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**“About As Shapeless as the Man in the Moon”:
The Representation of Desire and Transition in Six Films of Charles Laughton**

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A Thesis in

The Department of Film Studies

**Presented in Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts at
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Abstract

“About As Shapeless as the Man in the Moon”:

The Representation of Desire and Transition in Six Films of Charles Laughton

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Concordia University, 2001

The performances of Charles Laughton in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, *Mutiny on the Bounty*, *Les Misérables*, *Rembrandt* and *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* communicate a thematically and stylistically coherent vision of human identity. Through these performances, Laughton expresses the limits and possibilities of freedom for the self. Drawing on major works of Mikhail Bakhtin and Gilles Deleuze, as well as related theoretical explorations of the representation of identity in film and performance, Laughton is approached as an artist who explores the different ways in which film acting can articulate characters who remain outside psychological or narrative definition. The discussion is a close textual reading of Laughton’s performances which focuses on the expressive means available to film actors, especially gesture, the use of dialogue and the use of the gaze. The one film which Laughton directed, *The Night of the Hunter*, is incorporated into the discussion and is taken as an example of the continuity of Laughton’s complex and profound explorations of individual self-awareness and identity.

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Introduction

A Poet is the most unpoetical of any thing in existence; because he has no Identity – he is continually in for – and filling some other Body – The Sun, the Moon, the Sea, and Men and Women who are creatures of impulse are poetical and have about them an unchangeable attribute – the poet has none; no identity – he is certainly the most unpoetical of all God's Creatures.

– John Keats

The desire for hearing and telling stories is universal and timeless. At base all forms of art are a fulfillment of that need for storytelling. The theatre and cinema are equipped to convey stories in a magical and unique way because of their potential to synthesize the visual, literary and plastic arts. And it is mainly through the actor's participation that we gain access to the rite of storytelling.

– Carole Zucker, *In the Company of Actors*

Michael Powell describes Charles Laughton as “an almost mystically talented actor...”¹ John Grierson writes that Laughton is “the greatest saboteur a film could have.”² Where do we locate these acts of sabotage, these expressions of an almost mystical talent in Laughton's performances? Grierson understands what Laughton *is* and what he can do *to* a film. But what does Laughton *create*, what does he do *in* a film? In his acts of sabotage he is always creative, and through his talent he creates moments of immense power. It is this movement between resistance to limits and creative expressions of possibilities which characterizes Laughton's film performances.

There have been no detailed studies devoted to Laughton's performances, at least none beyond a few paragraphs in encyclopedias of film actors and film reference guides. There have been three biographies of Laughton, and Elsa Lanchester – his wife – has written two partial biographies. From this meager selection, Simon Callow's *Charles*

Laughton: A Difficult Actor stands out. In it, Callow devotes extensive attention to Laughton's performance style, and describes each of Laughton's performances with an insight and precision that befits Callow's deep immersion in all aspects of theatre.

Callow writes that Laughton "wanted to show what human beings were, to offer the raw material: not to explain it... [this approach] is dead against the drift of acting in the twentieth century, where 'interpretation', both in directing and acting, has been the watchword: what does this character's behaviour *mean*? – not what is it? What is the play about? – never what is it?"³ Although Callow stresses this approach, as a biographer he also digs into Laughton's psyche. Occasionally, he replaces Laughton's performances with Laughton's life: "His every performance was an encounter with himself, a liberation of another subjugated part of his psyche,"⁴ "Laughton was always publicly owning up to something, usually something rather unpleasant,"⁵ "He was profoundly ill-at-ease in society, in his profession, even, perhaps especially, in his own body. He didn't like himself, felt himself to be wrong, odd, unlovely... He knows what he's like, and he painstakingly displays it."⁶ Callow's arguments are well-supported, but these descriptions of self-hatred and self-doubt are not definitive. We still remain with important questions of where we locate Laughton's immense talent on screen, how the formal and thematic concerns of Laughton's performances create meaning and how his challenge to the limits of performance relates to other issues endemic to the study of film.

It is here that criticism must adapt itself to the object of analysis. A close examination of Laughton's performances reveals tropes that extend far beyond the specific roles which he played – tropes which repeat from film to film and challenge the forms and strictures of character in classical film. David Bordwell writes that in the

classical film mode, “the character assumes a causal role because of his or her desires... The hero desires something new to his/her situation, or the hero seeks to restore an original state of affairs. This owes something to late nineteenth-century theatre, as seen in Ferdinand Brunetière’s dictum that the central law of the drama is that of conflict arising from obstacles to the character’s desire...”⁷ Laughton consistently works against this by creating characters who are in constant transition. His performances communicate “the sustaining excitement”⁸ that we find in stories of enchantment; he performs the “instability of appearances, these sudden swerves of destiny”⁹ that draw our attention, our emotions and our intellect. By foregoing clear paths of desire, he tells us stories of freedom and expression. His performances are not defined by the constraints of appearance, personality and role; they are creative expressions which go beyond any single definition in a movement towards desires and freedoms that will not be limited.

The theatrical traditions which Laughton understood and used must be taken into account. This could guide us to a clear understanding of the limits and aims of his performances. However, this route of analysis is complex due to the broad range of theatrical and performance traditions in which Laughton was immersed. Laughton’s early inspirations were wide-ranging.¹⁰ Laughton’s professional training at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Arts did not work to shape him to one performance mode; Callow describes the curriculum as “crowded and very straightforward: fencing, dancing, gesture, elocution.”¹¹ The broader training relied upon scene studies, and was “not based on any theory or system...”¹² Some of Laughton’s earliest stage performances (in “The Government Inspector,” “The Cherry Orchard” and “The Three Sisters”) were directed by Theodore Komisarjevsky, who brought “the English the experience of Russian as well

as continental staging techniques and help[ed] English theatre and culture break down the wall of 'magnificent isolation' that had been solidly and conscientiously built up by the Victorians.”¹³ Laughton's earliest theatrical interests, his training at RADA and his experiences with Komisarjevsky indicate the wide range of theatrical traditions in which Laughton had been immersed by the time he began performing on film. We cannot attribute one performance style or mode to Laughton – from these early experiences to his later Shakespearean performances and his collaboration with Bertolt Brecht, Laughton's theatrical interests and influences were diverse. Rather than limiting the scope of the discussion, they expand it further.

