqueur.
Her gestures provide amusement for both Charles and Emma. The exaggerated gestures
are reminiscent of the over-exuberance of Catherine Hessling in the silent films. The
usually reserved and stiff Charles is almost for once free in his expression of joy. Flaubert describes the incident as follows:

Selon la mode de la campagne, elle lui proposa de boire quelque chose. Il refusa, elle insista, et enfin lui offrit, en riant, de prendre un verre de liqueur avec elle. Elle alla donc chercher dans l’armoire une bouteille de curaçao, atteignit deux petits verres, emplit l’un jusqu’au bord, versa à peine dans l’autre et, après avoir trinqué, le porta à sa bouche. Comme il était presque en vide, elle se renversait pour boire: et, la tête en arrière, les lèvres avancées, le cou tendu, elle riait de ne rien sentir, tandis que le bout de sa langue, passant entre ses dents fines, léchait à petits coups le fond du verre.26

This sequence, full of medium close-ups and close-ups of the two, expedites the union and reflects the growing closeness of Emma and Charles as suggested in the novel. The rapidity with which the first few scenes are cut, in which the camera pan on the farm in the opening scene then to Charles’ bereavement and then to his reappearance at the Rouault household, suggests the constant change of pace in both Charles’ and Emma’s lives. These quick cuts keeping pace with the rapid progress of events in both Charles and Emma’s lives pointing to the overwhelming nature and brisk yet growing depth of their relationship. They become involved in the pursuit of an illusion of romance and love too soon, leading to possible unsettling results. Almost anticipating this unsettling future, the cuts and the events in their lives slow down after their marriage.
In the film, when Emma pretends to drink, Charles gazes at Emma very sensuously. Emma’s medium close-ups reveal that she too looks very suggestively at Charles. This is the same pose she assumes earlier in the sequence where they discuss the pictures that Emma has in her room. Charles returns her gaze with equal unspoken tenderness, then Charles gropes for his riding crop. Both look for it and almost tumble over each other. When Charles prevents Emma from falling down, Emma breaks the suggestive silence by asking "Quoi?" while keeping her eyes fixed on his. Renoir exercises unusual restraint in exploring the description of this scene in the novel. The situation of this sequence here is another change from the novel. In the novel, this incident of close proximity between Emma and Charles occurs before Héloïse's death in Emma’s bedroom. Flaubert describes that scene as:

Elle se mit à fureter sur le lit, derrière les portes, sous les chaises; elle était tombée à terre, entre les sac et la muraille. Mlle. Emma aperçut; elle se pencha sur les sacs de blé. Charles, par galanterie, se précipita, et, comme il allongeait aussi son bras dans le mouvement, il sentit sa poitrine effleurer le dos de la jeune fille, courbée sous lui. Elle se redressa toute rouge et le regarda par-dessus l’épaule, en lui tendant son nerf de boeuf.27

In order to simplify matters and better utilize the linearity of the narrative, Renoir combines the incidents of retrieving the riding crop, Charles’ bereavement, and the sharing of drinks into one sequence after Héloïse’s death. The close-up reveals the
potential attraction between the two. But Charles withdraws from a display of his suppressed emotions.

After Charles' departure that fateful afternoon when they share the drink, Emma is seen in her bedroom sinking with the mixed emotion of joy and disappointment — joy at the thought that Charles enjoyed an intimate moment with her, and disappointment at the fact that the sharing of the drink did not culminate in a more romantic conclusion. On several occasions, they come dangerously close to each other, leaving the opportunity for Charles to seize her and express his passion. Charles, however, refrains. Emma's joy evaporates when at the time of parting, Charles simply says "Alors, au revoir", instead of resorting to any more poetic expression. Emma just gently touches his hand and rushes back to the house. By offering him the drink and touching his hand, Emma takes the first step of beginning a significant and symbolic contact with Charles. At the door before departure, Charles seeks Emma's hand from her father, M. Rouault, and they are married shortly thereafter. Renoir leaves all the details of their pompous marriage from his film.

After this sequence, there is a cut to the Bovary household. Emma examines Lheureux's garments and finally dismisses them as too expensive. While showing her the various garments, Lheureux entices her with his very flexible and easy terms. Renoir's use of a medium close-up, revealing their unusually close proximity, foreshadows Lheureux's interest in Emma both physically and economically and in doing business with her. Charles enters by the door behind them, buys the shawl, asks Lheureux to leave and surprises Emma with the shawl and his announcement of the purchase of the horse carriage. Here, in a long shot, Renoir presents the proscenium that he liked so much. The
camera remains stationary as Emma and Charles go out to check the carriage. The shot through the window creates a frame within a frame. This special framing transposes the two onto a theater stage, and in doing so, Renoir points to the theatrical (make-believe), ephemeral, conjugal, happiness between Emma and Charles. As the scene frames Emma in the routine chores of her married life, it anticipates the boredom that will soon engulf her. The very next cut shows how buying clothes and possessing a new horse carriage seem very tedious to Emma.

There is a cut to Emma driving the carriage. Charles, who is constantly infatuated with his wife, grabs her in an attempt to kiss her. Emma pushes him away by saying that he will ruin her corset. By now, Emma has started to grow weary of her married life. She does not know how to be a housewife nor what to do in the household. Charles, on the other hand, feels extremely proud of having such a beautiful wife.

Il ne pouvait se retenir de toucher ccontinuellement à son peigne, à ses bagues, à son fichu; quelquefois, il lui donnait sur les joues de gros baisers à pleine bouche, ou c'étaient de petits baisers à la file tout le long de son bras nu, depuis le bout de ses doigts jusqu'à l'épaule; et elle repoussait, à demi souriante et ennuyée, comme on fait à un enfant qui se pend après vous.28

Emma grows tired of the marriage charade:

Avant qu'elle se mariât, elle avait cru avoir de l'amour; mais le bonheur qui aurait dû resulter de cet amour n'était pas venu, il fallait qu'elle se fût trompée, songeait-elle. Et Emma cherchait à savoir ce que l'on entendait au juste dans la vie par les
mots de félicité, de passion et d’ivresse, qui lui avaient paru si beaux dans les livres.  

Her frustration shows in every retort she directs towards Charles. When Charles exalts her by saying that she is the most elegantly dressed woman around, Emma mocks him by asking him how could he even know such a thing, for he had not been around enough women to make such a claim. Her growing distance from Charles prompts her to "ask herself:"

Pourquoi, mon Dieu, me suis-je mariée?

Elle se demandait s’il n’y aurait pas en moyen, par d’autres combinaisons du hasard, de rencontrer un autre homme; et elle cherchait à imaginer quels eussent été ces événements non survenus, cette vie différente, ce mari qu’elle ne connaissait pas. Tous, en effet, ne ressemblaient pas à celui-là.

Renoir anticipates this despondency in Emma as he develops her character. Scenes illustrating Emma’s pent up anger follow one after the other.

The scene following the carriage ride is situated in the Bovary household. Emma plays the piano as Mother Bovary remains engaged in her work and keeps an eye on Emma. Félicité, the maid, asks Emma for directions about that evening’s dinner preparations. Mother Bovary expresses her displeasure at Emma’s extravagance. Emma plays the piano with her back towards the camera in an almost “over-the-shoulder” medium shot shows Félicité and Mother Bovary. Mother Bovary addresses her comments to Emma. Her accusations of Emma are directed towards the spectator, to seek some
sympathy and support for her statements. Emma's subtle shoulder shrugs, with her back towards the camera, indicate her disdain for Mother Bovary's comments and she shows her restraint at Mother Bovary's provocation. However, when Mother Bovary accuses her of possible infidelity, she flares up and asks her to leave the room, and by implication, her household. At this juncture, Charles enters again as he did during the argument between his mother and Héloïse. Charles begs Emma to be considerate of his mother and to apologize. He calls for his mother, who returns. The two women remain on either side of the screen as Charles retreats into the background. Charles shows the same tension he faced when his mother and Héloïse were at odds earlier. The curtain on Emma's side with its floral design suggests Emma's search for a flowery, full, and exciting life, while on Mother Bovary's side, the blank, white door seems to suggest an empty, spent, almost miserable end to life.

Emma takes a deep breath, apologizes to Mother Bovary, runs up the stairs and enters the bedroom to withdraw from the squabble. Once again a long shot creates a proscenium in Emma's bedroom. Emma, framed first within the door and then on the bed, seems depicted as if "on a stage" awaiting a dramatic turnaround of her mundane life. The first time she collapses on her bed is on the day Charles leaves her without actually proposing to her. That withdrawal is filled with mute disappointment mixed with faint joy, in anticipation of an overpowering passion for a man in her life. This withdrawal, in utter contrast, is an expression of anti-climactic exasperation. For her, married life becomes a routine of boredom and disillusionment. She can no longer be happy with Charles. She can no longer respect him or love him. The knight in shining armor of the
feudal period, that she expected Charles to be a protector of his wife under all circumstances, suddenly is transformed into a crass, middle-class village doctor, incapable of upholding his wife's pride. Anything that Charles does from this point on irritates her. Charles' entering the dining room with his work boots, his mundane conversation about patients, food, and the petty pleasures and details of daily life in general do nothing but aggravate her. One evening as Homais and Charles sit at the table, Emma bears with the conversation with a heavy heart for sometime and then leaves the room. When Homais leaves, she criticizes Charles' lack of manners. Sometime later when they go for a ride in the carriage, she rather rudely ignores Charles' suggestion that he should pull the hood in view of the imminent rain and then changes her mind. She cannot tolerate him any more. Increasingly, she looks for his replacement:

Si Charles l'avait voulu, cependant, s'il l'en eût douté, si son regard, une seule fois, eût venu à la rencontre de sa pensée, il lui semblait qu'une abondance subite se serait détachée de son cœur, comme tombe la recolte d'un espalier, quand on y porte la main. Mais, à mesure que se serrat davantage l'intimité de leur vie, un détachement intérieur se faisait qui la délait de lui.31

The scene of Emma's showdown with Mother Bovary is poignant. There are several reversals in evidence. When Charles was married to Héloïse, who was older than Charles, Héloïse suspected him of philandering. At that time, Mother Bovary belittled her anxiety. Now Mother Bovary suspects Emma, who is younger than Charles, of possible infidelity. Emma brushes this aside aggressively. Money still remains an important issue for Mother
Bovary, an effect of the self-imposed austerity that she had to endure. Also, she tries to exert control over her daughter-in-law's activities, just as she supervised Charles after his first marriage. Mother Bovary is determined to find fault with any woman other than herself in Charles' life. Mother Bovary longs for control over the life of her son because she had not been able to control her husband. However, as a consequence of her son's growing lack of complete obedience to her, she begins to feel wasted in that relationship. Once again, Charles finds himself caught between two disparaging women, both of whom hold him partly responsible for their misery.

Emma's disillusionment with the marriage together with the interference from the mother-in-law provoke her to seek someone else to turn her life around. Renoir is very sensitive to this demand. The carriage, though initially unbearable, proves fateful for her. They meet Count Vaubyessard and he invites them to his ball. Emma regains her energy at the prospects of going to the ball. Her face brightens up, and her change reflects her pre-marital, animated self. Emma immediately starts building a dream of a bright future for Charles. She assumes that Charles would be able to make important contacts through the Count that would benefit his practice and therefore, his earnings. This sudden resurgence of life in her is no indication of her renewed interest or passion in Charles. Underlying her aspirations of this romantic future is her desire to get away from her pathetic condition at Tostes. She seeks to find a new companion, an alternative to the boorish Charles.

Her estrangement from Charles takes a vicious turn at the ball. She scoffs at Charles' complaint that his boots and dress are uncomfortable. She ridicules Charles' idea
of attempting to dance and readily accepts an offer to dance from a complete stranger. This gesture may initially seem to be an attempt to arouse Charles' jealousy and to spark his romantic side but she dismisses any such idea. While Emma dances around with vigor, Charles seems confined to a corner. He quite clumsily moves away from the dancers, and especially from his wife, and watches her from afar, deriving some vicarious pleasure at her delight. Renoir captures the moment of Emma's growing disgust for Charles' very dramatically. As Emma, led by her aristocratic partner, dances round and round, Charles manages to find the nearest corner to stare at some pictures hanging on the wall. At one point, her partner asks Emma if she knew who this stiff man in the corner could be. Emma immediately denies any knowledge of him. Sesonske accuses Emma of duplicity here:

> Very quickly, Emma starts acting her own life as a melodrama that oscillates between ecstasy and despair. Openness gives way to growing duplicity, an uneasy descent to ignoble actions that she struggles to avoid, then embraces willingly.

> The assurance of her bearing becomes an instrument of concealment or an arrogant defiance justified by her self-pity and her contempt for Charles.  

More than duplicity, this action on Emma's part is a rebellion designed to avenge herself for Charles' betrayal in front of his mother. It is also an attempt on the one hand to make him jealous, and on the other to inject some high culture into him. Unaware of this strong emotion on Emma's part, Charles simply admires the sight of his wife dancing among the aristocrats.
With each passing day, Emma’s abhorrence grows. An example of this heightened animosity is found in Emma’s encounter with the priest. The priest inquires about Charles’ well being and his practice, but Emma responds with a very annoyed and sickened look. The medium close-up of her overwrought emotion(s) accentuates the heaviness of her heart and the very personal nature of her desperation. She comes to the priest to seek advice about her soul, but repelled by the Priest’s repeated reference to Charles, she refrains from sharing her deep, private desperation with the priest.

The priest’s attitude here is quite amusing. The manner in which he manages the children seems funny. The playful children keep him busy and worried, yet he maintains his patience, for he suggests that he is a soul doctor for people. The difference in their attires, the priest in black and Emma in white, attracts attention. His approach towards Emma is almost comical when he compares his profession of healing the soul being akin to Charles’ healing the body. In fact, he leaves the impression that problems of body and soul are almost interchangeable. His cavalier attitude towards Emma, furthermore, is demonstrated by the succession of shots. At first when Emma arrives at the church entrance, the priest emerges and glances at the children, completely overlooking Emma. When he finally sees her and inquires of her well-being, he does not understand the reason for her unannounced arrival and Emma’s stressed condition. Emma, up against the wall, indicates the gravity of her situation. She says, "Je voudrais savoir." The priest leaves her standing by the door and enters the church following the children, dismissing Emma’s attempt to convey an important message. Then instead of giving Emma any opportunity to express her grievances, he begins to discuss about the have-nots, about
whom Emma shows no interest. The fact that Emma may have any personal, psychological, tumult does not cross his mind at all. Charles' well being to him seems identical to that of Emma.

Emma's departure without discussing her problems with the priest is followed by a title announcing the Comices Agricoles. At the Bovary house, Emma gets dressed for the cattle fair. Here, for the first time Emma is also shown in the company of her daughter. Her daughter pulls her dress but Emma contemptuously shuns the child. The child insists on attracting her mother's attention and in response Emma pushes the child, who falls and cries. Suddenly, Emma realizes her pain and sympathizes with her. The reason why Emma keeps a distance from the child, is that she represents Charles. Emma's indignant concern for the child's injury indicates her increasing alienation from Charles. The medium long shot revealing Emma's detachment from the child is quickly followed by a cut to Charles' face which shows Charles' interest in Homais' suggestion that his success in Hippolyte's operation will enhance Emma's prestige.

When the camera returns from another survey of the fair to the Bovary household, Charles presents Rodolphe to Emma. The three close-ups of Rodolphe, Emma and Charles situate Emma between the two men. Charles and Homais then move to the background as Emma and Rodolphe occupy the foreground. Emma seems very subdued in Charles' presence, but as Charles departs for the fair, leaving Emma to Rodolphe's care, Emma seems joyful and engages in a conversation with Rodolphe. These sequences announce the possibility of an affair. Emma and Rodolphe arrive at the fair but remain aloof from the proceedings. Charles, in contrast, watches the fair with avid attention. A
cut to Rodolphe and Emma shows how Rodolphe successfully entices Emma to go horse riding with him. Rodolphe even asks Emma to lie about the riding in the event that there is curiosity about her new found recreation. Emma's bewildered joy makes her forget that only moments ago Rodolphe told her that he never lies. The treatment of these sequences is different in the novel. In the novel, Rodolphe is introduced to Emma at the dispensary and he immediately Rodolphe decides to seduce her. On the day of the agricultural fair, Rodolphe already walks with Emma holding onto his arm.

In the next scene, the cross cutting between Charles and Emma reveals that while Charles remains engrossed with Hippolyte's operation, Emma engages in recreation with Rodolphe. Emma's affair is about to begin. Rodolphe rides a dark horse, while Emma rides a white one. In the field, Rodolphe successfully seduces her. Emma's initial mild protest withers in the face of her longing for a change and a gentle, bold, and persistent pursuit by Rodolphe. But Emma overlooks Rodolphe's guile. Rodolphe, while initially declaring brotherly affection towards Emma, forcibly seduces her. Emma forgets that Rodolphe claims never to lie.

The first adulterous encounter over, Emma returns home with abounding joy. Back at home, Emma ignores the child and Charles' apprehensions. Charles is generally patient with her, unaware of Emma's disdain for him, and her new-found enchantment in someone else. Worried over his surgery on Hippolyte, he asks Emma to kiss him good luck. Emma refuses point blank. Emma's refusal to entertain Charles' request is reminiscent of her earlier refusal to allow Charles to kiss her while they are on the horse carriage. In this scene, Emma remains in the foreground, while Charles retreats to the
background. Unable to bear Charles' presence, Emma rushes out. As the door closes, the mirror from the door falls. The fall of the mirror foreshadows the fall of both Emma's image and of her real self.

The next cut shows Emma's hurried arrival at Rodolphe's house. In a medium close-up, Emma tries to embrace Rodolphe, and declares her hatred for Charles, and suggests an elopement with Rodolphe. Rodolphe, careful to preserve his hypocritical image, warns Emma against these unannounced arrivals at his house. Emma remains blind to Rodolphe's cunning plan to sensually enjoy her while denying her proper respect and personal consideration. Emma is too overtaken by Rodolphe's charms to pay heed to these ominous signals. To get rid of Emma at that moment, Rodolphe kisses her and offers her false assurances about a happy future.

The following few cuts reveal Rodolphe's shrewd design to dismiss Emma from his life while Emma prepares for her flight with him. The cut to Emma shows her buying a coat in preparation for this flight. At the shop, Lheureux slyly traps Emma with the procurement bill for her purchase. Anxious about her escape from Charles, Emma mortgages the belongings of her family. In short, she sells herself into financial bondage for her freedom. A close-up of Rodolphe shows him admiring himself in the mirror which reflects his conceited nature and his belief that his charms can seduce women easily. The shot continues in deep focus to reveal Rodolphe writing the letter declining Emma's suggestion of elopement. The image of Rodolphe through the mirror, writing the shocking letter, indicates Rodolphe's changing images. While his image in Emma's eyes is that of a symbol of hope for her, the mirror image shows his other self, which exploits
any unsuspecting prey. Back at the house, Emma sits in front of her dressing mirror, preparing for the illicit union. She easily convinces Charles of the insignificance of the procurement form. The parallel cuts show the progress of two preparations. While Emma prepares to flee from Charles, Rodolphe prepares to flee from Emma. Once again, Renoir recreates the complex handling of the plot as he does in La Chienne, in which Godard plots to blackmail Legrand, while Legrand plans counter blackmail on Godard and Adèle. While Legrand flees Adèle to be with Lulu, Lulu contemplates his dismissal from her life. And again, as in La Chienne, some of the characters are constantly jockeying for control over the others as they fall victim to both the duplicities of each other and of themselves.