Synopses and Outline

In order to explore how Laughton's creates meaning through performance, I have selected five of his most important performances for a close examination: King Henry VIII in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (Korda, 1933), Javert in *Les Misérables* (Boleslawski, 1935), Captain Bligh in *Mutiny on the Bounty* (Lloyd, 1935), Rembrandt in *Rembrandt* (Korda, 1936) and Quasimodo in *The Hunchback of Notre Dame* (Dieterle, 1939). These performances are taken from what Callow indicates are the “half dozen of Laughton's performances of the thirties [which] are of an originality and an intensity that sets them apart from the work of almost any other actor of the century, however skilled, however truthful, however audacious.”¹⁴

The coherent vision which Laughton expresses through these performances leads us to address a film in which Laughton did not perform, *The Night of the Hunter* (Laughton, 1955). Paul Hammond writes that “The film's a freak, an anomaly, an oasis...

Since it is Laughton's sole directorial credit, we can forget any obligations to consider it part and parcel of a grander auteurist design. With no other films to go on it is difficult to know how much of *Hunter* is Laughton."¹⁵ On the contrary, it is crucial to understand how this film interrelates with the thematic and stylistic concerns of Laughton's performances. Of course, the different forms preclude any direct stylistic connections. But we can see a range of similarities. From shared conceptions of objectivity and subjectivity to a similar exploration of formless desire, *Night of the Hunter* is very much part of Laughton's body of work. Although it was his first and only film, Laughton essentially shaped the film, directing, co-writing and co-editing it.¹⁶ This is not to minimize the extraordinary role played by his collaborators, and particularly the cinematographer Stanley Cortez. But through specific concerns and authorial touches, Laughton leaves his distinctive mark upon this enigmatic masterpiece. Cortez describes the strength of Laughton's artistic vision: "I became the student and Charles became the professor... Not from a technical viewpoint, but from a philosophical point of view, his thoughts and feelings from an actor's point of view and a writer's..."¹⁷ Cortez also notes that "Apart from *Ambersons*, the most exciting experience I have had in the cinema was with Charlie Laughton on *Night of the Hunter*."¹⁸ Also, Robert Mitchum's brilliant performance and Davis Grubb's under-appreciated source novel demonstrate that filmmaking is a collaborative process. Nevertheless, the shift in focus to Laughton's role as director will allow us to trace a consistent path from this later work to his earlier performances.

Night of the Hunter tells the story of two young children, Pearl (Sally Ann Brice) and John Harper (Billy Chapin), who escape from a nightmarish adult world. The world

they escape from is represented by naïve townspeople susceptible to the wolfish charms of Harry Powell (Robert Mitchum), a wife-murderer and a false preacher. Powell is searching for a stash of money which he knows is hidden in the children's home. In an effort to get the money, he marries the children's widowed mother, Willa Harper (Shelley Winters). He murders her when she discovers his duplicity. The children escape, carried away on the currents of river – in some of the most magical scenes in the history of cinema – until they are discovered by an elderly woman, Rachel (Lillian Gish). She successfully protects them from Powell and provides a new home for them.

It is difficult to provide a summary of Laughton's characters which I will be discussing, since his performances problematize any simple understanding of character. For instance, it would seem that Quasimodo, in *Hunchback*, falls in love with Esmerelda and at the end of the film is forced to realize the limits of his desire. Instead, the melodramatic shadings of this tragic and pitiful character are completely erased by Laughton's performance – Quasimodo's desires in the film, as will be discussed later, are as shapeless his grotesque figure.

Nevertheless, a brief summary of each film is necessary. Both *Henry VIII*, the film which established Laughton's popularity, and *Rembrandt* are episodic biographies of the famous historical figures. Graham Greene writes that *Rembrandt* is "ruined by lack of story and continuity: it has no drive. Like *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, it is a series of unrelated tableaux."¹⁹ Despite this episodic nature, the films endeavor to depict a vision of enormously powerful characters (a king and a great artist) realizing their limits through repeated situations of loss and failure. Both films end with their characters seemingly resigned to their fate.

The narrative drive of *Les Misérables* and *Mutiny* is much stronger than that of *Henry VIII* and *Rembrandt*. Laughton's roles in these two films depict socially defined characters, a chief of police and a ship's captain, whose power is challenged. Both characters then obsessively pursue the one who would usurp their right to power. In *Les Misérables*, Inspector Javert (Laughton) discovers that his superior, Jean Valjean (Fredric March), is an escaped convict. This allows Javert an opportunity to assert his power – the law – over a character who has a much less rigid conception of the world. Captain Bligh, in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, is similarly insistent on the rule of law, often carrying it to excessive extremes. After the mutiny, he obsessively pursues the leader of the mutineers, Fletcher Christian (Clark Gable). While these two narratives of power and vengeance resolve themselves differently, the characters are connected by their maniacal reliance on the rule of the law.

Laughton's role in *Hunchback*, as noted earlier, depicts a suffering, pitiful and grotesque character who cannot satisfy his desires. The film shows Quasimodo's gradual escape from the domineering control of his adoptive father, Frollo (Cedric Hardwicke), largely through the liberation of his desires through a longing for Esmerelda (Maureen O'Hara). All of these roles are connected by their depiction of limits. Characters either come to accept the limits of their desires or come to represent the dangers of desire without limits. Yet Laughton's performances expand any simple, reductive reading of these characters and establish emotionally alive and vivid characters searching for self-understanding and freedom.

The analysis which follows is essentially a close textual reading, analyzing formal patterns of resemblance between and within Laughton's performances. I will draw on a

range of related theorists who discuss performance, film form and representations of the body in order to indicate, sometimes implicitly and sometimes explicitly, different ways in which we can see film performance as part of a larger critical discourse. Laughton provides an ideal subject for this exploration, since his performances directly challenge many assumptions regarding the limits and possibilities of film performance.

In the first chapter, I will explore how Laughton creates characters, through performance, who can only be defined dialogically – in constant relation to others, the world and their own selves. Laughton's performances also frequently parody the rigidly defined self, particularly in terms of institutional roles. This will be explored in terms of Mikhail Bakhtin's analyses of dialogism and grotesque realism. I will connect this to the ways in which Laughton's performances create characters who resist a social and psychological definition which can explain their inner core. His characters engage with the world in a process of interaction and uncertainty.

The second chapter examines Laughton's use of the gaze to destabilize the representation of character. Laughton's careful manipulation of the gaze commands space onscreen, and helps problematize the distinction between characters to be looked at and character to be looked with. This chapter relies on explorations of cinematic and artistic form in the writings of Noël Burch, Michael Fried and Pier Paolo Pasolini to illuminate the different ways in which Laughton manipulates perception.

I will then focus on the recurring moments of transcendence coupled with wisdom that are created through Laughton's storytelling, or recitals of literary texts, in his films. This is a means for him to move outside of character, or very deeply within, by creating a unity of thought, feeling and desire through another's words. In this respect, Laughton

anchors identity in vocal rhythm and bodily expression rather than through a psychological or social definition. This returns him to the raw materials of performance – the body and the word – and also allows him to reflect on the artistic process, both in his portrayal of Rembrandt and in his own role as performer.

The fourth chapter examines the ways in which Laughton represents a transcendent escape through expressions of formless desire. This analysis will refer particularly to Gilles Deleuze's discussions of the affection-image and the becoming-animal. Laughton's performances and filmmaking become powerful tools for depicting freedom from social and narrative roles.

I will conclude with a discussion of some of the ways in which Laughton expresses a psychological undercurrent in his characters which embraces the death instinct. Laughton explores the relation between masochism and sadism in his films, and he expresses suffering and cruelty in strikingly powerful moments. This becomes the most direct way in which Laughton shows us his creations struggling to assert themselves in a world which demands rigidity and definition in place of engagement and transition.

Several important issues raised by Laughton's performances will not be discussed directly, and provide material for future analysis. For instance, Laughton's problematic and complex relation to issues of stardom and nationality inform many of his performances. Laughton also raises the subject of his homosexuality – which is a subtext throughout Callow's biography – in many of his performances (perhaps most directly in *The Sign of the Cross* (De Mille, 1932) and *Les Misérables*). These, and other important issues, are beyond the scope of the current discussion.

Laughton Under the Microscope

Let us briefly return to the questions raised at the beginning – where and how we can locate Laughton’s brilliance in performance. Josef von Sternberg, in *Fun in a Chinese Laundry*, chooses optical means to search for Laughton’s artistic core:

On the slide to be examined is a lump of clay shaped like an ideal Falstaff. Whether or not Mr. Laughton played at being Falstaff, I don’t know; whenever he ruminated, he chewed the cud of his versions of Nero, Henry VIII, Rembrandt, Quasimodo, and Captain Bligh... The well from which a man draws his talent is deep, but Laughton’s well had no bottom.²⁰

But, typically with descriptions of Laughton, such praise – however ironic – comes with a caveat. Although often the limits ascribed to Laughton involve his physical appearance or his excesses, von Sternberg is quite simply mystified by his method:

It must be admitted that his well of talent had never been a concern of mine, nor did I on this occasion check to see if the rope was worn or the pulleys creaked or whether the holes in the bucket were too many. He had made some reference, while I was preparing the work, to how he had arrived at Rembrandt by studying Italian, and at Henry VIII by looking over the Runic alphabet, but it never occurred to me that he was serious, and had I thought he was I would not have cared to know how he arrived at anything so long as he got there.

Simon Callow describes what it was in Laughton that exasperated von Sternberg: “his stand: that the actor’s work, in its complexity, difficulty and sheer human cost must be acknowledged and abetted. It was the spigot’s revolt. Laughton was insisting that, as he had proved in innumerable dull and clichéd scripts, he was both the conduit and the source of the liquid.”²¹ But despite his plainer assertions of what it is that Laughton was after, Callow ultimately – perhaps of necessity – relies on similarly abstract metaphors: for von Sternberg it is the well, for Callow it is the liquid. How do we move beyond these abstractions to understand the most complex aspects of Laughton’s performances?

The analogy of a microscope which begins von Sternberg's ironic discussion is a powerfully apt analogy for the study of performance. Béla Balázs writes that the close-up "simplified the story of the film and deepened and brought to dramatic life its smallest details, succeeded in lending dramatic tension to a mere state or condition, without any external event at all... The micro-tragedies in the peace and quiet of ordinary families were shown as deadly battles, just as the microscope shows the fierce struggles of micro-organisms in a drop of water."²² Callow seems to pick up on this analogy, writing that "it is exactly this ability to form a character out of a thousand living cells which together form a breathing, complex organism that fitted [Laughton] so wonderfully for the screen with its microscopic sensitivity."²³

The analogy of the microscope also reflects the trend in approaches to vision in the early part of the 20th century where what is invisible became visible, and the impression that by observing something closely enough, it could be understood and freed from forces thought to be innate. Freud writes that "It is true that psychoanalysis cannot boast that it has never occupied itself with trifles. On the contrary, the material of its observations is usually those commonplace occurrences which have been cast aside as all too insignificant by other sciences, the refuse, so to speak, of the phenomenal world."²⁴ There is probably no art more concerned with "the refuse of the phenomenal world" than film, and film acting – or a particular way of approaching film acting – reveals the human face which makes this possible.