When Rodolphe's letter arrives, Emma rushes to the attic to read it. The shock at Rodolphe's change of mind makes Emma almost fall out of the open window. Fortunately, the maid rescues her. The camera looks down upon Emma indicating her complete loss of position. The combination of sounds and the high angle heighten Emma's misery. As Emma laments, a dog barks, and the sounds of the hoofs announce Rodolphe's departure from the town and from her life. A cut to the carriage with Rodolphe aboard makes his departure more emphatic. Another cut situates Emma and Charles at the dining table. As Rodolphe's carriage passes by their door, Emma loses consciousness. The rapid pace of the cuts is a typical way in which Renoir shows the increasing pace of change and of the increasing tension in Emma’s life.

In the midst of this frenzied activity, Charles' calmness is quite intriguing. Charles never forbids Emma anything she desires. He is often not even curious about
what she does. In some ways, Charles reflects the stoicism of his mother's and Legrand (in La Chienne). Legrand, too, hardly ever questions the way Adèle or Lulu lead their private lives, or the way they treat him. Like Legrand, Charles even lets Emma be with other men. But unlike Legrand, he does not intend to dupe his wife. Not curious to know of any psychological causes behind Emma's sudden indisposition, Charles concentrates on her physical well-being. Paying heed to his friends' advice about the proper treatment for Emma, Charles takes Emma for an excursion to Rouen to watch an opera.

At the opera box, Emma seems to regain her cheerfulness. A cut from Emma to another corner of the auditorium reveals Léon watching Emma with binoculars. Léon, a former resident of Yonville, now studies law at Rouen. In the novel, Flaubert describes at length how Léon was Emma's first source of extra-marital diversion. Flaubert explains that Emma quite daringly invites Léon to accompany her. Emma's first visit to see her daughter at the wet nurse's is quite interesting in the novel. Flaubert describes:

Et, sur la réponse du clerc, elle le pria de l'accompagner. Dès le soir, cela fut connu dans Yonville, et Mme. Tuvache, la femme du maire, déclara devant sa servante que Mme. Bovary se compromettaient... Tous les deux, côté à côté, ils marchaient doucement, elle s'appuyant sur lui, et lui retenant son pas qu'il mesurait sur les siens.33

As Emma and Léon's association progressed, Flaubert writes:

Quant à Emma, elle ne s'interrogea point pour savoir si elle l'aimait. L'amour croyait-elle, devait arriver tout à coup, avec des grands éclats et des figurations,—
ouragans des cieux qui tombe sur la vie, la boulverse, arrache les volontés comme des feuilles et emporte à l'abîme le cœur entier.  

Emma’s resolve does not last long, as Flaubert declares that, “Elle était amoureuse de Léon, et elle recherchait la solitude, afin de pouvoir plus à l'aise se délecter en son image.”  

Renoir leaves Emma’s prior involvement with Léon out of the film. The only prior reference that Renoir makes to Léon is when Léon meets Emma and Charles while they ride in their carriage. He arrives at the box and kisses her hand. Here again, Renoir creates the proscenium with Emma and Charles’ box at the opera to be a frame within a frame. Léon makes a dramatic entry into the box and kisses Emma’s hand. Once again, like the first encounter with Rodolphe, Charles finds himself in between Léon and Emma. Charles leaves them in the box, and Léon seizes the opportunity to express his love for her. As they prepare to leave, Charles offers Emma the option to stay back at Rouen and even use the carriage and unknowingly and unsuspectingly creates an opportunity for Emma to indulge in another affair. Once again Renoir increases the pace of events by increasing the rapidity of cuts to demonstrate the mounting of tension on Emma’s part and of the swift changes in her new life.

The next scene opens the following day with Emma and Léon meeting at the cathedral. Emma, somewhat unsure of herself, wants to call off their rendezvous and to hand Léon a letter excusing herself. However, in Léon’s presence and on his insistence, her resolve breaks and she agrees to his proposal. They decide to go somewhere else to spend some time together. With Léon in the carriage, Emma seems exceedingly happy.
Emma tears the letter and scatters it out of the carriage window. The curtain is pulled down to indicate their privacy and intimacy, which is further explored as the next cut shows them at Emma’s hotel room. They indulge in passionate love making inspite of Emma’s declaration that she knows Léon will abandon her after using her. While they are intimately involved, Renoir cuts to a tramp in the street. Emma, hungry for the physical affections of anyone except Charles, mirrors the tramp’s pitiable condition. Emma seems to wander aimlessly, begging any charming young man for her pleasure. Emma confesses to Léon that she clamors for love and that Léon is her love. Emma’s apprehension of how Léon would accept her confession is expressed by the way she nervously puffs on her cigarette. Emma’s tragic experience with Rodolphe still does not change her childish romantic mind, and she gets subsequently drawn into another imminent danger.

Emma’s infatuation with Léon evaporates soon. On her return to Yonville, after her short sojourn with Léon, Emma finds herself being threatened by Lheureux who tells her to either pay off her debts or lose her property. Desperate for money, she requests Léon’s help. He turns her down. She leaves Léon and is extremely bitter. Swallowing her pride, Emma begs Rodolphe for money. Rodolphe’s crafty refusal prompts a tirade against him. The camera work in this sequence is characteristic of Renoir. First, it cuts to Rodolphe and then focuses on Emma, as she sobs recounting her financial ruin. The camera swings above Emma and Rodolphe on a crane in a circular motion, then focuses on Rodolphe again. Then the camera lowers and swings back in the reverse direction from the earlier position, as Rodolphe embraces Emma. With its high angle, the camera "looks down" upon Emma and Rodolphe. The viewer is also enticed to look down upon
the two former aimless lovers and then swings over them again. The oscillating movement of the camera implies that Emma's life (and survival) revolves around Rodolphe. Unable to extract any promise of help from Rodolphe, Emma runs out. The next shot shows Emma stumbling on the grass in order to emphasize the acceleration of her fall.

With imminent danger at hand, Emma implores the lawyer M. Guillaumin to save her. Guillaumin declares one of the conditions of his service to be sex. Emma refuses and returns home to commit suicide. Having consumed poison, she returns to her bedroom and collapses on the bed. Seeing her in distress, Charles attends to her and gives her water. A medium close-up reveals the terrible physical pain she endures at that moment. This scene is reminiscent of Nana's final moments. Writhing in pain and nearly unconscious of anything else, Emma does not scold Charles for coming into the bedroom with his boots on. Charles, like Muffat in Nana, ignored and insulted (and probably unaware of Emma's disdain for him), still does not abandon Emma. He is the epitome of a messenger of continuing love and affection for her. Charles remains oblivious of the fact that Emma does not love him. In Emma's view, Charles is an unsophisticated peasant turned doctor lacking the necessary manners to be accepted in high society. She cannot accept such a simple person to be her lover. Charles, however, infatuated with Emma's physical attraction and her accomplishments, devotes himself to her care. In the beginning, he does ask Emma to apologize to his mother when Mother Bovary argues with her, but that incident in Charles' opinion required an amicable solution which necessitated that Emma had to apologize to maintain harmony in the family. It may seem
in this particular incident that Charles favors his mother over his wife, but he actually stays by his wife’s side through thick and thin.

A close-up shows her turn over and pass out. A fade out is followed by a black. A cut back follows to Emma, struggling in bed, with Charles leaning over her. Shortly after, she embraces and kisses the cross offered by the chaplain. By embracing the cross, she signifies that her life is and has been a martyrdom of love and gestures for forgiveness and compassion. Her lifelong search for a freedom through love meets with success as she departs for some celestial abode. A switch to a close-up of Charles shows him sobbing. Then, their physical vibrations seem to synchronize at last. Emma tries one last time to get up, but Charles holds her and then she falls back. The picture first becomes hazy at this point and then returns to a clear focus on Emma. As a hand reaches over eyes, a cut to Charles fades out to conclude the action. The haziness is Renoir's artistic way of suggesting that viewers sympathetic to Emma's plight may have their own vision hazed with tears.

Renoir's films clearly incorporate a misunderstood and unappreciated male protagonist. In this film, Charles bears that burden. The men that Emma leave him for do not in any way treat her better than Charles does. Even with the other men Emma is reduced to boredom. Rodolphe's manipulating Emma into going on excursions outdoors, is to seize the opportunity to exploit her. A liaison with a married woman has always been a risky, yet celebrated event, in literature and films. Rodolphe merely kept Emma as a trophy of his hunting skills. Léon's brief appearance is even more inconsequential. While Rodolphe could claim an aristocratic title to increase his vanity, Léon had nothing
but his affected airs of Rouen to offer. Compared to these two men, Charles emerges as far superior in terms of his constant efforts to advance in his profession and to provide maximum happiness for his wife. In return for his dedication, some corporal pleasures on Emma's part do not seem too much to ask in a conjugal relationship. Events often speak otherwise. She offers herself gratuitously to other pleasure-seekers but cannot bring herself to let Charles enjoy similar gratification.

Emma cannot be blamed however, for her tragic and sociable nature. Emma is very confused about what she wants in life. She seems bored with anything organized and routine. At the convent (which Renoir skips, like many other details in the novel), the rigid routine did not excite her. After her return to her house following her mother's death, she took charge of the servants to accomplish household chores. True to her character, she soon grew tired of them. Before her marriage, she seemed to be floating with lofty ideas about romance, but that exuberance fades as soon as she married. Flaubert describes Emma as an impatient woman who needs to fulfill her objectives very quickly, "Il fallait qu'elle pût retirer des choses une sorte de profit personnel; et elle rejetait comme inutile tout ce qui ne contribuait pas à la consommation immédiate de son cœur, étant de tempérament plus sentimental qu'artiste, cherchant des émotions et non des paysages."36 In love she also expected instantaneous results which never happened. There was no instant gratification because she never realized that her associations with both Rodolphe and Léon were merely her entrapment in their seduction. She shaped her view of love and of life from the numerous text books she read, particularly before her
marriage. She therefore remained detached from the world outside her books. Renoir never explains, unlike Flaubert, that Emma lived in the world of her books, which made her assume a very naive perception of love and marriage. Renoir, however, reveals Emma’s existence in a fantasy world when he depicts her speaking about her goals with Rodolphe or Léon, her reflection about them as her lovers and her rosy future with them. She clearly never really understood what satisfaction meant to her. Her hatred of Charles makes her commit mistakes even after receiving shocks from her miscalculations with Rodolphe.

Emma’s personality is a complex amalgam of contradictions. While she resists nurturing her daughter, she nonetheless proposes to flee with her daughter at the time of her elopement. Also, when Mother Bovary accuses her of possible infidelity, she reacts very aggressively, only to prove the old woman’s apprehensions to be true later. In another instance, she tries to cajole Rodolphe into giving her money by using her charms on him. However, when Lheureux and Guillaumin offer to trade their favors for sex, she refuses to prostitute herself. Her risk-taking demonstrates her courage for undertaking adventures, yet her suicide in the face of danger belies that courage. The anxiety and financial stresses she leaves for Charles are not acts of willful conspiracy, but unfortunate miscalculations stemming from her lack of maturity and common sense.

Renoir’s development of Emma through all the calamities of her life blends with the social trends of the 1930s with those of Flaubert’s times. The extent of Charles’ liberal attitude towards Emma is striking and a product of the broadening of men’s attitude towards women. Progress had been made to allow more social space for women.
McMillan writes that, “Following the lead given by the philosopher Condorcet, authors of pamphlets and cahiers de doléance at the outset of the French Revolution called for equal educational opportunities for women.” However, McMillan also points out that the state was very slow to introduce changes for women and that the French Revolution failed to promote women’s rights. According to McMillan, the modern feminist movement was born out of the efforts of Léon Richer, a militant Republican and Freemason and Maria Deraismes, a feminist and social reformer with the formation of Association pour le Droit des Femmes in 1871, much after the French Revolution and fourteen years after Madame Bovary was written. McMillan further points out that this association was renamed the Société pour l’Amélioration du Sort des Femmes in 1874. Following the lead of Richer and Deraismes many new groups for the dedicated to fight for equal rights for women came into existence with the passage of time. In 1900 the National Council for French Women was founded by Mme. Sarah Monod which had 100,000 members by 1914 belonging to 123 different societies. “The other federation was the USF, the French Union for Women’s Suffrage which founded in 1909 to concentrate on winning the vote.” Middle-class women were becoming professionals, authors, artists, performers, social reformers and even entrepreneurs. McMillan writes:

In 1906, some 779,000 women were employed in commercial jobs and 293,000 in liberal professions and public services. In 1921 these figures were respectively 1,008,000 and 491,000. Mlle. Louise Sanua as responsible for the creation of the Ecole de Haut Enseignement Commercial, private establishment which was in due
course recognized by the state and placed under the patronage of the Paris Chamber of Commerce.  

McMillan does remind us that “despite all the signs of progress, it would be a mistake to think all the middle-class women of France were escaping from their foyers into the brave new world of work. For the most part, the women who made up the cohorts of female employees in white-collar jobs were not married. Women still could not get top management jobs, they were still discriminated against in administrative jobs, the Bar discouraged women’s success. Women were also not guaranteed success in the field of medicine. Women were more readily accepted in the fields of teaching and social work. These small changes brought about a change in men’s attitude towards women. Men reluctantly were becoming less rigid about women’s position in society and of their independence. Renoir’s Charles reflects that changed mentality. While Emma resented Charles’ personal conviction that he was making her happy, Charles’ non-interference in her matters gave her the liberty to do whatever she wanted, even when people around her criticized her for indulging in certain activities.

Valentine Tessier as Emma provides a guarded yet expressive rendition of this hapless wandering woman. The criticisms about her age as unbefitting Emma are not as significant as her performance. Sesonske, while taking a fairly critical view of Tessier’s appearance as Emma, concedes that:

Valentine Tessier’s performance as in creating this histrionic woman is almost as good as self-defeating. The trouble is, as Tom Milne has remarked, that Emma is
a tiresome woman and Valentine Tessier plays her as tiresome—the fault lies not
in the characterization but in the character.\textsuperscript{40}

Often there is no unanimous agreement among readers and critics about the traits
or physical features of the characters. The development of any character is an independent
choice either of the filmmaker or of the actor/actress. Character portrayals should not be
considered as ultimate pronouncements on the author's visions. Critics who contend the
beauty of Emma to have been betrayed by Valentine Tessier's advanced age, overlook the
fact that the appreciation of beauty is in the eyes of the beholder -- a personal preference
unique to each individual viewer. In this film, "the correct image" does not hold for
Madame Bovary. This caution may help one understand Flaubert's subtitle of the novel,
"Provincial Manners." Emma's inherent naïveté about life and her constant affinity for
natural beauty, chivalry, romance, art, travel, and literary exoticism imbue her nature with
beauty. Both Flaubert and Renoir are interested in the gestures and personality of their
leading woman, not just her physical attributes.
Notes


3 Leprohon 72.

4 Raymond Durgnat, Jean Renoir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 94.

5 Durgnat 97.


7 Sesonske 164.

8 Leprohon 72.

9 Sesonske 145.

10 Blakely 3.

11 Sesonske 145.

12 Sesonske 143.

13 Sesonske 143-144.

14 Sesonske 146.

15 Blakely 8.

16 Blakely 7.

17 Blakely 7.

18 Gustave Flaubert, Madame Bovary: Mœurs de Province (Paris: Librairie Garnier Frères, 1936) 12.
19 Flaubert 12.
20 Flaubert 19.
21 Flaubert 7.
22 Flaubert 7.
23 Flaubert 42.
24 Flaubert 21.
25 Flaubert 12.
26 Flaubert 24.
27 Flaubert 18.
28 Flaubert 37.
29 Flaubert 37.
30 Flaubert 47.
31 Flaubert 43.
32 Sesonske 151.
33 Flaubert 97.
34 Flaubert 106.
35 Flaubert 113.
36 Flaubert 38.

18 McMillan 83.
39 McMillan 117.
40 Sesonske 151.
CHAPTER 5

La Règle du jeu: the manipulating wives and the mistress

"On est a l’époque où tout le monde ment," exclaims Octave, "le gouvernement, la radio, le cinema, les journaux—et pourquoi on insiste que les individus comme nous soient différents?" In the first intertitle of the film La Règle du jeu (La Règle du jeu, 1939), Renoir declares that this film is intended for entertainment, not for social criticism. Certainly, this film treats serious social problems with a theatrical stance. In a play actors must follow the rules of speech delivery, positions on stage and particular rules of engagement. In this film, Renoir proposes that one has to abide by rules in doing anything in life. Furthermore, Renoir suggests that society, universally, is bound by rules created by its inhabitants. Social relationships and the interaction between men and women (regardless of their class status) are not exempt from these rules. Rules, as seen in this film, like relationships can be tiresome at times. Also, just as the task of sustaining relationships may become burdensome, so too is the task of upholding these rules is not always easy or feasible. When one is unable to support those rules, one lies, in order to
make others believe that s/he is playing by the rules. In order to cover one lie, others follow and the individual delves deeper and deeper into the clutches of falsehood.

Maintaining the rules in a general social context becomes, just as effort to salvage a troubled relationship, a complex mindgame. That is why Octave, one of the chief negotiators in this film, tells Geneviève, (le Marquis de la Chesnaye, Robert's mistress), not to reveal her cards to others.

A summary of the story in the film will help develop the analysis better. However, it must be noted here that the story is so complex, that critics such as Sesonske feel that, "Any brief account of the narrative of La Règle du jeu must seem complicated to the point of unintelligibility." Jurieu, a well-known aviator flies into Paris, across the Atlantic, inspired by his love for Christine, Robert's (marquis de la Chesnaye's) lonely wife. Jurieu disappointed at not being received by Christine at the airport announces his love for her over the radio to the entire nation. Later, Jurieu convinces Octave, a failed musician and a childhood friend of Christine, to arrange a meeting between him (Jurieu) and Christine. Octave arrives at Christine's house to fulfill his promise to Jurieu. Jurieu arranges for an excursion at his chateau, La Colinière. There, at different times during the sojourn, Jurieu, Octave and St. Aubin (another guest) all express their love for Christine. Robert, meanwhile, galivants with his mistress Geneviève. Christine's maid Lisette, who is married to Schumacher, Robert's gamekeeper, flirts with Marceau, a poacher, whom Robert employs. Schumacher to prevent his wife from leaving him for Marceau, challenges Marceau. Schumacher chases Marceau with a gun but ironically, later in a
confusion, fatally shoots Jurieu. In the end, all conflicts are at least superficially resolved and peace is restored.

Discussing La Règle du jeu in the context of Renoir's career, Sesonske writes:

From Toni to La Règle du jeu, Jean Renoir made nine films... These nine films explore two themes that recur throughout Renoir's career: the contrast of nature and convention and the question of how people meet—Renoir's concern with the encounter which may change one's life.

Noting the historical context of the film Sesonske states that:

Some critics see La Règle du jeu as part of the trilogy with La Marseillaise and La Grande Illusion. If so, then La Règle du jeu too is an historical film, though set in the present, being the final strand of a thread perceived in French history from 1789 to 1939.

Sesonske also claims that La Règle du jeu is a complex matrix onto which the failures of the French society of 1939 are reflected through the interactions among the various members of the aristocracy and the proletariat. Leprohon takes a different critical tact:

Within the context of his [Renoir's] total production it stands as a link between the social and satiric aspects of the films preceding it and what might be called the "spectacular" character of the films that followed. La Règle du jeu is related to Boudu and La Chienne, but has ties as well to La Carrosse d'or; that is to say it is a most renoir-like film, and thus of immense value.