Walter Benjamin, in many respects a philosopher whose work rests upon the refuse of modernity, connects Freud's *Psychopathology of Everyday Life* to film acting:

[Freud] isolated and made analyzable things which had heretofore floated along unnoticed in the broad stream of perception. For the entire spectrum

of optical, and now also acoustical, perception the film has brought about a similar deepening of apperception... As compared with painting, filmed behavior lends itself more readily to analysis because of its incomparably more precise statements of the situation. In comparison with the stage scene, the filmed behavior item lends itself more readily to analysis because it can be isolated more easily.²⁵

What Benjamin refers to as “filmed behavior” is film acting – that is why he compares it to other artistic modes. Benjamin goes on to note that the representation and observation of minute details “extends our comprehension of the necessities which rule our lives [and] manages to assure us of an immense and unexpected field of action.”²⁶ Thus, awareness deepens our ability to act freely.

This is Benjamin's observational version of what Brecht described as a presentational activity. Brecht wrote that an actor should

discover, specify, imply what he is not doing; that is to say he will act in such a way that the alternative emerges as clearly as possible, that his acting allows the other possibilities to be inferred and only represents one out of the possible variants.... In this way every sentence and every gesture signifies a decision; the character remains under observation and is tested. The technical term for this procedure is “fixing the ‘not... but’”.²⁷

The shared desire of Benjamin and Brecht – to reveal freedom, whether through perception or creation – is a beautiful goal.

This revelation of hidden mechanisms as a move toward freedom from the forces which control our lives is Laughton's aim in performance. Brecht, who collaborated with Laughton on the staging and translation of *Galileo*, writes, “Asked why he acted, L. answered: ‘Because people don't know what they are like, and I think I can show them.’ His collaboration in the rewriting of the play showed that he had all sorts of ideas which were begging to be disseminated, about how people *really* live together, about the motive forces that need to be taken into account here.”²⁸ The incisiveness of this approach to

performance is often lost when it becomes subsumed to pre-conceived notions of the limits of film acting. Thus, we must match our method with our object of analysis by exploring through detailed description and analysis the elements of Laughton's performances which lie beneath – and thus move beyond – the broader strata of role, director, narrative and film mode.

1. Performing Dialogism

I rather think Laughton got the part [as Galileo] because Brecht had seen the ravenous eating he did in the Henry VIII film... It will be recalled that Brecht's word both for commercial entertainment and for the sensuous, thought-inhibiting, action-inhibiting high art of our era was: culinary.
– Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries*

What animals dream of I do not know. A proverb for which I am indebted to one of my pupils professes to tell us, for it asks the question: "What does the goose dream of?" and answers: "Of maize." The whole theory that the dream is the fulfillment of a wish is contained in these two sentences.
– Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*

Laughton's first appearance in a feature film was in a brief scene in E. A. Dupont's *Picadilly* (1929). Laughton plays a businessman, sitting alone, in a musical club. He is drunk and he looks down at a plate on his table, as if deep in concentration. He touches it, slowly raises his hand close to his face and rubs his fingers together. The plate is dirty. He peers down at it again, as if it were a crime scene. A waiter comes by and Laughton contemptuously motions down at the plate, tells him it is dirty (as the intertitle states) and begins to create a fuss. Other waiters come along, and finally the situation is corrected. Laughton's obnoxious character returns to eating – chewing with an open mouth and an intense, vacant stare. In this early scene, Laughton creates a model for later performances of self-satisfied characters who are oblivious to the world around them.

Another scene of eating occurs midway through *Mutiny*. As Bligh shares a meal with his fellow officers, he laughs at one of his own jokes in an awkwardly formal

manner – a little “tut tut.” Later in the scene, he is affronted when Christian refuses a piece of cheese. The sailors above deck are starving due to Bligh’s slashing of their rations, and Christian’s refusal to partake of this cruel banquet indicates his resistance to Bligh’s selfish world. Eating often functions as a metonymy for character in Laughton’s films; the way his characters eat reflects the way they relate to the world. These scenes of consumption can be discussed in terms of Bakhtin’s analysis of grotesque realism. For Bakhtin, the artistic representation of consumption becomes degraded through its depiction as “the contentment and satiety of the selfish individual, his personal enjoyment, and not the triumph of the people as a whole... It is a static way of private life, deprived of any symbolic openings and universal meaning...”²⁹ Similarly, laughter, which is “the characteristic trait of every expression of the grotesque,” must be part of a social and regenerative process or else it loses its essence, its “gay and joyful tone.”³⁰ These central motifs of grotesque realism, as evidenced in the writing of François Rabelais, are consciously parodied in these scenes of wealth and power, but they are also used positively throughout Laughton’s performances. Consumption is not only culinary or wish-fulfilling for Laughton, it is also social, relational and festive.

Bakhtin connects grotesque realism to the novels of Dostoevsky, demonstrating that they share a preoccupation with characters who are defined through interaction and dialogue with the world, with one another, or even within themselves. Together, these elements contribute to Bakhtin’s project which, as Tzvetan Todorov describes it, endeavors to demonstrate that “*the interhuman is constitutive of the human.*”³¹ Since Bakhtin focuses on relations between and within characters, he does not see narrative structure or individual motivation as determining factors. This approach is a fruitful one

for the study of film actors, like Charles Laughton, who bring characters outside the bounds of narrative. Wayne C. Booth, in his introduction to *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, writes that “most of what Bakhtin has to say would not be affected if we discovered new manuscripts that scrambled the order of events, or the handling of flashbacks and foreshadowings, or the manipulations of point of view... If Bakhtin is right, a very great deal of what we Western critics have spent our time on is mistaken, or trivial, or both.”³² Bakhtin is interested in the dialogism of individual scenes and moments, “crisis times,” as revealed through dialogue and interaction.

This chapter explores, through Bakhtin’s theories, how Laughton represents characters who resist definition and are instead constituted dialogically. Laughton’s performances often show a pseudo-grotesque vision of the body and an engagement with the materiality of the world; and, perhaps even more frequently, they show the parodic extreme opposite of this. This central element of Laughton’s performances is most strikingly visible in his dialogical characters who are constituted by multiple desires and who consistently try to hide their inner complexity from others. These complex characters are not ultimately defined by a single motivation or desire, nor are they subsumable to social, physiognomic or cultural types. Instead, their fluid identities emerge through dialogue, with others as well as with themselves. To discuss these elements of performance, I will begin by discussing two characters who are emblematic of grotesque realism and dialogism, respectively. First, I will discuss Laughton’s performance of King Henry in *Henry VIII* as an example of grotesque realism – a celebratory character in engagement with the world, without an interior he can conceal and without a stable center from which to experience the world. The second performance

I will discuss is Javert in *Les Misérables*. His fluctuating responses and desires provide a psychological corollary to Henry's excesses without abandoning the same essential formlessness and relational identity. I will then turn to two forms of defining identity which Laughton's performances parody or resist: the physiognomy and the statement of self. I will conclude with a discussion of how Laughton's consistent representation of open, unfinalizeable selves inflects the narrative chronotopes of the films in which he starred.

Grotesque Realism

Bakhtin describes the modern image of the body as virtually a catalogue of what an actor, in the traditions of psychological naturalism, is supposedly meant to show: "the leading role is attributed to the individually characteristic and expressive parts of the body: the head, face, eyes, lips, to the muscular system, and to the place of the body in the external world. The exact position and movements of this finished body in the finished outside world are brought out, so that the limits between them are not weakened."³³ In *Henry VIII*, Laughton plays Henry as diametrically opposed to this conception of revealing interior meaning. Henry does not indicate his frustration or his desire through facial gestures and shifts in modulating tone, he *announces* it through shouting and stomping. When angered by his drunken fiancée, he shouts polite small talk, "Permit me to express! uh! that a short rest will restore you to health madame!" Flirting with a pretty costumier, he looks at her directly, lifts her chin and asks her name. She replies softly, "Katherine Heard, if it please your majesty." He pauses and, inches away from her face, shouts, "It does Katherine! It does!" He stares at what he desires; he takes

what he wants. The film itself is balanced between Laughton's comic grotesque and a more restrained comic naturalism, between Laughton's expressive life and the narrative's keyhole genre. Laughton's expressivity clearly dominates.

This mode of performance is visible in Laughton's use of declamatory gestures. In a scene early in the film, Henry and Cromwell are discussing the possibility of war. Henry shouts at him "Diplomacy, diplomacy, me foot! I'm an Englishman and I can't say one thing and mean another! What I can do is to build ships, ships, and more ships!" The speech itself indicates the materiality of Henry, unable to "say one thing and mean another." The declamatory and gestural nature of the speech accentuates this directness: he stamps his foot when he says "me foot," he sweeps his arm when he says "I'm an Englishman" and he raises his thumb when he says "build ships." As he continues to argue his point, he raises his thumb again to mark his most extreme points, even holding it up to signal the end of his speech. It is a wonderfully appropriate image – signifying both the craftsmanship of a shipbuilder (trying to match a line) and the power of a king. The immediacy and fluidity of each one of these gestures suggests that Henry does not need to make an effort to announce his thoughts through action – this form of expression is his very way of being in the world.

The same gestural essence is revealed in scenes that would appear to be more personal than public. Presented with a painting of his wife-to-be, Anne of Cleves, Henry walks into a room of milling people. He stops inches in front of the painting and looks at it as one would "act out" art connoisseurship (except with a quickened pace, adding to the humour of the scene): his head moves in punctuated steps up and down, side to side; he says a quick "hmm..." in fake contemplation; he steps back to take in the whole painting.

Turning to an attendant, he asks what she thinks, his head dashing back and forth between her and the painting. She tells him, “charming your grace.” He is pleased, and he begins to laugh softly. But someone asks him what *he* thinks. He continues laughing softly, and absent-mindedly says “yes.” Realizing that the previous comment has questioned him, he turns and growls a frustrated “hrrr” and then a thoughtful “hmm” as he suddenly turns back to the painting. He nods and walks off quickly. These gestures seem automatic. Henry is only responsive to the immediate situation in his environment, seemingly without internal thoughts or emotions that carry him through from moment to moment or scene to scene.

Henry’s expressivity seems to embrace the world; he is always working to unify everyone’s pleasures with his own. This manifests itself most directly through laughter. Throughout the film laughter marks the transition from Henry’s personal satisfaction to a desire to include others in his experience. This is the carnival laughter of grotesque realism, “not an individual reaction to some isolated ‘comic’ event. Carnival laughter is the laughter of all the people... it is universal in scope; it is directed to all and everyone.”³⁴ Whether pleased with his new wife’s naiveté, his infant son, or his own joke, Henry’s laughter continues in rolling, heaving sounds – demanding not only to be heard, but to be joined as well.

The well-known banquet scene is a tour de force of grotesque realism which encapsulates these different elements of expressivity. It begins quietly. Something has disrupted the festivities; the banquet is out of joint. Henry drinks gravy from a flask, burps loudly as he pours it on his chicken, and pounds the chicken with his fist – spraying the patient Cromwell. Henry’s mouth is open as he chews, he coughs coarsely, and he

throws scraps of meat behind him. But, it is not this grotesque behavior which indicates things are wrong. Nor is it because, as Henry loudly exclaims, the food is too dry (“call this a capon?”) or the audience too quiet (“are you all dumb?”). The problem is that the generative power of the king is in doubt. His advisors and his subjects are encouraging him to marry again and have another son. He wants to end this role. “Am I the king or a breeding bull?” he asks those gathered in the banquet hall. Henry wants to be an *individual*, his own man, in control of his own life.