Leprohon sees a certain sense of cruelty in Renoir's treatment of the various characters in the film. He suggests that,
By dehumanizing the characters, Renoir throws into relief the fragility of that which endows a man’s life with its emotion and greatness. The people love and struggle and suffer, and appear ridiculous in the process because their feelings are dissected by a pitiless ironist. Renoir's cruelty which was often masked by his hearty good fellowship tenderness (for example, the railwaymen’s ball in *La Bête humaine*), breaks out here into a pulverizing humor that barely spares the pure and clumsy ones: Jurieu the lover and Octave the dreamer. For Bazin, this film is a “classic of the film societies.” Bazin describes this film as a “wild imbroglio, a farandole danced to a frenetic rhythm in the corridors of the chateau and ending with an absurd cadaver (Jurieu’s).” Faulkner thinks that, “On the surface, *La Règle du jeu* is a comedy of manners ("une étude de mœurs"), a kind of morality play on the veniality of human beings, regardless of their station in life.” But below the surface, “The darkness falling over Europe is reflected in the savage pessimism of *La Règle du jeu.*”

Renoir and many of his critics have pointed out that *La Règle du jeu* was inspired by *Les Caprices de Marianne* by Alfred de Musset (1851), Beaumarchais’ *Le Mariage de Figaro* (1784) and Marivaux’s *Le jeu du l’Amour et du Hussard* (1730). This analysis proposes that *La Règle du jeu* depicts relationships among men and women as a game governed by a maze of rules which are being constantly negotiated and often altered by the players, according to the changing needs of their positions in the game. Though extremely tangled in its exposition, this film presents a grand opportunity to investigate the evolving relationships among the characters.
The characters Robert, Christine, Jurieu, Geneviève represent the bourgeoisie, while Schumacher, Lisette, Marceau the proletariat; Octave crosses the barrier between these two classes and his relationship implies the thin line that separates the ongoing relationships, in love, physical attraction and professional realms between these two classes. Octave thus prances around Lisette with as much ease as he can in expressing his intimate feelings to Christine. This chapter focuses on how the often conflicting relationships in this film site and then subvert the rules that define the pursuit, sustenance and evolution of love. In so doing, this chapter concentrates on how women create and destroy the possibilities of various relationships and liaisons in the context of the "game."

The word jeu/ game is very important in this film. With its complex maze of plots and subplots, this film seems like a mind game. The relationships in this film are fleeting. Nobody seems to make firm decisions about friendship and love. There is an innate casualness in everyone's comportment. Every major player chases every other to establish his/her control over the targeted person, now reduced to an object of desire. For example, Octave agrees to arrange a union between Christine and Jurieu. But, when the opportunity arises, he is ready to elope with Christine, leaving Jurieu behind. Earlier when he is alone with Lisette, he does not hesitate to flirt with her. Le Marquis wants to be worthy of his wife and abandon his flamboyant life style but cannot liberate himself from the spell of Geneviève.

The casualness in everybody's behavior is also a commentary on Renoir's philosophy in filmmaking and the film itself. Directing films, like life, in Renoir's view, is a game. He enjoyed playing it. This film explores the depths of the game he created.
"He will sometimes describe a director as *le meneur de jeu*, and he calls his friends and collaborators his *accomplices*." Renoir, apart from being the director, as Octave plays the role of a grand negotiator. In this role, he lets the events follow an unrestrained, bizarre, baroque narrative form. Renoir seems to incorporate a *caméra stylo libre*, engaged in a spontaneous creation of the events on screen. (The term *caméra stylo* "literally, "camera pen:" a phrase [was] first used by Alexandre Astruc in 1948 to suggest that camera could be as multi-dimensional and personal as the older literary arts). In this film Renoir uses the camera so freely to compose many different and intertwined situations affecting the characters, while situating them in a rapidly changing platform and blending cinematic representation with theatrical styles of representation. Thus the climax and the anti-climax of the film merge with an actual play/performance. For example, Jurieu's final attempt to elope with Christine becomes a possibility only to be quickly thwarted by his unexpected murder by a soon to be cuckold, Schumacher. All of this happens while a play/variety program is being staged at *le Marquis de la Chesnaye's chateau*. From another perspective the word *jeu* assumes another connotation. Robert le Marquis is very fond of toys for which the French word is *jeu*. It may be assumed that he treats the people in his orbit as mere extensions of his *jeu(x)*. Thus, he takes more interest in his toys than he does in people.

*Jeu* can also be liberally substituted for *play* in the context of this film as in a staged play or *pièce* related to the term *joueurs* for actors. In this sense, filmmaking, particularly the making of this film, for Renoir can be seen as *recreation* of play/pièce on screen. In effect, this masterpiece reinvents the dramatization of narrative and narrative
style. Instead of following a linear form of narrative form and keeping a continuous and
easily comprehensible storyline, as was customary at that time, Renoir, experiments with
different narrative styles. On several occasions, the plot and the style assume genuinely
theatrical stylizations. For example, the entrance and exit of the characters in this film
follow the entry and exit patterns as in a play. The interiors of the Marquis' chateau are
built like huge stage(s), the doors of which serve as the wings. The incidents at La
Colinière (Marquis’ chateau) intertwine with the entertainment staged for the amusement
of the guests, creating an enormous confusion among the guests, the hosts, the
protagonists and their attendants. While the activity continues on stage at the chateau, the
spectators, the performers and attendants engage in their performances. Schumacher, the
Marquis' gamekeeper, chases Marceau to punish him for attempting to philander with his
wife. He shoots through the crowd thereby startling and unnerving the guests. The
intrigue in this film is resolved as dramatically as it is introduced. For example, Jurieu
announces over a radio broadcast that he daringly flew over the Atlantic Ocean only to
claim the woman of his dreams who failed to keep her end of the bargain. It becomes
public knowledge that Jurieu's cherished woman is Christine, the wife of le Marquis de la
Chesnaye, Robert. The film ends with Schumacher fatally shooting Jurieu whom he
mistakes for Octave, a mistake caused by his suspicion about Octave’s intentions about
Lisette. Octave, a commonly acknowledged good Samaritan, has by then created the
ominous meeting of Jurieu with Christine. He leaves the chateau, seeing no practical
possibility of his espousing Christine. Christine and Robert are to be reconciled and the
hope for resolving the marital problems of other characters are expected to be resolved as
well. The intrigues of the play staged at La Colinière invade the personal lives of the principal characters, only to be amicably settled. In short, this film for Renoir becomes an instrument or an experiment to blend theatrical episodes into the realm of the filmmaking.

In the narrative, some common themes emerge as in many other Renoir works. The famous love triangle that is so present in Nana, La Chienne, Madame Bovary, multiplies in this film. Christine's attempt to dissuade Jurieu from pursuing her anymore seems futile. Le Marquis, Robert, for a change, decides to be worthy of Christine's love. He announces his desire to distance himself from his mistress Geneviève, but Geneviève refuses to give him up. Octave, who is a childhood playmate of Christine, suddenly senses romantic attachment to Christine. Christine believes that Octave is actually Lisette's (Christine's maid) lover. Neither Lisette nor Octave himself dismiss that possibility for she cannot accept the idea of being with Schumacher, her husband. Octave cannot succeed in anything he does including expressing his love for Christine. Lisette therefore, remains for him an alternative. Marceau stakes his claim for Lisette quite openly, encouraged by Lisette herself. St. Aubin, a guest of Robert senses Christine's desperation, and moves to exploit her. Jackie (Christine's niece), thinking of a prosperous future with Jurieu expresses her desire for him.

The love triangles are thus Robert-Christine-Jurieu, Christine-Octave-Lisette, Jackie-Jurieu-Christine, Christine-Robert-Geneviève. Last but not the least, there is the entanglement among Schumacher, Lisette, Marceau and Octave. Other endless combinations are of course possible. A pyramid of triangles is created in such a manner as to disrupt the support at the base, thereby, risking a collapse of the main structure. No
wonder Robert remarks prophetically that he hates geometry and that triangles are his biggest annoyances. As in Renoir's other films like La Chienne and Nana, the manifold interactions in these love triangles are often positively or negatively influenced by the desires of characters who try to control their perceived rivals.

At first, the focus is centered on the Christine-Robert-Jurieu affair. The film opens with the intertitle cautioning people against interpreting the film as social criticism. This device is the starting point of the game. The disclaimer in the intertitle is used to draw attention to the satire that Renoir plans on the complex nature of the relationships among the various players in the story. The first scene following the intertitle announces the arrival of Jurieu, the famous aviator, who declares the motive for his adventure to be the love of Christine. Jurieu almost sets the agenda of the film through his declaration of love. Thoroughly disappointed with Christine who did not come to receive him, he demands, over national media, that Christine honor his devotion. The close-up of Octave reveals his two-fold disappointment. On the one hand, he does not want Jurieu to be childishly obsessed with Christine who is already married. On the other hand, it pains him to see the feeling of dejection in his friend Jurieu. By announcing his aspirations and lamentations over national media, Jurieu equates a brave deed for love as his to be of national importance and even charges the nation to sympathize with his cause. He thus eagerly pounces on Octave in the presence of the national media to inquire about his love. The use of mass media to convey a message of love suggests tactical significance.

Sometimes Renoir uses both the aural and visual potential of this [communication] device for continuity through several scenes. The opening four
scenes of *La Règle du jeu* all begin with either the sound or the sight of a radio carrying the broadcast from the airport, symbolically and literally showing the problems of communication in love and friendship between the film's principal characters.\(^\text{12}\)

Jurieu, frustrated by Christine's absence at the airport, uses [other] media like Octave and the radio to regain her favor. The difficulty in communication is expressed in the actions and expressions of all the major players in these four sequences. It is psychologically suggestive that Jurieu, who does not feel shy about announcing his love for Christine over the national broadcast, cannot go directly to Christine's house. Rather, he depends on Octave to arrange their meeting. Christine, who is apparently bored and or disappointed with her own marriage, listens to the radio and hears of Jurieu's blunt admission. Yet, she feels sad that she cannot reach him either for she feels obligated to stay within "the rules" of her society. A close-up of her while she turns the radio off and asks her maid Lisette about her conjugal and love life shows the latent sadness etched on her face. Her face is completely drained of life. She thus needs lots of make up and lipstick to bring back the prior vivacity. Lisette says make-up/lipstick is not natural, to which Christine retorts in a close-up through the mirror, "Qu'est-ce qui est naturel dans la vie?" It is a cruel irony that she exists in the made-up world. The personal image she has of herself exists only in the mirror and at social gatherings in expensive outfits she wears. Amidst the superficial glitter and glamour, she feels herself to be a prisoner in her home surrounded by the expensive material objects she ostensibly desires. Her ritualistic high society married life in a foreign country suffocates her. Married to a wealthy Marquis, she has the potential to

157
be happy, but she is not. Married life has not given her the fulfillment she longs for. Her lack of joy in life equals Jurieu's depression. With this depression, he cannot enjoy the fanfare his feat brings. His success can only be meaningful if he can win Christine's favor. The graphic match of her sad face while she talks to Lisette seems analogous to Jurieu's sorrow as he replies to the radio broadcaster's questions.

Robert, who lives in the world of music and mechanical gadgets, also listens to the radio and learns of Jurieu's infatuation for his wife. When Christine enters his room, they neither embrace nor show any outward expression of joy. Instead he turns the radio off and plays music from a doll that he had acquired that day. When Christine provides him the opportunity to talk about radio, he asks her directly, why she refuses him her friendship. Robert seems quite open about his wife's friendship with any other man. Indeed, they have a troubled and complicated marriage. Robert asks his wife's permission to kiss her hand. He even addresses her as chère amie instead of simply ma chère implying a subtle distance between them. This suspicion grows later when during the sojourn at La Colinière, Christine tells Lisette that all she craves for is children, which at that point is an impossibility with Robert.

In this particular scene, the camera frames Christine and Robert in a medium close-up, as Robert asks how Christine could not extend her friendship to Jurieu. Still in close-up, Christine boldly replies that she did not want Jurieu to confound her friendship with love for "It is difficult to live [such] a lie." Even though Christine remains disappointed in her marriage, she cannot yet contemplate a liaison with another man. She seems to subscribe to Lisette's idea that friendships without ulterior motives cannot be
established with men. Robert seems quite content with his wife's explanation of the whole incident. He dismisses the public proclamation of his wife's disloyalty to a would-be lover by saying, "Men are so naive." Veiled in his statement is his patriarchal, chauvinistic confidence that Christine will not likely risk their marriage and reputation to get involved with Jurieu as well as a threat that Jurieu would find it extremely difficult to establish a liaison with Christine.

Robert and Christine's conversation boils down to their personal ethics. Robert asks her if she believes in him. As Christine says that she has confidence in Robert, the camera shifts to a medium shot. At that juncture, Robert excuses himself to make a phone call to Geneviève, his mistress, Christine in turn does not wait for him but descends the stairs. Robert plays another musical doll while on the phone, as the camera catches him in the mirror. The mirror image that speaks to Geneviève on the phone implies duplicity on Robert's part. It is reminiscent of Rodolphe's image in *Madame Bovary* and ironically, while Rodolphe is seen writing a letter announcing his intention to abandon Emma, Robert calls Geneviève for an appointment to announce his separation from her. Renoir often uses the structural form of this shot distribution to disclose the interior traits of a character. It is typical of Renoir to use similar shots to depict similar situations.

The next episode in Christine-Robert-Jurieu's life takes place at the chateau of La Colinière. Owing to Octave's clever manipulation, Robert agrees to invite Jurieu to the excursion. Octave survives the subsequent car crash resulting from Jurieu's careless driving. Jurieu seems too depressed and on the verge of suicide at the prospect of not meeting Christine. Octave does not like the idea of being an accomplice in Christine's
marital problems, but in order to save Jurieu from a suicide attempt, he gets Jurieu an invitation from Robert. The conversation between Octave and Robert once again shows Robert to be a calculated risk-taker. Octave flatters Robert in order to cajole him to invite Jurieu to the hunting party. In a medium long shot Robert, surrounded by the dolls and other mechanical gadgets in his room, declares at first that he cannot agree to Octave's suggestion for he knows of the possible liaison between Christine and Jurieu. Here, the normally easy going Robert's anxiety and the gravity of his statements are not clearly reflected on his facial expressions. As the shot tightens into a medium close-up, he declares that he loves Christine and cannot give her up. Without losing patience and or expressing frustration, he light-heartedly delivers his decision to Octave. Shrewd, as he is, Octave does not give up and waits for Robert to have a change of heart. As the shot changes to a close-up, Robert, much to Octave's joy, suddenly declares that he will invite Jurieu for he does not believe erecting barriers will protect Christine from Jurieu. Separating them will not change the feeling of love that Jurieu and Christine may have for each other. Once again, Robert delivers this statement with a straight face without showing any anguish.

On her arrival at the chateau, Christine, in a medium shot, confides in Robert her joy at being able to come for the excursion. Later in a long shot, Christine watches from the foreground the arrival of Jurieu (in deep focus). Robert, who had disappeared with Geneviève earlier, makes a timely reappearance (as seen in plays) to greet Jurieu. Robert puts his arm around Christine's shoulder as he greets Jurieu with the utmost courtesy, Christine responds by maintaining her distance. At the news of Jurieu's arrival, other
invited women flock to embrace him. Christine, in a medium shot, too seizes this opportunity to kiss Jurieu on the cheek—, the first contact initiated by Christine. By then, the chateau is already full of gossip about Christine and Jurieu. Either anticipating this gossip or having heard some passing remarks, Christine makes a bold announcement. In a medium shot, while standing next to Jurieu, she announces that she and Jurieu talked and corresponded about his flights. There is nothing more to their relation than mere friendship she declares. In the background, Octave converses with Robert. The disparity in the treatment of Christine and Robert by the guests’ (men, women, servants alike) is noteworthy. While the three men at Geneviève's side do not hesitate to laugh at the potential scandal between Jurieu and Christine, they never ridicule Robert's liaison with Geneviève. They wonder how it is affecting his conjugal life and whether the affair is affecting Christine adversely.

As noted earlier, it is quite significant how Renoir varies his shots to reveal the different aspects of his characters and the varying degrees of their intimacy with each other and with the viewers. Often when the character is not fully forthcoming, Renoir leaves them in medium or long shot. But as the character reveals more of his/her inner self and thinking, he brings them into close-up. For example, when Christine and Robert discuss their truthfulness, they are in a medium shot. Christine flatteringly assures Robert that she has confidence in him. However, when Robert, immediately following Christine's comments calls Geneviève to make an appointment to announce that he is abandoning her, the camera captures him in a close-up working on emotional intimacy
between Robert and the audience. This shot reveals his serious and sincere effort to make his marriage work.

When Christine first sees Jurieu arriving, she does not summon enough courage to greet him at the door. Thus Jurieu remains in a long shot from her point of view. When Robert arrives and makes the atmosphere lighter, she draws closer to Jurieu. And now with everyone else having greeted Jurieu, she seizes the moment to clear the rumors about herself. However, since her true motives are not yet revealed, and since she clearly remains unhappy in her marriage, her testimony about herself and Jurieu is established through a medium length shot. It may be recalled that in Nana too, when Muffat first meets Nana, the shot of Nana from the point of view of Muffat is long and vice versa. As they begin to relax in each other's presence and to open up, the camera frames Muffat and Nana in a close-up shot.

The introduction and dinner over, Renoir draws attention to the simultaneous actions that go on among the various guests. Robert in a medium close-up thanks Christine for her speech about her acquaintance with Jurieu. They both look at each other with the expectations of new lovers, ready to begin their union. However, just as Emma and Charles cannot exchange their feelings of love in Madame Bovary, Robert withdraws without prolonging the conversation. That Christine is affected by Robert and that she is contemplating a strategy to make her marriage work is evident through her conversation with Lisette when, in a close-up, she declares that she craves children. Her door remains half open, and her face reveals the pain of not having derived satisfaction from the marriage. Underlying this apparent pain is the hope to start things anew and to recapture
her former conviviality. Christine's lamentations divulge a veiled appeal for Robert to
give meaning to her marital relationship.

In their room, Jurieu loathes and criticizes Robert depending upon Octave for
support and calls the Robert-Christine union a mismatch. Octave tries in vain to dissuade
him from indulging in such insinuations. Jurieu's hatred towards his host and rival
increases as they go out to hunt. Jurieu confides in Octave that he cannot stand Robert.

Jackie, another invited young woman, fails to seduce Jurieu, who is obsessed with
Christine. A chance survey with a small telescope allows Christine to catch Robert and
Geneviève in an embrace. Unaware of the actual nature of this embrace, this serendipity
serves as a rationale for Christine to explore extra-marital possibilities. In the evening,
during the variety performance, Christine gets involved with St. Aubin and drinks heavily
in order to avenge herself of Robert. Her sense of honor of having announced just a mere
friendship with Jurieu prevents her from seeking out Jurieu. Christine feels compelled to
believe that Robert tries to cheat on her and neglect her. Unable to find pleasure in her
own marriage, she has no choice but to react accordingly and seek pleasure with other
men. While, St. Aubin fails to capture her imagination, when cornered by Jurieu,
Christine pretends to be attracted to Jurieu. At this point, she is thoroughly confused and
insecure and cannot decide upon the right course of action. Thus later, when Octave tries
to distract her and recounts his emotional and physical closeness to her father and to her,
she declares her love for Octave. The assault on her innocence and naïveté, drives her to
get involved with anyone who shows sympathy and care for her, a care and attention that
she does not get from Robert.