But things become set right again. Katherine bravely offers to sing a song. Sex returns to the atmosphere as Henry rubs his beard while staring intently. His body begins to move again, as he absently marks the rhythm of the song by waving his hands in time. And dialogue has returned: “Do you know that I wrote [the song you will sing]?” As Katherine sings, we see Henry’s body slowly relax its forward tension. Relieved, he tells Cromwell he would have a fourth marriage, and he would “consider it the victory of optimism over experience.” And that is just what the scene is. The *optimism* of food, sexuality, song and body returns; the *experience* of self, personality and individuality vanishes. After saying this line, Henry lets loose another one of his booming rolling laughs, and it is infectious – Korda’s camera travels with rows of guests, who join in the merriment. The laugh, in a scene reminiscent of the famous opening of *Love Me Tonight* (Mamoulian, 1932), reaches down to the guards and the kitchen, finally dying out in Henry’s abrupt cough. In this scene, individual victory is absent, and Henry’s pleasure is the same as his people’s; Bakhtin writes that “The popular images of food and drink are active and triumphant... They express the people as a whole because they are based on the inexhaustible, ever-growing abundance of the material principle.”³⁵ There’s nothing

pitiable in his acquiescence to remarry. All sense of sadness, enforced by a social role, is absent because his body is not an individual's, his laughter is not only his own and his character is the people.

Bakhtin sees the modern approach to the body as one where "All that happens within it concerns it alone, that is, only the individual, closed sphere... death is only death, it never coincides with birth; old age is torn away from youth... All actions and events are interpreted on the level of a single, individual life."³⁶ In the last scene of *Henry VIII*, Laughton continues to perform an escape from this individuality, representing motifs of marriage, death and consumption. Henry has married the last of his wives, who tends to him with motherly irritation. His immense power is tamed. As she scolds him for eating too much, we see him nibbling at the food in his mouth like a ruminating calf. He strikes a gentle pose, with his pouty lips and slow chewing. When she leaves, thinking he has fallen asleep, he peers out of the corner of his eye, and his head turns slowly to check if she has left. He stands up, fussing to get his blanket off. With little steps, he makes his way to the food on the table and returns to his chair with a piece of meat. He faces the camera and addresses the audience directly: "Six wives and the best of them's the worst," continuing to chew at the meat in his mouth.

In the script, his movements are described as: "with a spark of the old vigour, he kicks off the blanket, rises and shuffles off to the side-table... [where] he attacks the succulent morsel."³⁷ Laughton plays it much differently – his Henry does not need to assert his youth to satisfactorily end the comedy. In the grotesque worldview, old age and youth are simply part of the same cycle, and the vanishing of life is not an end. Laughton's performance in this scene celebrates the potential for victory through images

of festivity and desire rather than a literal return to vigour. Bakhtin writes, "The fact is that 'a feast' and 'a wedding,' put together in the nuptial banquet, offer a completed picture: the potentiality of a new beginning instead of the abstract and bare ending. Characteristically enough, death is never such a completion in the folktale."³⁸ The performance effectively shows the unity of marriage, death and consumption as part of a cycle. Victory overwhelms, even in old age, and the film itself becomes a joyous representation of the powers of unbridled selfhood in relation to the world.

Laughton's commitment to the representation of Henry's excesses, describing him as a "temperamental child, the victim of conceit and his way of living,"³⁹ lends Henry a powerful elements of joyous narcissism. Freud writes that "Illness, death, renunciation of enjoyment, restrictions on [the narcissist's] own will, shall not touch him; the laws of nature and of society shall be abrogated in his favour; he shall once more really be the centre and core of creation – 'His Majesty the Baby', as we once fancied ourselves."⁴⁰ This also explains some of the appeal of a character who is, in some respects, actually quite abhorrent. Freud writes that "The charm of a child lies to a great extent in his narcissism, his self-contentment and inaccessibility, just as does the charm of certain animals which seem not to concern themselves about us, such as cats and the large beasts of prey. Indeed, even great criminals and humorists, as they are represented in literature, compel our interest..."⁴¹ Laughton does not play Henry as a victim or a failure, but rather as an exuberant and powerful vision of an unrestricted self, a bundle of joyfully unrestrained desires.

Dialogism

These motifs of expressivity and bodily engagement are not the only means for Laughton to create open, unfinished characters. To an even greater degree than his reliance on elements of the grotesque, Laughton draws on the complexities and contradictions of dialogical performance. R. Barton Palmer has noted that film scholars have tended to focus on dialogism in film in terms of the relationship between film and audience. Palmer writes that the subject can be more appropriately directed to the representatives of speech within films, the characters: "we may conceive of the cinema – or, at least, the sound cinema – as a secondary or elaborated speech genre which takes as its primary object of representation the dramatic dialogue of human communication."⁴² According to Palmer, dialogism in performance is almost always erased for the sake of a monologic voice and meaning, so that "hesitating sounds, sentences started but abandoned, phrases that lack clear meaning, for example, are eliminated; these are usually coded as 'bad acting'."⁴³ Robert Stam, in a reply to Palmer, picks up on this interest in performance, and expands it to include performative details which do not depend upon an exchange between characters, but which can be seen in an individual character:

cinema is superbly equipped to present the extra-verbal aspects of linguistic discourse.... [since] we not only hear the words, with their accent and intonation, but also witness the facial or corporeal expression which accompanies the words – the posture of arrogance or resignation, the raised eyebrow, the look of distrust, the ironic glance which modifies the ostensible meaning of an utterance...⁴⁴

Laughton's performances are fundamentally structured around these expressive acts which belie stability and single-toned expression.

Laughton's early performance as Sir William Porterhouse in James Whale's *The Old Dark House* (Whale, 1932) provides an example of these concerns by the way in which Laughton inflects this supporting character with a wealth of conflicted emotions and expressions.⁴⁵ Trapped in a haunted house on a rainy night with a group of travellers, Porterhouse is criticized by a fellow traveller regarding his businessman persona. Porterhouse angrily says, "Maybe I can see things a bit further than you suppose." After the traveler tries to calm the situation by telling him of his envy and admiration, Poerterhouse replies, "Oh yes you envy me alright but you don't admire me," adding in a voice of certainty, "I don't admire meself so much." As he say this, he looks down at the cigar in his hand, nervously. It will serve as the gestural prop for the rest of the speech and the same nervous look returns once his speech has ended. He switches from the introspective pose to a more defiant and direct one as he says, "I know that money making isn't everything, but let me tell you something..." The sense of him restraining tears begins to emerge in his face, as his mouth draws down and tightens.

He begins to tell his story to the assembled group, "I'm a young man see... married to a Manchester girl pretty as paint, the only thing in the world I care about, well, she dies. It's this way, my directors give a party, they ask us," he laughs a slight laugh and – remembering the day – a sense of nervous joy is visible in his face. He continues, "Red letter day for us I can tell you... I buy my first dress suit and Lucy has a new *frock*. A cotton frock." The look of pleasurable reminiscence has become a look of anger, and as he speaks the twitches of his mouth stand out in relief against his otherwise immobile face. We sense that he is reliving the experience and fighting off the rush of emotions that would follow if he were to truly give way to the memories. "It seems that Lucy didn't go

too well at that party, especially with the women. They snubbed her, nothing definite you know, just didn't think the cotton frock was good enough." The tears that were welling in his eyes subside, the lips no longer extend, the eyes no longer draw in, and he continues with a tone of regret, "Oh Lucy worried about it, gets it into her head that she's going to hold me back." He shifts to address his listeners directly, in a tone of frustration and defiance, "Well you may not believe it but I know that's what killed her. That's what started me making money, I swore I'd smash those fellows and their wives who wouldn't give my Lucy a kind word, ha, and I have smashed them, at least most of them." He looks back to the cigar, "Once you've started making money it's hard to stop, especially if you're like me – there isn't much else you're good at."

The striking shifts in emotion that course through the monologue are created by the discrepancy between Porterhouse's conflicted memories of the past and an uncertainty in how to present himself in his current context. This inability to understand and adapt leads to the type of vow – "I swore I'd smash those fellows" – which recurs in many of Laughton's performances when characters find themselves dangerously uncertain and confused. The attempt to paste a single motivation onto themselves may hide, but not erase, their inner turmoil. We see a compressed version of Porterhouse's emotional and intellectual life in this single speech, which constitutes Laughton's only major scene in the film. A living and complex figure emerges through Laughton's use of dialogue within the self and with those around him.

A scene early in *Les Misérables* provides a much more elaborate example of this approach to performance. The scene is a confrontation between Javert and Valjean. It seems that Javert has discovered that Valjean – the superior who he hates – is actually an

escaped convict. But Javert has not discovered this secret; it is quickly revealed that the scene is really about Javert's feelings of guilt and self-hatred for believing he has wrongly suspected an innocent man. Laughton's performance, however, turns the scene into more than simply an expression of guilt or shame.

With a quick stride, Valjean enters the room and offers a brusque "good evening." Javert does not look at him, absorbed with the "business" of sorting through letters. His eyes are tilted down so that we cannot see them. As Javert informs Valjean that he has "an urgent duty to perform" and that "an agent of the government has committed a crime," his tone is almost without inflection. Despite parenthetical comments, brief pauses and the highly charged narrative suspense of the scene, he does not significantly alter his droll, emotionless delivery. Valjean nervously asks him, "who is the agent?" Javert's eyebrows rise slightly, and he slowly says, in the same emotionless tone, "It is I."

After this difficult admission, Javert looks up for the first time in the scene. He moves his head and his eyes bulge as they see Valjean. For a brief moment he seems genuinely terrified. The show of business, formality and everyday duty is over. He continues assuredly and plainly, looking directly into the eyes of Valjean, "You must proffer charges against me, you have the right. I who demand justice for others must demand it for myself, you see... uh... I... uh... denounced you to the prefect of police." The direct and decisive tone breaks apart in the elongated "uhs" and the awkward shift of his eyes from Valjean to the table. His head, ashamedly, tilts down. Javert's eyes remain looking away, upper offscreen right until Valjean asks "Well?" Javert looks at him again, and the same look of horror flashes across his face as it did earlier, except this time his eyes cannot even meet Valjean's and he averts his gaze. As he continues his explanation,

his head bobs up and down, shooting brief glances at Valjean. As he replies that he must be dismissed, a quiver enters his voice, and several words seem almost accompanied by a laugh. He gives the impression of struggling against breathlessness and an uncontrollable anxiety while trying to appear calm. He finally turns to face Valjean, says the last of his words, and lowers his head. With his head down, he describes himself as a “f-f-fool!” He continues his explanation of the events and how he is deserving of punishment, and he continues to glance at Valjean – reading his expressions.

When Valjean surprises him, telling him that he did his duty, that it is his job to suspect, Javert turns to face him for only the second extended time in the scene. He demands punishment, and offers a speech for why it is necessary, “I too have my creed.” His head is immobile, strongly addressing Valjean, until at the end he is almost shouting. When Valjean says, “I make no charge against you,” Javert does shout, “You must! If you don’t, then I must!” Valjean still refuses. Javert retreats – looking away nervously. He also whispers – a marked contrast from the shouting that the scene had built to – the scene’s final lines, “You’re too lenient, but I’ll do as you say.” His face twitches nervously. Valjean has removed the world of duty – with its concomitant feelings of solidity and power – and Javert is left unmoored.