163
The Robert-Geneviève liaison complicates the lives of both Christine and Robert and threatens to dissolve their marriage. Robert realizes this and decides to terminate the affair. In the sequence when Robert calls her, Geneviève has her back towards camera, as she exclaims that Robert was going out with Christine. But as she turns to face the camera, she smiles. After the phone conversation, she joins three men who are playing cards and discussing the scandal that Jurieu's confession will create. The men wonder whether Robert is upset about this. One of the men accuses Jurieu of exhibitionism. Geneviève supports that idea. It is ironic that while Geneviève does not feel guilty about continuing her liaison with Robert and does not see that as a problem for either Robert or Christine, she seems to think that Jurieu's presence creates an embarrassment for Christine and Robert. According to Sesonske, she discusses the concept of love with the three men and identifies 'love in society as "the exchange of two fantasies" adopting the Chamfort precept. From this sequence, there is a cut from this sequence to Geneviève's residence.

An elegant dissolve on this mot [statement] brings Robert and Geneviève to face the end of their affair, linking Geneviève's professed cynicism about love with her hurt reaction to Robert's new fantasy, a ripple from the pebble of sincerity dropped in the pool of lies by André at le Bourget [airport].

Robert and Geneviève are in a two shot. Robert declares his decision to terminate their affair. Geneviève mockingly retorts, "Tout est à cause de la radio et Jurieu!" It is interesting that in this relationship Geneviève seems to be the dominating partner and thus she remains largely in the foreground in close-ups while Robert is in the background.
mostly found in medium shots. Geneviève refuses to believe that their separation will change the relation between Robert and Christine. Geneviève's compassion for Christine is easily discernible in her sarcastic remarks. When Robert declares that everything will change in his relationship with Christine once he separates from Geneviève, she angrily retorts that nothing will change and that Christine, being a foreigner will not understand them. For her only a Parisian is capable of understanding their (Robert-Geneviève's) liaison. Implied in this statement are two significant social themes in the film: the common occurrence of adultery in the French society and the ready acceptance of French women of their husbands' infidelities. Unable to persuade Robert, she resorts to arousing fear in Robert, by saying that once Christine knows about them, she will not be able to forgive him. Still unperturbed, Robert declares that he is aware of the consequences. Geneviève then tries the sympathy tactic by saying that she wants to "keep" Robert; without him she would be miserable, for she loves him. Robert quite guiltily pleads with Geneviève to consider his situation and release him to which Geneviève responds by calling him a weakling.

As explained earlier, the relationships in Renoir's films are always a function of the "end game" that the characters play in order to gain control over the other. Here, Geneviève again demonstrates this phenomenon. In a society generally perceived to be male-dominated, she tries to manipulate Robert into subordination. This sequence implies a role reversal between men and women. The woman threatens and cajoles a man to follow her suggestions. When tact fails, she calls him a weakling to arouse enough courage in him to leave or to continue ignoring his wife. Geneviève contends that her
claim over Robert should gain precedence over that of Christine. It is ironic that she calls Robert a weakling, because Robert wishes to leave her (his mistress) to start his life anew with his wife. From a woman's point of view, Geneviève proves the cliché that often women are their own worst enemies. In order to fulfill her pleasure, Geneviève does not feel guilty in sacrificing that of the legally deserving woman. In the face of her offensive, Robert meekly declares that he has inherited his weakness from his father.

In order to illustrate this disorienting experience for Robert, Renoir uses an unusual composition. In a shot-reaction shot, usually the protagonists are put at two ends of the screen. In breaking with this tradition, Renoir shoots both Geneviève and Robert from screen left, to the viewer, both Geneviève and Robert appear on the right side of the screen, even though in the medium and long shot, they are shown to be at left and right of the screen and the room. Also noticeable is the fact that when Geneviève tries to unnerve Robert, she keeps her hand on the statue of Buddha. Robert while defending himself, stays close to the other statue of the Buddha. While Geneviève seeks to draw strength from Buddha to confront Robert, he seeks to draw from Buddha's calmness and patience to stand up to her attacks. Robert's resolve not to be moved by Geneviève is brilliantly illustrated when he dismisses the discussion, by suggesting that his weakness is inherited and by asking Geneviève if they should dine.

Geneviève remains committed to pursuing Robert. At the hunting party, she seizes Robert and asks him to follow her for an important discussion. Threatening to reveal everything to Christine, Geneviève asks if Robert loves her or not. In close-up when Geneviève demands him to give her a direct reply, Robert finds courage and thus he, too,
in close-up declares that he likes her but does not love her. For once, Geneviève feels threatened as she asks him if she bores him. Robert, maintaining his polite demeanor, asks her to refrain from using such negative words. Visibly hurt, Geneviève declares that she never gives up fighting for what she wants but that she cannot fight boredom. As they walk, Geneviève slips, but Robert catches her from falling. Here, Geneviève changes her ploy, and exhibiting a very romantic expression, asks Robert to think of their union three years ago, before the advent of Christine in Robert's life. Renoir uses a cut to Christine at this point, who while fiddling with the telescope, discovers Geneviève in Robert's embrace and feels devastated.

In several ways, the statements of the characters in this film seems self referential and often haunt the characters that disclose them. Robert had admitted that men are naive when he dismissed Jurieu's attempt to associate with Christine, as "difficult." He had at that time assumed that he would be able to abandon Geneviève without any scandal and without Christine's knowledge of the whole affair. He hardly realized that he too, was among the naive men to have thought that it would be easy to switch devotion from one woman to another.

Geneviève and Jurieu seem to be complements to each other. While Jurieu wants to steal Christine away from Robert, she contemplates stealing Robert from Christine. For both, love is an adventure in winning a prize in the form of the desired lover. When their attempts to fulfill their plans get delayed or thwarted, both feel extremely dejected and start hating their rivals with a vengeance. Both believe that a public scandal would allow them to achieve their goals. Jurieu thus uses the national media to broadcast his actual
motive, and Geneviève threatens to reveal all to Christine. For both, their desires about love and their lovers are the defining factors in their relationships. They do not even think about asking if the persons they choose feel comfortable about them. Marriage, family and social traditions seem of little consequence to them as they seem bent on breaking up existing families. In Jurieu's case Sesonske points out, his zeal outweighs the practical considerations of his plans. He tells Octave:

If you desire Christine's happiness, let her come with me—because, me, I love her! Anyway it's a shame to see her with that idiot de la Chesnaye, with his hunts, his chateau, his mechanical birds [oiseaux mecaniques]. But is there more sanity in André's (Jurieu's) sign of love, his dash across the ocean in a twentieth century oiseau mecanique?

By so doing, Jurieu further puts Octave, his friend in a very embarrassing situation. Octave should not be the judge or decision maker for Christine for he is not her guardian. In his eagerness to win over Christine, Jurieu even enters into fist fight with Robert. the difference is easily patched up, and Jurieu decides to propose Robert a settlement to take Christine away from him. This action on Jurieu's part reduces Christine to a commodity. Jurieu is found to have planned out Christine's “transfer” from Robert to himself.

Geneviève remains at work as well trying to poison Robert against Christine. During the chaos that ensues, Christine decides first to spend time with St. Aubin. They are discovered by Robert and Geneviève when she remarks "If she loves you why should she be with St. Aubin?" Once again Geneviève uses an unfortunate turn of events to condemn, victimize and punish Christine to further her cause. She does not hesitate to
condone her own illegitimate relation with Robert but cannot offer the benefit of doubt to Christine. Geneviève's attitude is still the more intriguing, ingratiating and self-serving, even after the magnanimity Christine showed her the previous night when she confronted Geneviève about her liaison with Robert. Instead of creating a storm, Christine quite gracefully tells Geneviève of her knowledge of their liaison, rather than asking her to leave the party, Christine asks her to stay for "Women should help each other from time to time." Once again, a remark Robert makes early in the film seem very relevant in this context. While discussing whether Christine thinks of him as a liar or not, Robert tells that Christine is a very shrewd woman. Christine leaves a mark of her intelligent planning when she asks Geneviève to remain as a distraction for Robert so that she can verify the depth of St. Aubin's attitude. She dismisses Jurieu's sincerity in his love for her, for she believes sincere men are boring.

Judging from Christine's actions, it is quite clear that she is very intelligent and thoughtful. Lisette, her confidante, seems to be a philosopher maid very experienced in the ways of the world. Christine feels confident to discuss her life story with Lisette and listens to Lisette's sagacity with careful attention. Lisette, fully devoted to Christine, risks her marriage with Schumacher. The question of Lisette's alienation from Schumacher is open-ended like the intrigues about so many other relationships in Renoir's films. For example, it may be recalled that Renoir never discusses why Legrand cannot understand Lulu's pretenses early in La Chienne. Similarly, Christine's experiments with other men are more truly designed to arouse Robert's love for her. Sesonske points that the duet that was planned for Christine in the act actually allows her to express her love for Jurieu.
"The first duet, to our surprise, and probably to hers, has Christine declare her love to André (Jurieu), though her defiant air suggests the words are really meant to reach and hurt Robert." "17 By choosing to bear with the pain of an unhappy marriage, brought about by the neglect on her husband's part, she represents an image of extreme sacrifice and tolerance. She probably succeeds in arousing Robert's interest, for he declares that he wants to be worthy of his wife. From a feminist point of view, her tolerance of this treatment is clearly masochistic. Why she bears such a life is not explained in the film. She finds some solace in sharing her thoughts with Lisette. A change in Robert's attitude towards her and a further acknowledgment of her importance in his life is evident in his attempt to fight a symbolic duel over her with Jurieu.

The discussion of women and their importance in this film requires a reference to Lisette's life style. Devoted to Christine, Lisette forsakes her husband. Her residence in Paris alienates her from the life at la Colinière. Her instant infatuation for Marceau in place of her legitimate husband is also baffling. Both Marceau and Schumacher are involved in similar trades. While Schumacher is Robert's gamekeeper, Marceau is involved in illegal poaching activity. In fact, for Marceau, poaching becomes a metaphor for his existence. By his own admission, he also preys upon women. Lisette fancies such a person. Both women would like to see their husband's take the initiative to change their personalities to make their wives happy. It is possible that both Lisette and her mistress Christine look for responsible men who are sufficiently adventurous and can sustain the excitement and happiness that conjugal life can bring. Lisette, being of a lower social class, is more vociferous than her mistress in asserting her choices. She is well versed in
personalities and stereotypes of men and dismisses them as fun loving, opportunistic, insignificant creatures. She acknowledge that men easily rave about women. She considers that to be a problem of the "man' kind that they adore women. She wants to maintain her free will in philandering with men. To this end, she flirts with Octave as easily as she does so with Marceau.

If the attitudes of the significant women in this film are compared, Geneviève and Lisette would be placed at one end of the spectrum and Christine on the other. Both Geneviève and Lisette are quite open and aggressive about their options in life. They do not feel shy to threaten their male partners to achieve their ends. For example, Lisette threatens Schumacher that if he tries to discipline Marceau, she will have her thrown out of the house. Likewise, Geneviève threatens Robert to reveal their affair to Christine, in order to blackmail and retain him. Christine, on the other hand, seems very patient, persevering and graceful in her objectives. She seems to be satisfied with simple wants. That is why she seems content with the idea of eloping with Octave, rather than Jurieu if at all. She craves for proper attention from her husband and a meaningful relationship with him. Octave's care and concern for her thus brings her new hope of life. Riches and social prestige do not attract her for those appear to be extremely artificial. However, she has faith that Robert will understand her pain and change himself. Her calculated calmness may be an effect of her higher social class and wealthy background. While Lisette has nothing to lose, Geneviève's social class is never revealed. It may be speculated however, that she must be closely linked to the aristocracy for unlike the other two, she does not seek a violent upheaval to break social norms. As is usual with many
other women in Renoir's films, these three women show great courage and determination in the face of adversities. They make the world around them turn at their beckoning.
Notes


2 Sesonske 388.

3 Sesonske 388.


5 Leprohon 121.


7 Bazin 109.


9 Faulkner 108.


12 Faulkner 90.

13 Sesonske 393.

14 Sesonske 394.

15 Sesonske 394.

16 Sesonske 396.

17 Sesonske 403.
CHAPTER 6

The River: the mysticism of love and life

"The river was in Bengal, India, but for the purposes of this book, these thoughts might as easily have been a river in America, in Europe, in England, France, New Zealand or Timbuctoo... Its flavor would be different in each," writes Godden in her novel The River. The River is Jean Renoir's most complex film both in style and content. The story, partly autobiographical for Rumer Godden, primarily focuses on the experiences of Harriet, the daughter of a British manager of a jute mill in a tranquil village on the banks of the Ganges, considered to be the most sacred river in India. A close companion in all her encounters and feelings is the serene river, with its gently flowing waters. In effect, the river is the tableau on which Harriet's life is painted. In choosing this plot, Renoir seeks to answer the question of how unassuming people of humble means, toiling day and night for meager compensations, still continue to enjoy life amidst all the diurnal hazards.

In his adaptation of the Godden novel, Renoir makes considerable changes which will be discussed in the following analysis. In this film, Renoir employs his creative instincts in many different ways. For example, Dargnat writes, "Harriet's commentary recounts how she was rescued from her suicide attempt even as the flashback shows her
slipping into the nocturnal stream. Thus flashback structure reverses chronological order, to sacrifice obvious suspense for an ulterior wisdom." The story in the film evolves in the following manner. Harriet recounts her experiences as the daughter of a wealthy company executive, living in a remote village in Bengal. She is in a happy family with her brother Bogey and two other sisters. Valerie, the daughter of her father's colleague, and Melanie, the daughter of her neighbor are her immediate friends. The arrival of Captain John's (a wounded American war veteran) disrupts Harriet's small world because all three women, Valerie, Harriet, and Melanie, all three, vie for his attention and love, creating a rivalry among themselves. While the three compete against each other for Captain John’s love, Bogey, on account of a sad and sudden twist of fate, is bitten by a cobra. Soon after Bogey’s death Captain John decides to return to the United States. Bogey’s death is also followed by the birth of Harriet’s sister. In all these experiences, Harriet finds a great companion in the river, which provides livelihood to the villagers and the industrialists and flows as if impervious to all of life woes.

In this film, Renoir looks for the philosophy of life and oriental mysticism.. All three women Harriet, Melanie and Valerie seem to declare that in spite of their western heritage, this village in Bengal is their native land. Through them Renoir tries to understand whether the principle of undisturbed peace or solace can work in the lives of people from the West amidst various tragedies. The complexity in juxtaposing the river with the life of a young girl, and the native culture with her foreign upbringing becomes compounded when Renoir attempts to assume the various personalities of Harriet, developing her points of view, Melanie and her father. It is as if he seeks to reinvent himself, to use all of them as alter egos to bridge the gap between the East and the West. Melanie, the anglo-Indian girl played by Radha, was a new character, to bring more of India into the interior of our action; she substitutes the novel's diversity of
visitors and servants. Radha made me think of a young Nazimova, and acted as
Renoir's social and cultural guide to India. ¹

In so doing, Renoir sets up almost a dialectical dialogue between Harriet and Melanie,
and therefore between the East and the West.

Obviously Renoir was fascinated by India and its mysteries, and just as obviously
he realized that it was impossible for him, a Westerner, to deal with these
mysteries at their core. But what he could do, and what he did do, was construct a
'Western mediation on the East:' the story of an English family living in India, the
meeting of the two worlds. ²

Renoir's attempt at mixing Eastern and Western traditions is easily noticeable. For
example, early in the film Harriet's father makes way for the women to pass on the
wooden bridge. He is carrying a few kites. He hands one to the little girl who steps on the
bridge behind the Bengali women. Kite flying is still (and especially at the time the film
was produced) predominantly a male sport and one does not offer such a little girl a kite
as a toy. Later Harriet will be seen flying a kite as well. Renoir does not distinguish
between local traditions in choices about sports and toys for men or women. Also
noticeable is the attempt to merge a documentary style with that of a feature film through
the use of Harriet's voice-over description of the life in that part of Bengal blended with
the events of the individual lives of the Western characters. Leprohon believes that "the
film itself becomes like the majestic river, and the story dissolves in the water's
wanderings. Dream and reality mingle, and the characters become the heroes of a fairy
tale." ³

Bazin considers The River to be La Règle du jeu of Renoir's second period. Bazin
further explains:

176
The River describes the life of two English families someplace in Bengal. They are wealthy and without material worries. Renoir never subjects this colonial bourgeoisie to antipathy, to the slightest critical irony. Of course, the characters of La Règle du jeu had his sympathy too, but the tenderness they inspired in him did not in any way mitigate his mercilessly lucid appraisal of them... Their destiny had been ordained.  

Faulkner claims:

The River ignores the historical processes to celebrate a timeless cycle of creation and destruction. ... By refusing to engage at all with the social, political, or economic implications of the post-Independence Western presence in India, The River completes a gradual shift away from subject matter that deals with specific historical realities.  

Durgnat believes that, "The River forms, with The Woman on the Beach and French CanCan, a trio of meditations on the theme of time (or more exactly of memory) and of space (or more exactly detachment). The themes are not unique to Renoir."  

The River is a vehicle for Renoir to continue to explore the relationship of nature to human beings, attempted earlier in La fille de l'eau (1924), Boudu sauvé des eaux (1932), and (Une)Partie de campagne (1936). For example, the long shot where Harriet and Captain John look at Melanie running among the plants and the grass on the riverbank hiding her timidity in expressing her love, represent Melanie's innocent nature and her inherent softness, quite similar to that of the tender plants. Thus the amber color of her saree blends so well with the natural surroundings. From the perspective of film aesthetics, the collation of the river with the lives of his narrator as well as with the other women protagonists anticipates the avant-garde film of the French New Wave, Hiroshima mon amour (1959), where the two rivers by two cities bear testimony of the love and
death of its principal characters. Also the mix of low angle and ground level shots accentuating the strength of the boatmen, who row the barges and the small boats are reminiscent of the grandiose shots of the sailors and the cannons in Eisentein's Battleship Potemkin.

In this chapter, the complex interaction among the women protagonists, along with the other women characters vis-à-vis the interaction with Captain John, John (Melanie's father), Harriet's father and Bogey (Harriet's sister) will be examined to understand if and how the complexities of nature intertwine with their characters, and how it either helps or hinders their love and the transformation of their individual beings. For convenience, Melanie's father will be referred to as John, and the other as Captain John. As in Renoir's other films, the central theme of this film too is the evolution of love in the lives of his protagonists. Here, too, one finds Renoir's trademark the classic triangle in Captain John, Valerie, and Melanie. The triangle is actually extended (into a rectangle) to create a place for the teenager Harriet, through whose eyes the intrigue is revealed. The difference of this triangle from the others is that instead of two or three men pursuing one woman, three women express their infatuation for one man. In La Règle du jeu, for example, Jurieu, Octave and St. Aubin, when given the chance, all seek Christine's hand when Christine's husband Robert thinks of attempting to start his conjugal life anew with Christine. And also in Nana, the characters Muffat, Vandeuvres, and his nephew Georges all stake their fortunes for Nana. In The River, Harriet, Valerie and Melanie feel the pains of love for Captain John. Since Harriet is the narrator, often the examination of the various characters and their relationships will be revealed through their interaction with her. Initially the intrigue of the plot may seem to vary among the perspectives of the British, the American, and the Indian. "Our drama is based on essentially on the classical
triangle situation, with Harriet, the Stranger, and India as protagonists.' But the eventual rivalry is more complex.""

The definition of love varies in this film depending on each individual character's view of life. Thus the task of this chapter will also be to focus on the philosophy of life and its relationship with love, and vice-versa. In the background of the tableau of these three women are the glimpses of the lives of the common working women of rural Bengal, which illuminate the class or socio-economic difference between the leading women and these women in the background. The affluent background of these women affords them the leisure to explore the depths of their emerging love more easily than these toiling and less privileged women. Nan, the governess, is a feminine form of Octave in La Règle du jeu. As the caretaker of the children, she also acts as their friend, philosopher, and guide, thus transgressing the thin line between the different classes and rationalizing the dilemmas of love, life and death with the growing women. Her tales of romance thus inspire these young women to seek a love adventure with Captain John. Underlying the different perspectives on love is a more profound philosophy that "ignores the historical processes to celebrate a timeless cycle of creation and destruction."" Love, as may be expected, is mystery to them. "As the three girls discover love, so Harriet's young brother, Bogey, confronts a male mystery."" "The river" in many ways is a metaphor for love and life.

The first few shots set the stage for the exploration of love. The song that the old boatman sings talks about the love of two live birds on the golden banks of the river. This is one of the oldest folk songs in Bengal. It extols love among animals, among human beings, between nature and human beings, and love for life in general. Renoir's use of this song while the boatmen begin their day and the women go about their daily chores makes the scene very natural. The boatmen enjoy their jobs as much as the women do their daily
chores. As the men start their workday — the boatmen taking loads of jute to some other industrial port, the jute mill workers loading the boats, the fishermen rowing their small tugs, while the women go about doing their work around the household. The men work outdoors to earn their livelihood for their wives and children, the women keep the homes in order so that when men come home, they can enjoy the peace after a hard day's work.

The initial close-ups of Harriet reveal her character well. The first cut to Harriet shows her in close-up with her sister Victoria. In the film, she is the most concerned about her siblings. It may be because she is the eldest among the sisters in the film and also because she is also the narrator and thus Renoir's voice. (Renoir ignores Bea, who is in the novel Harry's elder sister.) Her efforts at writing poems and short stories are a means to seek answers to the mysteries of life that intrigue her. Later her writing will become a tool to impress her first love, Captain John. When Captain John devotes his attention to Valerie, she asks her mother one of the most intriguing questions that has baffled mankind. Why is not everyone universally accepted as pretty or beautiful? When her father returns home with the kites, he looks at his two youngest daughters who are dirty playing with mud. He asks "Whose filthy children are those?" Harriet's mother replies without hesitation, "Yours." (It is customary in Bengal, as a joke, to attribute all the good traits in the children to the father and all the bad ones to the mother. Here Harriet's mother seizes the opportunity to turn the table on her father.) She is shown to be quite friendly with Valerie, whom in the novel Harriet "disliked and feared" and who is slightly older than she is, in spite of her reservations about Valerie's culture and social situation. Valerie's wealthier background seems to her to be an intra-class cultural constraint for their free mixing. Valerie's father owns the jute press, where as her father is an upper level employee of the jute mill. Both try to overcome these differences by spending long periods of time together.
In introducing Valerie to the viewer, Renoir keeps Valerie at a distance from the camera. Since Valerie is very difficult to understand, her characteristics are cannot be revealed easily. Also because Harry feels a psychological and social distance from Valerie, the first shot of Valerie is a high angle long shot, which does not reveal her features well. Through the balcony, one sees a figure on horseback in the courtyard. The camera does not rush to her as she descends, but descends even more slowly than her dismount from the horse. Harry's voice over declares "She wasn't one of us." When Harriet is introduced to the viewer there is a cut to a close-up on Harriet with her sister Victoria. Here, even when Valerie greets everyone, she remains in a long shot, quite far from the viewer's close attention. She remains physically at a distance from the children, their mother, and Nan. The camera finally brings her into a close-up as a reaction shot when Harry's mother inquires of her parents. This shot is abruptly cut to a shot of Harry's father asking "Whose filthy children are those?"

Harriet, fondly called Harry by all, is a dreamer and a poet. She loves the river. Her description of the river elucidates its animated quality. Her romantic accounts capture the exotic character of the natural surroundings. Commenting on Captain John's arrival she says that "the river brought a young man." The river thus becomes a catalyst in evoking her romantic feelings for a man and also in her mental transition from a girl to a woman. As soon as Nan announces Captain John, Harry and Valerie along with Nan and the other children peer through the cement grills of the balcony to catch a glimpse of the young man. Harry argues with Valerie that a man can in fact be beautiful. Captain John's arrival brings turmoil into her relatively tranquil life and creates a rivalry with Valerie. From now on they will watch Captain John and attract his attention to them.

Harriet feels jealous that Valerie wins out on the first contact with Captain John. When Valerie returns with a report on Captain John, Nan who is engrossed in helping the
children with their work drops everything and joins Harry to listen to Valerie's account. In a close-up two shot Valerie and Harry are seated next to each other. Valerie describes how Captain John suffered wounds in the war. Harry exclaims that her father suffered in the war too and thus Captain John does not deserve special distinction for that. Valerie and Harry childishly debate whose wound is greater, until Nan cuts them off. On Nan's suggestion, they decide to invite Captain John to Harry's house on Diwali (festival of lights) night. Valerie wins again by writing the invitation. Harry decides to score on Valerie this time, by taking the invitation to Captain John. On the way she meets her second rival.

By contrast to the introduction of Valerie, Melanie is brought to a medium close-up almost as soon as Harry sees her descending from the carriage. Like her father, Melanie is extremely unassuming especially compared to the self-conscious and haughty Valerie. Also, between Valerie and Melanie Harry feels less threatened with Melanie because if physical appeal were to be any or the only consideration to hold Captain John's attention, then Valerie would triumph over both. Together Harry and Melanie go inside to meet Captain John.

Harry has to wait for Captain John's attention as Melanie is first introduced to him. They exchange pleasantries. Finally, Harry gets her chance only when Melanie goes outside with Arjun, an Indian youth and her longtime admirer. She will have to wait until the end of the film to get personal attention from Captain John. Harry manages to stand as close to Captain John as possible and recites her invitation for the Diwali night. Harry seizes the opportunity and interrupts John to explain the significance of this auspicious occasion. Harry's eyes light up as she describes the festival of lights, hoping that she will get her chance to capture Captain John from her two rivals. The close-up reveals her
childish exuberance. Harry is the child/girl wanting to jump to womanhood, yet not wanting to give up her childish innocence.

Harry and Valerie both betray childishness when they run without greeting Captain John when he arrives first at the "Big House" (Harry's house) on Diwali evening. After they run away from the entrance into the yard, there is a low angle cut to the balcony. On the balcony surrounded by the lamps are Harry's father, John, Melanie and Captain John. The quick cut to the fireworks and later their presence in the background in deep focus represent the exploding emotions within the "girls", which they cannot properly express. A little later the action shifts indoors. Everyone starts dancing to music. Melanie joins her father. Harriet decides to make her first move by asking Captain John to dance with him. She sulks as Captain John dismisses her as a child. The medium shot showing her hurt feelings indicate her impatience to grow quickly. Nan calms her by taking her to dance. While dancing, the girls keep watching the movements of Captain John. While Captain John does not get up when Harry asks her to dance, he gets up as soon as he sees Melanie approaching him, even before Melanie actually asks him. A cut to John shows him imploring Melanie to sit and give Captain John company rather than make him dance with his artificial limb.

Renoir, being fond of quick cuts, makes a rapid survey of the room and people's activities by cutting from the girls dancing, to Captain John, to Melanie, and finally to Valerie and Harry keeping an eye on their target. The fast pace indicates the increase in the pace of the activities among the characters. Another cut to Captain John shows him offering Melanie a drink. Melanie accepts it reluctantly, but the first sip discourages her. Melanie does not complain, but the medium close-up shows her lips quiver in distaste. Captain John understands and puts the glass away. Valerie, watchful of Captain John, comes and snatches Captain John to dance with her. Unable to refuse Valerie, Captain
John, leaves Melanie and limps around with Valerie. Melanie, left alone, is joined by Nan and Harry. Now the three women watch what Captain John and Valerie do. Captain John cannot bear the stress for too long and retires to the verandah, still under the surveillance of Nan and Harry. Now the camera concentrates on Valerie, Captain John, Nan, and Harry. Melanie for the time being is forgotten.

In a short while, Captain John returns as he anticipates Valerie's return. Valerie sits on the unevenly lit stairs which leaves her in the light, but as Captain John leans against the wall, he remains in the shadow, as Nan and Harry continue to watch. Captain John's position in the shadow may indicate that most of Captain John remains obscure for both Valerie and Harry, while the illumination of Valerie's face indicate the ease with which Captain John sees her being. Valerie is nervously about to express her love for Captain John. In order to make the conversation less formal and more intimate, Captain John sits next to Valerie on the stairs, but remains in the shadow. As Valerie says "I like you," he touches her hair and cautions her from being so forthcoming with her early womanhood's emotions. He also admits that he finds Valerie attractive. "You're a little beautiful," he says. Harry and Nan in close-up watch Captain John declare to Valerie he finds her beauty in "Maybe it's your hair, maybe it's your eye, or maybe I'm dreaming." As he says" Maybe it's your eye," the close-up of Valerie reveals her apprehensive joy. Captain John too seems in a dilemma about his own sensibilities about Valerie. The lighting of Captain John's face when he declares his appreciation of Valerie's beauty is representative of his honesty and ingenuity. His cautious approach to Valerie's suggestions reveal his self-restraint, his own tension about love, his respect for a woman's dignity, his disbelief of a germinating woman's ebullience, and his own anxiety about his place in a 'normal" social life. Soon after, Captain John invites her to dance, but instead
of accepting his offer, she asks for a cigarette, to release the tension of having heard the praise of her beauty from the man he whose heart she wants to capture.

A cut to Harry and Nan show their disapproval of Valerie's smoking and then a cut back to Valerie reveals a long shot as she continues to talk to Captain John. Once again, Valerie's social habits and her initial triumph over Harry renew the distance between them. the next cut to a medium close-up shows Captain John helping her light the cigarette. While Harry feels jealous of Valerie, having been witness to her score on Captain John, Melanie, left to herself, feels very lonely. The medium shot shows Melanie against the wall, expressionless. The cut back to Harry and Nan reveal their laughter and a sense of revenge at the Valerie's coughing from smoke inhalation. A cut back to Melanie shows her moving from the wall towards the room. At this point, the shot dissolves to a place of worship of the Goddess of destruction of evil Kali. The rapid drum beats and the young man dancing with a burning incense holder reveal the rising tempo of the celebration. This particular dissolve from the three potential lovers reproduces their emotional upsurge as the night progresses. A cut to Melanie and John watching the immersion procedures at the bank of the river keeps the viewer in suspense about any further progress that night. One may even interpret the immersion scene, following soon after, as indicating a sudden forsaking of the emotions between Captain John and Valerie, and time for calm for Melanie and Harry.

If the night of Diwali is to be taken as a time of triumph for Valerie, the next scene at Melanie's house should provide consolation for Melanie. The scene opens with John getting up from the couch at the sound of a Veena. He goes into the next room to find a saree-clad Melanie listening to the servant boy play the instrument. The sight of her in a saree reminds John of her mother. Radha's anticipated response to his delight indicates her willingness to always remind him of her mother. At this time, Captain John
expresses his appreciation of Melanie in the saree. The brief moment between Captain John's statement and Melanie's habitual subdued acknowledgment is replete with the traditional Indian economy of gestures and emotional expressions. Renoir must have been aware that love for one another is very simply averred by the appreciation of one's choices in clothes, flowers, and colors, or for one's deftness in accomplishing something artistic. Most often if a woman is appreciated she does not respond to the recognition externally. The dissolve from the momentary encounter between Captain John and Melanie to Harriet and Melanie (and their subsequent conversation) lend credence to the speculation that there is as much possibility of a love connection between Melanie and Captain John as between the latter and Valerie. The sound of the Veena is very thought provoking. Veena has been associated with love songs. This instrument was even used in ancient Indian traditions, especially in southern India, as the emblem of grooms. In cases of arranged marriages where the bride and the groom were separated by long geographical distances, it was customary to send the Veena to the bride's house for a temporary exchange of vows until the groom arrived to solemnize the marriage. Thus until the arrival of the groom the bride for all intents and purposes is married to the Veena. Captain John's presence in the house when Melanie listens to the Veena can thus be taken to be an indirect expression of Melanie's tender feelings about Captain John.

Harriet quite skillfully asks Melanie if she has any feelings for Captain John. Latent in Harry's innocent suggestion, "I would like to be loved by hundreds of men," is the tact to elicit an appropriate response from Melanie. Melanie in her usual, subdued manner declares her satisfaction with the attention of only man. This sentiment is typically Indian. Traditionally, Indian men and women are not known to "date" in Western sense of the term. Dating is taken to be something very serious and usually involves the intent of ending up in a permanent relationship. Multiple partners are
forbidden. The expression of love is very sacred under the Indian traditions and thus casual declarations of love for every person that one meets are un-Indian. (With the rapid influx of MTV culture over television networks, India is suffering from the Mcdonaldization of social traditions which are changing and on the verge of radical redefinition.) Harry gets her suspicion vindicated and pounces on Melanie to reveal the name of the only person she wants to be loved by. At this time, John announces Anil's arrival. When Melanie hesitates, Harry quite eagerly pushes Melanie to meet him, just to ensure that she does contend for Captain John. On Melanie's refusal, Harry's suspicion deepens and she asks her directly if she would want to marry an American (Captain John, though a cousin of John, is American). Melanie replies ambiguously that she does not understand them. Melanie never says that she will not marry any American. Implied in her reply may be that she does not understand how Americans respond to love or that since she wants to cling on to her Indian roots, she cannot believe that she is getting the attention of an American, who is not accustomed to oriental culture.

Harry, quite confused, thinks that Captain John must find both Melanie and Valerie to be very physically attractive. The next scene reveals Harry's fears of being overlooked because in her mind she wants the transition "to a swan from an ugly duckling." In a close-up she asks her mother, "Am I beautiful mother?" Her mother, also in a close-up does not allay her fears but rather says "You have an interesting face full of character." While not calling her child beautiful, Harry's mother turns the discussion to assure her daughter that no one is ugly. Once again Renoir inculcates the Indian stoicism in looking at things. Traditional Indian philosophy emphasizes the beauty of the (inner) self rather than just outward physical appearance. At this time, the voice over (Harry's) extols the physical virtues of Captain John, in an attempt to compare her endowments to his. The next scene illustrates Harriet's increasing infatuation for Captain John.
Harry sees Captain John around the bazaar (market place) close to the river bank and starts following him. This action can be termed a reversal of voyeurism. Film criticism predominantly portrays only the male viewer to be voyeuristic and the female to be the object of the male gaze. Right from his arrival, Captain John is being subjected to the gaze of all three "girls' interested in him. As Harry follows Captain John around, the song in the background requests a visit by a God who is the protector of the household. Harry slowly passes Captain John and stands in the cement structure with a view to the river. Harry cannot call out to Captain John, for she cannot express her sentiments and also finds herself far away from his world. However, Captain John sees her silhouette and approaches her. Here Harry declares that she can never understand men, yet she wants to conquer him. She drags Captain John away to show him a secret.

Dragged to her secret hole, Captain John reads Harry's poems and marvels at their quality. He even touches her hand while reading the poems. If Harry's desire to conquer Captain John is to be given any credence, then she has succeeded in achieving partial success. In a medium close-up, Captain John sits holding Harry's notebook in one hand and her hand in the other. This scene is poignant because as Durgnat points out, "Harriet woos her hero with a poem." Captain John suddenly goes towards the balcony (through the front porch). The close-up on Harry reveals her distraction too. The next cut to a long shot of Valerie's arrival on horseback takes Captain John away from her, as he goes out to greet Valerie. She cries out, "I hate her," and her frustration is so consuming, that she breaks down on Bogey who comforts her even though he is not in the least interested in Captain John or the "girls". Harry voices her disgust for Valerie in the next scene, to which the former sequence dissolves.
A long shot first shows the swing and then a medium close-up captures Valerie and Harry swinging together, each facing a different direction. The sometimes childish conversation proceeds like this:

Harry: You can have him.
Valerie: Man with one leg.
Harry: You're cruel.
Valerie: I like to be cruel. I like him.

Valerie formally stakes her claim to Captain John and accepts Harry's surrender in the fight. As noted earlier, once again a male being becomes the object of "girls' desires. Harry literally hands her potential possession Captain John to Valerie. The fade in from here to Captain John helping Harry fly a kite is probably more metaphorical. Many objects in India have strong social and traditional connotations. The Kite, for example, is often identified as symbolizing someone's fate. Renoir does not reveal the color of the kite that Harry flies, but this sequence ends with a shot of one kite, which was bought by Harry's father towards the beginning of the film, cut from its string and hanging from the branch of a tree. The cut kite can be taken as symbolic of Harry's sealed fate with Captain John.

A cut from this scene shows Harry face to face with Captain John and Valerie. Harry sits on the floor reading her story to them but they pay little attention to her. They instead indulge in their own coquetry as Valerie helps Captain John light his cigarette. The story is based on the classical and probably the most famous Indian love legend Radha and Lord Krishna, (Krishna is the lord of love and also the protector of justice). The legend has been changed. Harry reads the story aloud and in her story the legend changes again to transform that legend to the association between Melanie and Anil. At the end of story Valerie snatches the book and reads other writings much to Harry's
protest. On Captain John's insistence she finally returns the book to Harry, who retires extremely hurt. A cut to Captain John and Valerie shows Captain John's objection to Valerie's sudden outrage. Valerie becomes very daring here as she dismisses Captain John's criticism. She invites him to play, which initially the Captain refuses. Questioning his ability to play, Valerie cunningly draws the Captain into playing with her. She suddenly throws the ring out of his reach. The Captain, unwilling to yield, dives and falls on his injured foot, badly hurting himself. The high angle on the prostrate Captain underscores his helplessness and also his appeal to Valerie to leave him alone. Valerie's point of view of looking down upon him proves her earlier statement that she likes to be cruel, implying that she would want to test the "one-legged" Captain for she "likes him" and her ability to dominate him. At this juncture a cut to the idol of Krishna with a tune of the flute in the background would identify Captain John as a symbol of Lord Krishna or the idol of love for Melanie. Harry has relinquished her claim to the Captain and the Captain probably dismisses Valerie from his life, so the legitimate match ought to be between Melanie and Captain John. Harry's suggestion of the Melanie-Anil match most likely will not work, for Melanie is not prepared to accept Anil yet. Soon after the incident Captain John's departure will be announced and greeted with gloom by all the "girls."

To dispel the air of gloom, Nan suggests that the girls take some flowers to Captain John. Melanie's Indian self thinks like Nan, as can be seen by the cut to Melanie's household shows Melanie putting some flowers from her deity on Captain John's plate. This is customary to wish someone well or even to fulfill someone's wishes. Melanie peeps from between the curtains to see if Captain John eats or not. As soon as he sees her, she withdraws. Captain John confronts her to demand why she avoids him. Melanie, for a change, complains that Captain John is always with the girls at Harry's. John regrets that
he feels he spoils the peace and happiness between John and Melanie. As Melanie looks with a placid expression, John announces his departure off camera. Melanie's question "Where will you go?" touches the chord of pain and alienation in Captain John. He explains his alienation from society. Captain John even asks if Melanie dislikes him. The tabla (a percussion instrument) in the background gains momentum, once again reflecting the agitation within Melanie. Still looking at the camera with a very pathetic expression on her face, Melanie announces that she hates herself, not Captain John. Captain John pursues her out into the greens leading to the river. Melanie runs away from him.

In a long shot, Captain John sits on a log by the river and watches (together with the viewer) Melanie's retreat. At this moment Harry and Valerie descend on the scene to offer flowers to Captain John. Valerie beats her to Captain John. In a medium close-up Valerie sits close to Captain John and apologizes for her rude behavior. The Captain's heart melts and they kiss. Melanie shy and embarrassed by this development tries to look away but Harry looks on. Harry's comments at this moment, "I hate bodies and It was my first kiss received by another" become the defining elements in the film for her and even for Melanie too for she watches Valerie and the Captain explore their love from a distance. She always felt closer to Melanie, so she could share her comments with her. Her hatred for Valerie increases as she wins out on them. Melanie could have got the chance to fulfill her love with Captain John, but she avoided the opportunity.

All three feel sad in this situation, for the Captain leaves. Valerie declares that to her, Captain John was a symbol of love. She did not cherish him as much as she did the potential love between them. Harry laments because her love is never recognized by Captain John and she seems most devoted to him. Melanie feels sad for she does not know how to express herself and whether to express her love for Captain John. Dejected, Harry returns home, first retiring to her hole and then coming to her mother for answers.
about about the meaning of love. Following this incident, another tragedy strikes Harry. Bogey, her younger brother, dies of a snake bite. She feels guilty for not having informed her parents about the existence of the snake. Unable to bear these consecutive tragedies, she runs off to commit suicide, but the boatmen rescue her from drowning. While this turmoil is going on through Harry's mind, Melanie and Captain John get-together again to redefine their philosophies about life. In a close-up they sit close to each other. Melanie wearing a white saree symbolizes innocence, an open mind (tabula rasa). She asks a question that cannot be explained either in the context of the film or in the context of life in general, by any philosophy or religion. As they discuss their dilemmas in life, John interrupts announcing Harry's disappearance. Captain John gathers the information about Harry and goes to the river bank to bring her back home.

Captain John gets on the boat, lies beside Harry and lights a cigarette. He actually asks Harry to help him light the cigarette. Days ago, Harry watched Valerie help Captain John light his cigarette. For a moment she can replace Valerie. Captain John explains nothing is ever lost and that Harry can easily begin again for she is so young. "Captain John... shares with her what he has learned. With every experience, after every encounter, one dies a little, or is reborn." During the war, Captain John came close to death but he survived and now he lives. Harriet died a little because of her tragedy. her survival gives her the chance to leave this behind and start anew. It is "the river that brought a young man" (Captain John). He is/was her dream. She does not understand what love means, but feels that she loves him. However, he refuses to acknowledge her love, for she is far too young for him. She does not understand this and thus now on the boat before his departure she quite comfortably declares her love. This is the only opportunity she gets to express her desires to him. She had go through a personal death to sustain her love. The Captain will leave. "Harriet sees her Captain John go, but what has
passed between them is a precious form of love." For Harry, love is more poignant for
she had to risk her life to get so intimate with Captain John and get to this special
attention from him. The announcement of her disappearance even took Captain John
away from any last minute possibilities of his making up with Melanie. When Captain
John tells her "Come on I'll take you home", she feels rescued by her hero. In her diary
Harry describes Captain John as having a face which is like the plants that one can touch.
In other words, her fantasy about Captain John transforms him into objects that she can
feel easily. Here on this boat she can touch and feel him. She thus declares her love for
him. Captain John just kisses her lightly on the forehead as an elderly relative would.
Since the river is witness to all the events in her life, it is significant that she confesses
her love for the Captain on the river. Thus when the Captain leaves, her love will remain
alive. It is with this inspiration she narrates, when the camera zooms over the head of the
three "girls" onto the river, that "The river runs, the world spins; the story ends; the end
begins." With the flow of the river water, her love will travel and the life of the river will
keep it vital like the river itself which serves as a vehicle for household use, trade, food
and transport for the village.

For Melanie, the fulfillment of love with Captain John has implications of
incestual and illicit relationships. While the story of Radha and Lord Krishna, as narrated
by Harry, is one of the most celebrated love legends of India, Radha happens to be
Krishna's aunt, his maternal uncle's wife. As the legend goes, Krishna in his childhood
used to steal the cream and when he grew to be a young man stole women's clothes and
eventually the love of his aunt. Lord Krishna is one of the most revered and feared deities
of India, yet the tales of his philandering are an open secret. Predominant Indian tradition,
while acknowledging this tale, does not justify and actually vehemently opposes incestual
relationships. In certain pockets of southern India, however, incestual and intra-family
marriages and unions have been legitimized (as is the custom among Muslims and certain Judeo-Christian sects). Even though this film, like *La Chienne*, does not seek to moralize people's actions, Melanie as an Indian could endanger her social acceptance specially in Bengal. The Hindu Marriage Act even prohibits marriage to family members within three generations from the mother's side and five generations from the father's side, unless exempted by law. (At the time this film was made, these restrictions extended up to five generations on the mother's side and seven generations on the father's side.) This is one more reason to believe that Renoir's Melanie does not have Bengali strain in her blood.

As mentioned earlier, love has different meanings for different characters in this film. Durgnat writes that for Melanie, it is the principle of giving up the easily accessible, i.e., personal solace. For Harry's mother a Western woman the pain of love is akin to labor pain. She thinks it is part of her duty in love to bear children. Thus lovers should bear children. The joy of love makes the labor pain bearable. For all of them though the concept of love is unified a single theme. Love brings with it a sense of loss, a tragedy, a personal sacrifice. Valerie thus sets out to conquer someone she cannot hold onto. Harry tries to impress someone who does not recognize her efforts until she attempts suicide. Melanie expresses her love by giving up any claim to him, waiting and hoping if love has any meaning between Captain John and herself, she does not have to fight for it. Harry's mother bears with the pain of her son's death for she loves her husband and she expects the new child as a new symbol of their continuing love, a symbol that can some day replace the loss of Bogey. The concept of love is closely tied to the concept of death, pain, and suffering in Indian traditions and philosophy. That is one of the reasons for the mystic Indian stoicism of renouncing the possession of worldly items. The most cherished object does not last long enough. Underlying that love is a terrible suffering which one has to grow with. Melanie's father John thus feels so joyous when he holds his
daughter in his arms. She reminds him of his lost love, her mother and thus their love become more animated, even though death separates its expression between them. For Nan love imbues trouble, mystery, and some adventure. For her girls must be active in the pursuit of love. It is she who gives the idea of inviting Captain John to their household and to send him flowers at the time of his departure.

Love is not a function of the physical or financial attributes of a person. The River is unique in this regard. In La Chienne ugliness is a hindrance to love, in La Règle du jeu Schumacher's lack of sophistication and his employer Robert's obsession with mechanical toys are causes for their dismissals from their wives, in Elena et les hommes as well as in Nana, ambition, valor, political power and financial strength are the criteria for winning the beloved's hand. In The River by contrast, Captain John's disability becomes a symbol of romantic heroism. Valerie exploits the Captain's handicap to test his patience and endurance in love. For Melanie and Harriet, his injury invokes a somber compassion.

Durgnat discovers another triangular element which unites the love of these three girls and makes them represent each side of the triangle. He writes:

The three girls bring their love-offerings to Captain John. A long shot shows him in light grey clothes, in the top center of the screen. below him and nearer the camera in a pale blue dress peeps at him amidst pale green and yellow foliage (the fresh, gentle colours express her character; so does her posture--she is caught shyly bending). "Her" commentary ends but the shot is held, and we discover Melanie at the top of the screen in her red sari amidst dark green foliage talking to Captain John ( the most detached girl is the nearest to him--to gain something by grasping nothing is the sad privilege of maturity). And then amidst the matt red grey of a wall at the bottom of the frame our eye is struck by the wine-coloured dress and flaming golden hair of Valerie. The shot gently equates the girls, softens
the competitive tension which they must feel into a wry, perhaps involuntary togetherness. 17

Nan is Lisette from La Règle du jeu. She provides the missing links in the philosophy of life. As governess for the children she supervises their academic and social lives. She constantly fills the children with tales of love. She believes in lucky and ominous charms and signs. Thus when the arrival of Captain John increases the number of redheads to three, she smells trouble. She is more than a hired hand. She is the vehicle for change. Thus unknowingly she puts the girls into troublesome situations, when they take their advice to invite Captain John and gets involved with him. She tries to lessen Harry's guilt by blaming g Bogey's death on Captain John. She is the mirror of their emotional development. Thus when Captain John's departure is announced she feels as much gloom as the girls. During the Diwali festival when the girls embark on their love journey, she enjoys their ecstasy the most. her smiles in close-ups are the brightest. For Harriet Nan is very special. "Well, Nan was Nan, and to Harriet that was like bread, too everyday and [yet] too necessary to be regarded, though she was the staff of life." 18

The choice of Radha as Melanie is very intriguing. As Renoir had shown before in other films like Madame Bovary and La Règle du jeu, he is not interested in the popular perceptions of beauty and appropriateness in selecting actors and actresses for his characters. The River is no exception. Radha, an accomplished dancer, fails to capture Melanie's emotions. Her expressions are too contrived and for much of her role she is almost devoid of any expression. Her stiff portrayal of Melanie is very much unlike Melanie's Indian frankness. Radha's voice appears to be very dry and unsuitable for the philosophical stoicism that she professes to hold. In the film, Renoir never declares if her mother was from Bengal or not. If her mother happens to be from Bengal, then her accent is complete misfit. The dance she performs, the musical instrument Veena, and the art of
decorating the pitchers are not of Bengali origin. The worship that she performs, the way she wears her saree and the colors for the saree she chooses by contrast the essence of Bengaliness. This may be deliberate on Renoir’s part, for despite her part Western heritage and her education abroad, she shows preference for her Indianness, which is very unusual. By own admission, she seems quite confused about her own existence, much like her father and feels herself to be a misfit in that milieu. Renoir may have contemplated an integral Indian image of Melanie that imbued strains of various indigenous cultures.

Nan, on the other hand being played by a Bengali actress may seem to be surprise choice. Usually with British homes in India, people from southern India and western India sought employment as governesses. Her performance is true to the emotions of a devoted governess as described in the novel and expected in the film. Once again the age of the actresses do not reflect the age of the characters. If Valentine Tessier could be accused of having been much older than Emma, both the actresses who play Melanie and Valerie could also be accused of seeming older than the ages of women or girls they are supposed to represent. After the Hessling period, Renoir never sought to cast women who fit the traditional descriptions of beauty and attractiveness in his films. His films as has been noted earlier, are explorations of human relations and of human nature, not of human bodies.

In The River, Renoir searches for a serenity in the women protagonists, that reflects the solace of the river. The gentle waves of the river act as soothing balm amid pain and also as a source of life for the village. Its cold waters provide the villagers with a therapeutic effect when the villagers bathe in it. It is a silent witness to all the struggles of the people who thrive on its banks. It provides a fine balance to the turmoil of the brisk activities of the factories, the workers, the fishermen, and everyone else. The river, for

197
Renoir, appears to be a source of divine peace. The personal struggles of Harry, Melanie, Valerie, Nan, and Harry’s mother lead them to that peace.
Notes


3 Durgnat 274.


5 Leprohon 143.


8 Durgnat 281.

9 Most critiques accept the title of the film as *Partie de campagne*, while Penelope Giliat writes the title as *Une Partie de Campagne*.

10 Durgnat 275.

11. Faulkner 163.

12 Durgnat 275.

13 Godden 23.

14 Durgnat 275.

15 Durgnat 275.

16 Durgnat 275.

17 Durgnat 278.

18 Godden 23.
CHAPTER 7

Eléna et les Hommes: Dangerous Relations

Eléna et les Hommes can easily be seen as an extension of the study of social norms and mores initiated by Renoir in La Règle du jeu. In this film, competition similar to that seen in La Règle du jeu determines who wins Eléna's hand. Rollan the brave and celebrated general, Henri de Chevincourt "an amiable, indolent aristocrat," and Martin Michaud a wealthy shoemaker, vie for Eléna. This chapter interprets and occasionally deconstructs the intrigues surrounding Eléna in Eléna et les Hommes. While examining the intrigues, a constant focus is on the significance of the image of a woman that Eléna portrays. The other women like Eléna's aunt la Baronne, Lolotte, Denise (Martin Michaud's would be daughter-in-law), Rosa, the brothel keeper, and Miarka, the gypsy singer, appear briefly but add significantly to the collage of images for women constructed in this film. This chapter also examines how Eléna uses her sexual powers to dictate terms to the men who shower on her their admiration. Eléna is the most powerful of the women protagonists examined so far. While Nana and Lulu control some men, they willingly or because of the force of circumstances submit to other men. Eléna, by contrast, does not succumb to any pressure from any of her suitors.
Eléna, a Polish princess, is a lavish spender and is connected to elite Parisian society. Her expensive habits, however, drain her resources and she is almost forced to marry Martin-Michaud, a shoe-trader. With her refined tastes, she cannot bear to be the wife of even an astute businessman whose passion for patriotism stems from the fact that France’s eminence in the political arena will ensure profitable exports for his company. Eléna pretends to like him. Martin-Michaud either does not see through her pretense or willfully accepts Eléna’s rejection. He accidentally admits in a scene with the charming Henri de Chevincourt that when the call of duty for the country arises, one has to sacrifice personal interests. Eléna is different from the other women protagonists in the films in the sense that women like Nana (Nana), Lulu (La Chienne), Emma (Madame Bovary), Christine (La Règle du jeu), Valerie, Melanie and Harriet (The River) have a tragic destiny. Eléna dictates the terms of engagement with all the men in her life with an overriding masculine confidence. However, she manages to protect herself from any grave danger. While her masculinity proves dangerous for the men in her life, she remains unaffected by the numerous risks she takes. Adèle in La Chienne evokes a masculinity somewhat similar to Eléna, but she too falls prey to the cunning of Legrand and gets trapped with her first husband Godard, an impostor. As is habitual with Renoir, he plans his narrative so carefully that the personalities of the women in his films are revealed in the context of their relationships with one or more men.

The following summary captures the essence of the story in the film. Eléna, a Polish princess, agrees to marry Martin-Michaud, a shoe merchant. When Eléna accompanies Martin-Michaud to witness the celebrations of Fourteenth of July, she gets separated from Martin-Michaud in the crowd and meets with Henri Chevincourt. Chevincourt, a French aristocrat and a close associate of Rollan, the great French General, introduces her to Rollan. Through a quick turn of events, Eléna gets involved in
France’s political intrigues. Soon the rapid rush of events catapults Eléna into national prominence when she becomes the chief negotiator between rival political factions. Eléna exerts a magnetic spell on the men around her. Rollan, charmed by Eléna’s beauty, falls in love with her and is ready to forsake his political career for Eléna. Henri risks his long standing friendship with Rollan over Eléna. Martin-Michaud’s son secretly tries to exact sexual favors from his future mother-in-law. In the midst of these maneuvers over power and love, Eléna at first rejects Martin-Michaud and Henri and prepares herself for a conjugal relationship with Rollan. In the end, the strange twists of the complex situations unite her with Henri, when Rollan leaves for Paris to assume governmental reins.

Bazin sees *Eléna et les Hommes* as presenting the theme of the “part at the Chateau obviously revived from *La Règle du jeu* but transposed into a new climate with a different significance.” Durgnat writes that “doubtless the film’s elaboration of the theme of a whirligig of political alliances (already noted in *French CanCan*), intends a friendly message about ‘la réunion fraternelle de tous les Français,’ about patriotism evolving into dancing in the streets and making love not war.” In this film, it is not clear if Renoir’s primary intention is to make a mockery of the existing social system which uses women as commodity, or to portray the woman as willfully accepting her position as a social merchandise and thus as instrumental force in maintaining the status quo. All men of comparable social status with whom Eléna comes in contact, desire a sexual rapport with her. The piano tutor proposes marriage, the charming Chevincourt wants her to be his partner, as does the gallant Rollan. Eléna decides to marry Martin-Michaud at first, for she has to provide for her and her indulgent aunt’s lavish life-style and Martin-Michaud promises monetary compensation for her family, in return for her hand.

The film opens with a shot of a daily announcing of the fourteenth of July celebrations. This shot is followed by a close-up of Eléna, alone in the frame, with music
in the background. The decorative curtains and the painting of a house in a beautiful landscape indicate her joyous mood. The mood changes as soon as the shot widens to a two shot. Her music teacher, Lionel, fails to hold her attention because of interruptions. The mise-en-scène, with all the things around the room and close to them, give the shot a "cluttered look." Everything seems suffocating. Lionel and Eléna even share the same stool in order to play the same piano. Her well rehearsed smile in close-up betrays a sarcasm and insincerity especially when she looks at Lionel. There is a snigger in her smile. Eléna, clearly tired of this routine, looks for freedom and relief from this claustrophobic situation. As soon her maid runs to hear the band in the street, she leaves too. Lionel, with his exaggerated, effeminate mannerisms is a caricature of a man. Eléna dismisses his wish to seek her hand in marriage quite unceremoniously. Her phony smile is also easily noticeable in her interaction with Martin-Michaud.

The following sequence with Eléna in front of the mirror arranging her make up is reminiscent of Emma's make up scene in Madame Bovary and Christine's in La Règle du jeu. When la Baronne informs her that all her pearls and other jewelry have been sold, she dismisses the crisis. She assumes a very casual attitude about her. Her aunt proposes the possible connection with Martin-Michaud to salvage their family prestige and to ensure a guaranteed revenue. Without hesitation, she asks her aunt to complete the arrangements. While looking at the mirror, she settles the issue of Martin-Michaud as nonchalantly as she discards Lionel. Men seem to be in good supply for her and she treats them in a very unconcerned manner. Mirrors, as has been noted earlier, are very important in Renoir's films. They reveal the inner and the outer self of individuals. Here, too, Eléna dismisses the value of pearls and other jewelry while continuing with her make up. She considers them worthless, for she believes that her image itself will be enough to attract the attention of wealthy men. In this way she implies the futility of the make believe world

203
they live in. Since she is never wanting in the pleasures of life, she does not feel their lack. She also believes that her aunt and her caretakers will find a solution to these tough but fleeting monetary problems. She, like Emma, finds it quite convenient to live beyond her means, hoping that problems will be resolved. This scene is also reminiscent of Christine’s make-up scene in *La Règle du jeu*, where the protagonist ridicules the spurious world around her.

Upon Martin-Michaud's arrival in the following sequence, she gets straight to the point of arranging a date for marriage. This action is much to the discomfort of her aunt, who wants to arrange a heavy financial compensation in this marriage. She leaves these details with her caretakers, who she is confident will resolve all problems. Her mannerisms reflect the attitude of any male politician, military leader, or aristocrat (an upper level corporate executive in today's world) who is used to ordering people around and to getting things done when he pleases. Eléna's replies seem very sarcastic. Renoir, once again, keeps her at a medium shot when she declares that she accepts Martin-Michaud's offer of marriage.

The Martin-Michaud-Eléna union shows significant signs of breakdown from the beginning. Martin-Michaud and Eléna take a car ride to watch the July fourteenth celebrations. In the car she does not even look at Martin-Michaud. Her gaze is directed outside on the pedestrians. The car in which they travel gets stuck in the crowd, thus beginning an episode which anticipates the stagnation of their relationship. Eléna proposes to walk and mingle with the crowd. Advanced in age but still virile, Martin-Michaud agrees to do whatever Eléna proposes, hoping thereby to have an enjoyable conjugal life with this beautiful bride. She easily mixes with the people and leaves Martin-Michaud behind who yelling for his "Princesse." The crowd chants "Princesse"
making fun of poor Martin-Michaud. The lack of coordination between the two accentuates their mismatch and the failure of their relationship.

The dynamics in the crowd warrants interpretation. One woman, a complete stranger, gives her child to Eléna, who passes the child back again after going once around the public square. She then runs into Rollan who tips his hat to show his respect. She loses him soon, being pushed by the crowd. Then, she again meets the woman with the child, who again leaves the child to her charge. Eléna exchanges the child for a periscope from another stranger. She then comes back to Henri. All this while, Martin-Michaud remains on a different orbit. Eléna’s separation from both Martin-Michaud and Henri engineered by the surging crowd indicates their separation in real life. The close-up of Henri and Eléna when they first meet and later when she returns to him foreshadows their potential compatibility and their acceptance by the crowd, a metaphor for the people at large. The fact that she takes the child, exchanges it for a periscope and manages to return both child and periscope to their owners, foreshadows Eléna’s potential as a mediator for larger national interests.

Her first meeting with Rollan, arranged by Henri, is interrupted by Rollan’s aides and his lover Paulette. Rollan kisses her hand in customary courtesy and seems charmed by her first contact. However, on hearing her name he immediately remarks that she is a foreigner. Eléna here finds herself in a situation similar to that of Christine in La Règle du jeu. People around the two seem to like them but maintain the artificial distance from “the foreigner.” The difference between Eléna and Christine however, is that Christine is married to a French Jew and therefore has to calculate her moves. Eléna, being a spinster, is completely free in what she does. Christine, on the other hand, seems an introvert and constrained in her relationship with other men. Eléna, an extrovert by contrast, assumes the role of a free-wheeler. Eléna offers Rollan a daisy for good luck. When Rollan readily
accepts the magical powers of the daisy, Eléna tells him that he will not need her. By making this statement, she draws Rollan's attention to herself even more. The non-verbal cues suggest an instantaneous mutual admiration between the two. The aides view this potential liaison as a danger. Their close vigilance of Rollan show through the close-ups on each aide and confirm their suspicion of Eléna. They try to separate the two by pulling Rollan away from her. This gives Henri the chance to introduce himself to Eléna. Oddly enough, Henri presents Eléna to Rollan without having made her proper acquaintanceship himself. Eléna does not seem concerned about that. Her lack of concern and interest in Henri continues for most of the film, yet she appears in his company as any opportunity presents itself.

The jealousy and rivalry between Paulette and Eléna are augured from the moment of their meeting. Paulette notices that Eléna offers a flower to Rollan and throws it away immediately. She wants to keep Rollan away from other women. Renoir exposes the Paulette-Eléna rivalry immediately. Rollan is framed in a medium shot between the two women. Paula declares that she hates crowd, and Eléna just loves to be in the crowd. Paulette leads Rollan away from Eléna as quickly as possible. As Rollan takes Paulette's hand, Henri takes Eléna's. And as they leave the meeting point, Paulette throws away the daisy. It is interesting to note that she gives Lionel a daisy too, and that their relationship did not work.

As Henri and Eléna leave, there is a cut to a woman singing a song about Paris which the lyricist views to be a mistress for men and a caress for women. The juxtaposition of human qualities on the city speaks significantly about the animation of the city. The fact that the city is considered to be a man's mistress implies that even the women in the city are mistresses. Thus, Eléna (who is a foreigner) is a mistress in the making for Henri and the rest of the other men in her life. Soon after they visit a pub
where Éléna gets rather drunk, but she refuses Henri’s offer to take her to his home. She kisses Henri, but resists his attempt to proceed any further. While a song celebrating the fourteenth of July continues in the background, there is a cut to Henri and Éléna drinking merrily. Henri pours some more wine for Éléna, and as they look at each other somewhat bemused, somewhat uncertain of what is evolving between them, they come very close to kissing. But significantly, then refrain, quite like the first drink that Charles and Emma share in Madame Bovary. By this time, Éléna either feels a little beside herself or she is too cheerful to mind what she does. Henri asks her to step out of the bar and walks off screen. As soon as Henri walks off, Éléna starts dancing with someone else on stage. She ignores the fact that she is with Henri for now. Henri, however, pulls her along with him.

From this sequence there is a cut to another bar where Henri and Éléna dance. Éléna, partly in her merriment and partly because the hat hinders the movement of her head, throws her hat off, and the drummer catches and wears it. Now for the first time she presses her cheek to Henri’s and begins to be intimate with him. The close-up reveals her willingness to entertain Henri’s interest in her. To underscore the rising passion within Henri, Renoir dissolves the shot into a two shot with Henri and Éléna seated close together, with Henri on screen left. Henri continues kissing her, and they drink. A little later, they kiss on the lips. Once again, in close-up, one sees their mutual admiration of each other and their shared pleasant surprise. But she resists Henri’s taking any further liberty. Following this, Éléna departs leaving Henri behind. Henri grows distracted and drawn into a fight over insults to Rollan. Throughout the film, Éléna shows little interest in Henri. It is always Henri who in vain takes the initiative to draw her attention. Only in the end, when Rollan leaves accompanied by Paulette, does she accept Henri’s overtures. Henri’s access to Éléna is available clearly because of his connection with Rollan.
This strange dynamic among the conduits is significant. Henri seems to be the initial intermediary between Eléna and Rollan. La Baromme negotiates arrangements for a comfortable life for Eléna and herself, Eléna assumes the responsibility of mediating between Eugène (Martin-Michaud's son) and Denise (his future wife), while Martin-Michaud with his investments and Eléna with her intelligence, together with Rollan's aides plan for Rollan's future political strategies. Rosa agrees to broker a mediation between Rollan and the government representatives at her brothel, and Miarka, as an agent of Henri, provides him with the opportunity to break into Rosa's brothel to participate in the negotiation and help in Rollan's escape. Martin-Michaud, by showing no opposition, becomes the silent agent in the Henri-Eléna union. All of these fleeting relationships and liaisons convert the changing relationships into a series of complex games.

A cut to the events at the Michaud household, from Henri's duel, reveals the increasing importance of Eléna there. Eléna, already aware of Eugène's cupidity, advises Denise on how to control Eugène. The conversation between Eléna and Eugène is very earnest and Eugène does not conceal his sexual interests. While Eléna tries to reason with him, he gets very close and seizes the opportunity to kiss Eléna, his future mother-in-law, right on her lips. Eléna, though caught off guard, does not resist. Her gesture probably implies that if she were to marry an elderly, uninteresting person like Martin-Michaud, any liaison with his son does not matter either. Their action is interrupted by the sudden arrival of Martin-Michaud. In an over the shoulder shot of Martin-Michaud, Eugène is first seen ready to hurl a chair. He retreats when Martin-Michaud announces Henri's arrival.

Henri seeks Eléna's help in resolving the dilemma in Rollan's mind and in averting the national crisis. Eléna declares that she has only herself and nothing else. She
hints at the possibility of using her sexual charm to help. She does the same earlier when her aunt proposes an arrangement with Martin-Michaud to tide over their financial crisis. Eléna agrees to Henri's proposal to help in the negotiations only when Henri (jokingly) indicates that he might start believing in her talismans someday. The distance between Henri and Eléna in this scene is conspicuous, as they are separated by the flower vase on the table. When Henri kisses her hand the shot is held at medium length. The fire that burns/simmers in closed fireplace in the background denotes the simmering desire in Henri that remains caged within him. Eléna plays with Henri when she recounts quite insouciantly the discouraging story of her husband's demise in a bomb accident. Implied in her anecdote are the clear indications that she does not have much remorse for accidental deaths of her partners and that Henri might be in for some mishaps. The next shot of their riding on horseback echoes Eléna's premonition about danger, as bullets are heard in the background and they avoid a group of attacking soldiers. After her presentation to Rollan, Eléna, quite elated, declares to Rollan that "Vous m'avez montré la mission de ma vie." Her increasing admiration for Rollan is, once again, prominently displayed in the gleam of her eyes captured in a close-up and her ready acceptance to negotiate on his and country's behalf. The magic of the moment is not lost on Henri, who tells Eléna of his recollection of a tale titled the "Sorcerer's Apprentice."

Back at the Martin-Michaud palace after the trip to Rollan, Eléna quickly manipulates Martin-Michaud into releasing her from her promise to him for the sake of the country. After dinner, she gets the opportunity to get to know Rollan intimately. Rollan uses the opportunity to enjoy sex with Eléna. Their interaction is repeatedly interrupted by Denise looking for Eugène, by Eugène and Lolotte (who unbeknownst to them hide behind their couch), and by Hector, Rollan's personal aide who searches for Lolotte. A strange coincidence is noticeable in this sequence. Just as in La Règle du jeu,
Lisette, Christine's maid, decides to flirt with Octave, one of Christine's lovers, or Marceau, the poacher. Here, too, Lolotte indulge in the company of Eugène, whose desire for Eléna has been noted and Hector, who happens to be Eléna's suitor's valet. After Hector's exit, Rollan and Eléna feel the relief of being "alone at last," only to be interrupted again by two ladies. Frustrated, they go back to the room where Eugène and Lolotte slip away. These two pairs are similar in the sense that both Eugène and Eléna betray their fiancés. The hide and seek between the illicit lovers recapture the farce enacted among the lover in La Règle du jeu.

Renoir extends this burlesque by engaging Rollan and Eléna in a passionate embrace, while in the other room a fight ensues between Eugène and Hector (Rollan's valet) over Lolotte. Rollan's aides prevent Henri from interrupting Rollan and Eléna. Rollan, infatuated with Eléna, does not pay any attention to what she says. He only tries to have sex with her. There is a shift in the position of Rollan's aides. While in the beginning they draw Rollan away from Eléna even when he interacts with her in public, in this instance they seem quite indignant as to what happens between the two behind closed doors. Henri manages to barge in past the aides to find Rollan and Eléna wrapped up with each other. Enraged, he engages Rollan in a duel as Eléna looks on, while Denise attends to Eugène, who loses to Hector who steals Lolotte. All of this while the opera singer continues practicing her song. The multiplicity of action is Renoir's favorite means of providing entertainment at several different levels. It may be remembered that in La Chienne, while the little girl plays the piano, Legrand filches money from his wife's cupboard. The saber rattling between Henri and Rollan is reminiscent of Schumacher's frenzied firing through the audience in La Règle du jeu. The ridiculous nature of the shifting balance of power in love keeps pace with the rapid developments in the political
arena. The duel between Rollan and Henri is interrupted when Paulette arrives and Rollan is required to leave immediately.

A cut is made to the national assembly where Rollan declares a combative mood for the release of the French military staff. Eléna demonstrates an eager admiration of Rollan's valor and through her rapt attention during his speech. This is caught in close-up to show her increasing confidence and interest in Rollan and in his fearlessness. Once again, the rivalry between Paulette and Eléna over Rollan is highlighted through some quick cuts between Rollan, Eléna and Paulette, all in medium close-ups. While Paulette looks on with an air of political astuteness, Eléna merrily awaits Rollan's delivery wearing a daisy as a good luck charm. Eléna's belief in destiny and talismans is also prominent when she talks about destiny while with Rollan after dinner at Martin-Michaud's. Henri, eager to divert Eléna's attention, invites her to a dinner. At the dinner, Henri's personal philosophy which espouses squandering away time drives Eléna away from him further.

The scene then shifts to the Bourgogne Hotel where Rollan acknowledges the cheering crowd while his aides make preparations for a summit at Rosa's brothel. Shortly after the celebrations, a rumor runs high of Rollan's arrest by the government. At the brothel, the aides prepare the prostitutes to greet Rollan when he arrives. Eléna arrives too to convince Rollan to seize power. Henri is barred from entering in the strategy session. Here, Renoir demonstrates the old adage that politics make strange bed fellows. Paulette, who is also not invited at the deliberations, arrives with Henri and takes up residence at the gypsy settlement. In effect, politicians take the help of prostitutes to resolve a national crisis. Renoir implies that politics and prostitution are similar professions where people exploit each other to achieve their immediate goals and gratification. In both professions people will go to any length to get what they want.
At the time Eléna and Rollan meet at the brothel, chaos reigns reminding the audience of the pandemonium at the Martin-Michaud palace. Everybody at the brothel tries to get into the room with Rollan to pay tribute. Like the crowd during the Bastille day celebrations, there is much commotion here and for a time everything comes to a standstill on the stairs. When Rollan and Eléna meet inside the room, Lolotte stands between them. Eléna changes her previous statement to Rollan and says "Je suis heureuse que vous avez besoin de moi," implying her willingness to be a part of Rollan's life. Once again, their meeting is interrupted by both Eugène and Hector entering their room in search of Lolotte. As they leave, Eléna ruminates that she should have stayed with him and so on, while in the background one notices faintly a statuette resembling a Christ-like figure. They both want to become the guiding light in life for each other. Rollan does not pay any attention at all to Eléna's statements. All he says is "Je vous aime." In the reaction shot, Eléna's blank stare expressing delight and disbelief at Rollan's admission are prominent. Both seem consumed by each other's aura. Rollan is subdued by her physical charm and she by his military acumen and courage. Earlier when Rollan is alone at the Hotel Bourgogne, he is shown to draw the flower that Eléna gives him, thereby showing his appreciation of Eléna and of her gift. Soon a high angle shot shows Eléna stretching out on a couch and Rollan coming around to sit next to her. The high angle demonstrates Eléna's yielding to Rollan's glory. So when Rollan says that he wants her, she tries to refocus his attention to his cause, his mission to stand for the good of the country and to seize power. Eléna kneels before him to acknowledge his imposing strength. Rollan, however, gets down to declare that he is willing to forsake power for her. At this point their conversation is interrupted again with the sudden entry of Henri. It seems that both Henri and Rollan are bent on interrupting each other's progress with
Eléna. For Henri, the task is more difficult, for while Eléna surrenders herself to the legend of Rollan, she dismisses Henri's cavalier attitude as that of a worthless dreamer.

Henri's entry leads to another fight between himself and Rollan. Henri is initially knocked down by Rollan. Chaos becomes burlesque again. Renoir uses an ingenuous dramatic comedy to illustrate the fight. Gaudin, Eugène's would be father-in-law also a businessman and political broker, emulates the body movements of the two rivals. After Henri is tied up by Rollan's aides, Miarka, the gypsy singer, enters to free him. A cut to Rollan and Eléna show them to be kissing passionately again, while in the other room, Eugène and Denise struggle to free themselves. Rollan's expression of love is interrupted yet again by the announcement of his victory in the elections, which brings Paulette to take him away to Paris. A curious drama emerges amidst this chaos. Eugène and Denise are freed. Denise, who wants Eugène, finally gets a chance to be with him. Rollan's impending departure for the cause of the country frees up Eléna and leaves the possibility of Henri's last chance to win over Eléna. However, Eléna, with a lamp in her hand, reminds Rollan his promise to seize power if hindered by the government, and Rollan reminds her of her promise not to leave him. The lamp befits her image as the guiding light in Rollan's life. They lean out of the window to wave at the cheering crowd, Eléna waves the lamp at them. Her presence by the side of Rollan in the window frame with the glowing lamp in her hand raises the possibility of her becoming part of Rollan's glory and by implication a part of a grandiose couple for the country. As people chant Rollan's name, bidding him to assume control, Rollan seeks Eléna's opinion. Eléna tells him that the decision is solely his.

As Rollan kisses her hand, Eléna declares, "Vous êtes le héros dont j'ai rêvé toute la vie." She is overwhelmed with his glory as a courageous and victorious soldier. It is only befitting that Eléna, herself, being a very courageous woman who does not hesitate
to take risks to achieve her goals should desire someone ready to risk his life for the
country and for love. No wonder she dismisses Henri, for although he is chivalrous in
fighting for his honor and defending his girlfriends, he does not have any ambition to
shine like Rollan as a national hero. Rollan decides to take up yet his cause for the
country more fully and prepares to leave. Rollan, Elena and Rollan's group emerge screen
right, and at that juncture, Henri prepares to leave with Miarka who rescues him. Henri's
disguise as a circus performer suits him, for he does not care for his image and besides
that allows him to escape arrest as one of Rollan's advisers. Fearing the arrest of Rollan
by the government agents, Elena appeals to Henri to exchange clothes with Rollan.

Elena's role changes here. So far, Henri had been instrumental in arranging
meetings and negotiations between Rollan and Elena. This time, however, Elena for a
change becomes the intermediary between the quarreling friends. Elena's privileged
position stems from the fact that she can influence Henri simply because Henri still
desires her. In order to retain her affection he ought to accede to her request. As
anticipated, Henri agrees. Miarka and Elena wait outside the door as the two friends
change garb. Rollan's appearance as a circus performer is not inappropriate either, for not
only does he have to escape arrest, he has also to take charge of the circus of government.
In order to reward Henri for his help to his friend, Renoir rewards him. Instead of making
Elena change into Miarka's clothes, he sends Rollan out with Miarka, while as planned by
the aides, Henri is sent upstairs to stand by the window in Rollan's clothes. There he
creates the illusion of kissing Elena and uses that scene to distract the crowd from Rollan.
This permits him to escape unnoticed.

At the window, Elena refuses to be kissed by Henri, but Henri quite cunningly
uses the situation to his advantage by saying that it is only for the good of the country.
This is an interesting scene, as the crowd thinks that Rollan, by kissing his leading lady,
encourages them to follow suit. This scene is important, for Eléna, ever since her association with Rollan, completely dismissed Henri and refused any overtures from him. This time, as a means for the escape of her hero, she agrees to be with Henri. Rollan, unwilling to give up Eléna, looks up at the window and remarks that "Ils jouent bien leurs roles," leaving the possibility that he will recover his cherished love. However, the high angle on Rollan may signify otherwise. It may signal the end of the Rollan-Eléna union. Paulette joins Rollan in the carriage. Rollan does not dislike her. As Rollan enters the carriage cabin, the curtain is pulled, reminding one of the privacy created by Léon when he takes Emma for a ride in Rouen in the horse carriage in Madame Bovary.

A cut to the crowd shows Miarka leading the gypsies to sing a love song glorifying one night stands (reminiscent of the Medieval pastorales which glorified the one night sexual adventures of knights of armor), and the entire crowd continue to kiss. A cut to a close-up of Henri and Eléna shows Eléna reluctantly embracing Henri held at the window in an open frame, implying that their relationship is still open. The crowd does not realize that the figures at the window are not those of Rollan and of Eléna. A cut to Miarka as Henri and Eléna embrace reveals an ambiguous latent sadness in her. Her song either echoes a momentary alliance between Eléna and Henri, or it is her personal lamentation that she could not lead Henri out of the high society and into her gypsy community to build a union with him. Henri's unpretentious ways and his philosophy to lead a simple life would have made that seem possible. Her song reverberates effectively among the politicians and other guests at the brothel. A cut to the interior shows the politicians embracing prostitutes. Eugène, who has been running away from Denise ever since the beginning of their engagement, finally kisses her. Denise's remark that she comes to the brothel to meet with Eugène seems cynical. She can only exercise her soon
to be legitimized conjugal rights only in this brothel, for at home, Eugène chases his stepmother-in-law's maid. Durgnat observes:

The kiss is an ideal work of art, it is influential (averting a revolution), anonymous, and undetected. It triggers off a crazy sanity in the imaginations of its audience, and it goads them to a similar frenzy. It emerges, also, from the personal humiliation of all concerned. Rollan has lost his place.

A cut back to Henri and Eléna reveals a change of heart for Eléna. She asks Henri if he is acting about the kissing. Henri, of course, having waited for this moment for so long, affirms his sincerity. It is strange that Eléna can finally accept Henri only when he wears Rollan's uniform on which the white flower is prominently displayed. Her belief that the flower brings good luck holds good for Henri. His earlier statement fulfills its intention that someday he wanted to believe in Eléna's talismans. Rollan, being with Paulette, who discards her flowers, cannot come back to her. Henri in Rollan's uniform pretending to the crowd to be Rollan, can pretend to be as valorous as Rollan and in this way capture her admiration. Eléna's statement, that she desires and loves Rollan for his heroism holds true. For Rollan's uniform bears a mark of his courage and heroism. Here, Durgnat's analysis is cogent:

She yields to the sincerity of a spiritual and political also-ran, Henri. In the arms of the woman he loves, Henri is another man's stand-in, his shadow: the ghost of a lie. But with good grace he plays the game and from a generosity which is not unnaturally hypocrisy, a sufficient emerges.³

Renoir thus arranges for the crowd to look at the silhouette on the curtains of the window.

Miarka enters the house at this time and takes her place at the next window. Her loneliness equals Martin-Michaud's disappointment at not having won Eléna. She faces Martin-Michaud as he engages in helping himself to the food at the table. A cut back to

216
Henri shows him throwing away the flower, at which time Eléna says "C'est fini. Je le sais." A cut back to lonely Miarka sitting on the window sill increases her solitude even more. Henri and Eléna, engrossed in each other, do not pay any attention to her. Another cut stays focused on Henri and Eléna's back and then goes through the window into the crowd and dissolves into the title board announcing the end of the film followed by the epilogue. Eléna's last statement is extremely ambiguous and can be interpreted in various ways. She implies that her affair with Rollan is over forever, or her games with Henri are over, or that now that Rollan has left, her association with Henri and his pretended Rollan should be over. To emphasize this ambiguity Renoir dissolves to "Fin" over them.

The critical question that remains is; what does Eléna represent in final analysis? Eléna is an aristocratic woman who can live a flamboyant life which is stereotypical of men from her class. She does not feel answerable to anyone for the choices she makes in life. She is the epitome of an independence of spirit. It is no surprise that she chooses to enter into an arrangement with Martin -Michaud on Bastille day, a day of independence for the French. That very day she indulges in flirtation with Henri and even charms Rollan the greatest hero of her times. Her foreigner status does not restrain her from becoming the most important figure behind the scenes in domestic politics and in winning over Rollan's skeptical aides.

One can understand the risks to impress Eléna that these male characters are willing to undertake. The astute businessman Martin-Michaud does not mind being humiliated by her in order to get the prize (Eléna) for which he yearns. Martin-Michaud's son even secretly defies his authoritarian father, and despite his ongoing affair with the house-maid and an impending marriage to the daughter of a very wealthy merchant, dares to kiss Eléna. Eléna's charms create an oedipal drama on one level between Martin-Michaud and his son Eugène. The charming Henri de Chevincourt is ready to sacrifice his
loyalty and friendship towards Rollan for Eléna. The gallant Rollan risks his political career and marriage to a very powerful and aristocratic woman, even engaging in a duel with Chevincourt for Eléna. All these men play hide and seek with each other to fulfill their cherished desires. A similar game was demonstrated in La Règle du jeu.

The position of women has intrigued Renoir in all his films. Having explored the fates of Nana, Lulu, Emma, Christine and Valerie, Melanie and Harriet, Renoir clearly wants to create a woman who can live life with as much liberty as is given to men under the current social system. All the other women submit to the roles assigned to them. Eléna breaks away from these restrictions. She overcomes her momentary vulnerability in the face of Rollan's glory by letting him go as casually as she accepts him in her life. Actually, as she admits, it is not Rollan but his heroism that she is attracted to. Devoured by her confidence, Rollan at the time of departure still wants to hold on to her when he asserts that Eléna and Henri play their roles well as Rollan and Eléna. Rollan is ready to forgo the honor of governing a country and the power that comes with it. For him, Eléna's personality is more powerful than the pride of ruling the people. It is her encouragement that inspires Rollan to take up the reins of the country. Eléna wants to see him stay true to his cause and he cannot disappoint her. She rises above the mundane and lifts the men around her from the ordinary as well. Rollan cannot trade his duty to the country for her love and she recognizes her radiant vitality. She thus declares "c'est fini" as Rollan departs for Paris. Rollan's "spell" finally wears off.

The women around her also benefit from her determination. Denise does not give up on Eugène. Ignominious as it may seem, she pursues Eugène into a brothel to elicit her love. Lolotte learns from her mistress how to decide the man she wants in her life. She thus flirts with Eugène and yet when she meets Hector, she can dismiss Eugène for a soldier serving a highly decorated military leader. Lolotte's indulgence of Eugène's
flirtations is an indication of Renoir's desire to infringe class barriers, which he demonstrates in Lulu in *La Chienne*, who makes an intellectual middle class bourgeois fall in love with her. Octave, in *La Règle du jeu*, is the counterpart of Lolotte, who simultaneously flirts with Lisette and her mistress Christine, the wife of a marquis. And "Eléna who craved a hero, settles for an agreeable mediocrity." In so doing, Eléna makes herself available for the ordinary people. "Embracing him, Eléna is embracing Everyman." 

Miarka is a “poor people's version” of Eléna. Being a gypsy, she is condemned to the fringes of the society. The proximity of her caravan/ghetto to the brothel highlights her marginal status. Used by society for its benefit, she does not get the recognition she deserves. Henri whom she helps, ignores her. That does not stop her from contributing to the national good. She helps Rollan escape and actually leads him through the crowd, avoiding the government agents waiting to arrest him. Miarka is not shy to expect love from an aristocrat Henri whom she rescues, who is rejected by Eléna until the last moment. Wilfully she accepts a silent withdrawal back to her social stratum after her mission is accomplished, in much the same way that Eléna accepts her distance from Rollan and settles with Henri, who despite his potential to attain stellar positions in society, shuns any such ambition to achieve that stardom.

Renoir's choice of stars has been a subject of debate. The presence of Ingrid Bergman in this film is no exception. Durgnat is perceptive here:

Renoir's interest lies not in the Hollywood aspect of Ingrid Bergman's radiance but in that quality of buoyant earth-mother which expresses itself in middle-class terms as spiritedly as it would in any other...Sensitivity, freshness, generosity, distinction, Ingrid bergman can bestow upon her Eléna, who is to Nana as a kindly mother to a fractious child."
In conclusion, it must be said that women in this film initiate all the action. They get involuntarily drawn into the problems and they help men to arrive at solutions. Men depend on them. Women, in this new role, share social and political power with men. As noted earlier, Renoir does not necessarily adopt a feminist narrative style, but he definitely suggests a revision of the traditional views toward women.
Notes

1 Raymond Durgnat, Jean Renoir (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1974) 316.


3 Durgnat 323.

4 Durgnat 317.

5 Durgnat 317.

6 Durgnat 318.

7 Durgnat 318.

8 Durgnat 319, 318.
CHAPTER 8

Conclusion

The focus of this research has been on the treatment of women in Renoir's films. At the outset, there has been no intent to generate what might be termed a “unified” theory. As noted earlier, it is very difficult to classify Renoir’s films into any particular genre. Each film clearly differs from the others in narrative content and style. Moreover, Renoir frequently blends characteristics of different films into one film. This is the case even though many contain some identifiable common stylistic elements. For example, Renoir uses different characters at different stages of the narrative. In effect, these and other common elements of narrative content resurface in varying degrees. Given this thematic focus, the following generalizations are supported: Renoir’s films clearly foreground women. Women’s love is a dominant theme in the lives of Renoir’s women. Renoir either ignores or redefines the traditional concepts of beauty. Renoir makes critical and varied use of the concept of mask in a woman’s persona. Renoir’s roles for women clearly seek, to a large extent, to “liberate” them from conventional social and
cultural norms. It is to be remembered, however, that Renoir’s films do not fall into the category of feminist films.

In most of Renoir’s films, women provide the impetus for action. For instance, Nana (Nana), Lulu (La Chienne), Emma (Madame Bovary), Christine (La Règle du jeu), Valerie (The River) and Elena (Elena et les hommes) all provoke certain reactions or behaviors from their male protagonists. Women’s actions have varying effects on different people. Many a time, they act to exercise control over the with whom men they have relationships.

Often, women may, on the one hand, choose to dominate or control one while on the other, they may submit to the will of the men they associate with. Lulu is a very good example of this dual personality. Frequently, the women may even relinquish all influence and claims to the men they wish to espouse. Melanie (The River) willfully refrains from seeking any attention from Captain John and Christine (La Règle du jeu) while silently suffering the indifference of her husband, with whom she would like to have a more meaningful relationship, also maintains a distance from Jurieu who desperately seeks her.

Sometimes, the women's actions inadvertently create unexpected dangers for the men they cherish or the men who wish to be their suitors. For example, in Elena et les hommes, Elena's brisk political maneuvers endanger Henri, Rollan and even Martin-Michaud, who faces financial disaster if Rollan refuses to accept the popular clamor to rule the country. Valerie's stubborn resolve to make Captain John follow her wishes, aggravates an injury in The River.
The actions of Renoir's women define their personalities. Emma's search for romance explains her restlessness and boredom in her marriage. Elena's casual attitude in love and business matters demonstrates her passion for dangerous living. Nana's tirade against Bordenave and his supporters illustrate her will to fight for her rights. The actions do not remain suspended in vacuum, but rather energize themselves in the complex maze of relationships that the women find themselves in. Customarily, the actions are actually fundamental to the functioning of the relationships. A case in point is Emma's (Madame Bovary) indulgence in Rodolphe and Léon. It is her encouragement of Rodolphe and Léon that results in her seduction, the continuation of the illicit affair(s) and eventual ruin.

In all the films examined in this research, love is a recurring theme in the lives of the women. Their relationships are based on love. The pursuit of love often drives the women to seek adventurous liaisons and embark upon impossible dreams. Emma's illusion to find "perfect" love in a "perfect" body is an illustration of this aspect.

Renoir believes that love defies race, color and cultural barriers. It is therefore as easy for Count Muffat to dedicate his life to the love of an perfidious actress-cum-prostitute in Nana, as it is for a clumsy middle-class intellectual like Legrand in La Chienne to forfeit his marriage, a secure job and sanity for a prostitute who dismisses him very nonchalantly. It is the fluidity of love across class structures that allows Octave to contemplate eloping with Christine, while flirting with her maid Lisette, in La Règle du jeu. Cultural differences dissolve in the face of tidal waves of overpowering emotions of love that rise within Melanie in The River.
Renoir's women live for love. In fact, all their actions are intended to fulfill their dreams about love and their yearning to seek "perfect" happiness. Harriet's literary explorations thus become a means of vicarious living of her love with Captain John. Melanie's deliberate distance from Captain John is an attempt to draw his attention to her stoic infatuation for this wounded soldier. Even Elena, who seems otherwise very detached from her milieu, succumbs to the charms of Rollan, a powerful army general. Search for love most often remains unsuccessful. Nana, Lulu, Emma, Christine, Melanie all fail in love. Only Elena lives vicariously in Rollan's love by way of Henri.

In exploring the plastic beauty of women, Renoir often undermines popularly held beliefs about beauty. Renoir uses stars as his protagonists, to break the star coding which is quite common in the institutional mode of representation. It has been noted by Bazin, Bertin and other prominent critics that Renoir wanted to explore the limits of his wife Catherine Hessling's screen appeal to maximize public appreciation of his films. Even though Renoir does not display Catherine's sexual appeal in the traditions of the institutional mode of production, the close-ups of Catherine as Nana, with her exaggerated gestures, do evoke the power of her sexuality. Renoir must have been quite infatuated with the Lillian Gish/Mary Pickfordfish appearance of Catherine.

La Hessling, Lady of Misrule, transcends Zola's blonde Amazon to become a pocket venus of sulk, cajolery and command. With her prettily Napoleonic postures, her limbs light as petals, her air of fin-de-siècle Lillian Gish, Hessling's expressionistic pantomime of gestures becomes, precisely through its arbitrary,
irrational selection, vitalist, and false. They are the gestures of a goddess.

Hurrying down a long corridor, her bustled gown is like a lizard's or a fish's fin.

Renoir's inability to cast Catherine as Lulu is thus compensated by Janie Marèze's resemblance to the matinée idol image of Catherine Hessling. Even the maid's resemblance to Catherine's personality in *Boudu sauvé des eaux* point to Renoir's obsession with the Catherine image. By using the Hessling image, Renoir holds on to the fashionable woman in the [nineteen] twenties look. He, however, clearly breaks away from type casting as he starts experimenting with different actresses beginning with Valentine Tessier, in the thirties.

In Renoir's view, the mask is an important element of the women's persona. It is part of a woman's personality rather than of her make-up. Renoir's women in all the films analyzed in this monograph wear different masks for various reasons. Nana wears one particular mask for Muffat to ensure his complete devotion for her. Once assured of his unconditional attachment, she dismisses him and pursues Vandeuvres. For both Nana enjoys playing the goddess of love[ and sex]. With Bordenave she wears a mask for mortal combat to salvage her dignity and to maintain her existence as an artist. Lulu wears her mask of an enchantress for Legrand and other clients. Ironically, her success in hiding behind different masks makes her lose her sincerity and esteem in the eyes of Dédé, her dream lover. Dédé scoffs at her love and unyielding care thinking that Lulu's concern for him to be a part of her act. Emma successfully hides her infidelity to Charles. She uses Charles' absence well to keep her affair with Rodolphe alive. With Léon, Emma's illness provides her an alibi. Her ability to live the dual life of a doctor's innocent
wife and an adulterous woman, is helped in part by Charles' unwavering confidence and trust in Emma to do what is right. Elaborate make-up aids Christine mask her dual problem of solitude on the one hand, and craving to make her marriage work on the other. Christine maintains a dignified silence, a noticeable distance and a public explanation of her association with Jurieu, to respond to the scandalous rumors about her.

Melanie's personal dilemma about her own identity helps her veil her interest in Captain John. Elena's pretenses are more difficult to sustain. Elena protects herself from any criticism by keeping in her amorous affairs behind closed doors. Her fiancé's foolish eagerness to please her also allows her to get away with her infidelity. She suppresses any interest in Henri by expressing her interest in valor, ambition and ability to command public approval, all reflected in Rollan.

The mask is an important tool for the women to bargain for power and to serve their personal wants. Lulu's antics thus guarantee her Legrand's patronage, as do Nana's in Muffat's case. Christine does need to increase her power over anyone, but she uses her marital status to fend off advances from Jurieu and her possible friendship to Jurieu to arouse Robert's interest in her. When she thinks her chances of success with either Robert or Jurieu are feeble, she uses the cover of darkness and sentiments of childhood intimacy with Octave to plan an elopement.

The women analyzed in this study are defined by the impacts of their social roles. Often these roles are quite different from the conventional social norms. Thus these women can be observed from the standpoint of their roles as mother, daughter, daughter-
in-law, wife, mistress and so on. Some play many of these roles simultaneously. The women demonstrate some unusual characteristics in each of these roles.

This initiative to conquer their men also fills women with remorse and despondency when they lose their lovers. Nana's reaction to the double suicides is quite unusual. She seems extremely desolate, heart broken and even immediately following these mishaps, contracts small-pox, a fatal disease. Emma, too, replete with remorse over the loss of her lovers and insurmountable debt takes her own life. Even Harriet, who cannot be compared with Nana, Lulu or Emma, overcome with the loss of Bogey and Captain John, contemplates suicide.

The element of danger that these women present for their men does not make them monstrous femme fatales. The majority of women discussed in this work are "usually not placed safely in any of the familiar roles," as "mothers, wives, daughters, lovers, mistresses, whores, simply [to] provide the background for the ideological work of the film which is carried out through men." Instead defined by their sexuality, which is presented as desirable but dangerous to men, the women function not merely "as the obstacle to the male quest." The hero's success or failure does not exclusively depend on the degree to which he can extricate himself from the woman's manipulations. For example, Charles remains fully influenced by Emma's charms, yet Emma not Charles suffers ruination. The women are not the dark protagonists of film noir. Renoir, as noted earlier, does focus exclusively on their particular body parts to play with the power of their sexuality or in their "presentation as objects of desire."
wife and an adulterous woman, is helped in part by Charles' unwavering confidence and trust in Emma to do what is right. Elaborate make-up aids Christine mask her dual problem of solitude on the one hand, and craving to make her marriage work on the other. Christine maintains a dignified silence, a noticeable distance and a public explanation of her association with Jurieu, to respond to the scandalous rumors about her.

Melanie's personal dilemma about her own identity helps her veil her interest in Captain John. Elena's pretenses are more difficult to sustain. Elena protects herself from any criticism by keeping in her amorous affairs behind closed doors. Her fiancé's foolish eagerness to please her also allows her to get away with her infidelity. She suppresses any interest in Henri by expressing her interest in valor, ambition and ability to command public approval, all reflected in Rollan.

The mask is an important tool for the women to bargain for power and to serve their personal wants. Lulu's antics thus guarantee her Legrand's patronage, as do Nana's in Muffat's case. Christine does need to increase her power over anyone, but she uses her marital status to fend off advances from Jurieu and her possible friendship to Jurieu to arouse Robert's interest in her. When she thinks her chances of success with either Robert or Jurieu are feeble, she uses the cover of darkness and sentiments of childhood intimacy with Octave to plan an elopement.

The women analyzed in this study are defined by the impacts of their social roles. Often these roles are quite different from the conventional social norms. Thus these women can be observed from the standpoint of their roles as mother, daughter, daughter-
in-law, wife, mistress and so on. Some play many of these roles simultaneously. The
women demonstrate some unusual characteristics in each of these roles.

This initiative to conquer their men also fills women with remorse and
despondency when they lose their lovers. Nana's reaction to the double suicides is quite
unusual. She seems extremely desolate, heart broken and even immediately following
these mishaps, contracts small-pox, a fatal disease. Emma, too, replete with remorse over
the loss of her lovers and insurmountable debt takes her own life. Even Harriet, who
cannot be compared with Nana, Lulu or Emma, overcome with the loss of Bogey and
Captain John, contemplates suicide.

The element of danger that these women present for their men does not make
them monstrous femme fatales. The majority of women discussed in this work are
"usually not placed safely in any of the familiar roles," as "mothers, wives, daughters,
lovers, mistresses, whores, simply [to] provide the background for the ideological work
of the film which is carried out through men." Instead defined by their sexuality, which
is presented as desirable but dangerous to men, the women function" not merely "as the
obstacle to the male quest." The hero's success or failure does not exclusively depend on
the degree to which he can extricate himself from the woman's manipulations. For
example, Charles remains fully influenced by Emma's charms, yet Emma not Charles
suffers ruination. The women are not the dark protagonists of film noir. Renoir, as noted
earlier, does focus exclusively on their particular body parts to play with the power of
their sexuality or in their "presentation as objects of desire.
Bibliography

Books on Renoir


231


Articles and Interviews About Renoir


232


Suggested reading on Women’s issues


235
Suggested reading on French Cinema and National Cinema


236