In Hugo’s novel, Javert is bound to duty: his “eyes cast down with an expression between that of a soldier before his officer and a prisoner before his judge,”⁴⁶ his “face, simple and impenetrable as granite, [showing only] a gloomy sadness,”⁴⁷ and his “tone of proud humility, a desperate and resolute tone, which gave an indescribably whimsical grandeur to the oddly honest man.”⁴⁸ Laughton plays it much differently, contrasting several different characteristics. Javert is, first of all, efficient. Nothing in the “business”

of sorting letters indicates madness, nor does his remarkably strong line-readings suggest uncertainty. At the same time, the sudden explosions of uttered pauses and the wide-ranging use of the eyes indicates a profound fear. All this is undertaken with an economy of movement, a rigid bearing and only *flashes* of self-revelation.

In a description of the unfinalizability of the main character in Dostoevsky's *Notes From the Underground*, Bakhtin provides an approximation of the complex processes of dialogization in Javert:

What he fears most of all is that people might think he is repenting before someone, that he is asking someone's forgiveness, that he is reconciling himself to someone else's judgment or evaluation, that his self-affirmation is somehow in need of affirmation and recognition by another. And it is in the direction that he anticipates the other's response. But precisely in this act of anticipating the other's response and in responding to it he again demonstrates to the other (and to himself) his own dependence on the other. He fears that the other might think he fears that other's opinion. But through this fear he immediately demonstrates his own dependence on the other's consciousness, his own inability to be at peace with his own definition of self. With his refutation, he confirms precisely what he wishes to refute, and he knows it.⁴⁹

In a closely related discussion, Balázs writes that "film first made possible what, for lack of a better description, I call the 'polyphonic' play of features. By it I mean the appearance on the same face of contradictory expressions. In a sort of physiognomic chord a variety of feelings, passions and thoughts are synthesized in the play of features as an adequate expression of the multiplicity of the human soul."⁵⁰

Balázs goes on to discuss a scene with Asta Nielsen which demonstrates this polyphony: "First she feigns love, then she genuinely shows love, and as she is not permitted to be in love in good earnest, her face again registers a sham, a pretence of love. But now it is this pretence that is a lie. Now she is lying that she is lying. And we can see all this clearly in her face, over which she has drawn two different masks. At such

times an invisible face appears in front of the real one..."⁵¹ These words echo Bakhtin's tracing of the circuitous pathways of interior conflict.

The ability to show uncertain psychological states beneath a facade of assuredness – as if projecting a microscopic enlargement of a soul in tension – is one of Laughton's gifts: we see it in the eyes which bulge in *The Big Clock* (Farrow, 1948), the wiping of the nose in *Mutiny on the Bounty*, the awkward use of touch in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street* (Franklin, 1934) and the violent suddenness of movement in *St. Martin's Lane* (Whelan, 1938). *Les Misérables* has a fully worked out system of contrasts which precludes our monologization of the character. Bakhtin writes, "An enormous and intense dialogic activity is demanded of the author of a polyphonic novel: as soon as this activity slackens, the characters begin to congeal, they become mere things, and monologically formed chunks of life appear in the novel."⁵² A similarly enormous and intense dialogic activity is demanded of Laughton in his dialogic performances.

Physiognomy

Marguerite Duras describes the characters in *Hunter* as "des prototypes parfaits du bestiaire cinématographique américain."⁵³ Rather than a literal bestiary, however, she has in mind their representation of a social milieu. She writes that this reliance on typical social figures, where "La personne est absente du film," is responsible for the efficiency of American cinema.⁵⁴ Duras's perceptive comments lead us to consider what kind of bestiary Laughton has created in his performances. What are the typical character *types* which Laughton represents? A standard litany might list the social roles which he has played (king, functionary, misfit) or the psychosexual tendencies of his characters (sadist,

masochist, narcissist). Laughton's performances also reflect the pressures of class difference, familial conflicts and historical contexts. However, Laughton's characters are *not* defined by social or psychological roles, but are in a state of dialogue, transition and formlessness.

So we are left to ask, how do we examine the Laughton bestiary? Let us begin with a Hugolian approach. In *Les Misérables*, Hugo writes,

It is our conviction that if souls were visible to the eye we should distinctly see this strange fact that each individual of the human species corresponds to some one of the species of the animal creation; and we should clearly recognise the truth, hardly perceived by thinkers, that, from the oyster to the eagle, from the swine to the tiger, all animals are in man, and that each of them is in a man; sometimes even, several of them at a time.⁵⁵

These hidden creatures represent a primordial spirit within us, and they are the constitutive elements of our physiognomy, or our type. Hugo notes that we should not mistake their invisibility for their absence: "The visible *me* in no way authorises the thinker to deny the latent *me*."⁵⁶

Physiognomies are not only remnants of 19th century literature. Writing almost a century later, Balázs describes the relationship between the close-up and physiognomy as one where "we do what the ancients did in creating *gods* in man's image and breathing a human soul into them. The close-ups of the film are the creative instruments of this mighty visual anthropomorphism."⁵⁷ Whereas Balázs stresses the spectator's ability to perceive or create a physiognomy in the ambiguous image of the human face, the Expressionists were fascinated by their own ability to shape the appearance of physiognomies. Lotte Eisner writes that they sought to "isolate an object's 'most expressive expression'".⁵⁸ She notes how Balázs elaborates on this point: "an object can

be stylized by the accentuation of (in Balázs's words) its 'latent physiognomy'. This will permit the penetration of its visible aura."⁵⁹ While Balázs and the Expressionists saw the physiognomy as an essentially subjective creation – either on the part of the spectator or the artist – the idea of this latent physiognomic self, raised by both Hugo and Balázs, still seems to have held a mystical potential for unearthing an inner truth.

The latent Javert is stated by Hugo not in terms of social role, but in terms of animality: "Now, if we admit for a moment that there is in every man some one of the species of the animal creation, it will be easy for us to describe the guardian of the peace, Javert. The peasants of the Asturias believe that in every litter of wolves there is one dog, which is killed by the mother, lest on growing up it should devour the other little ones. Give a human face to this dog son of a wolf, and you will have Javert."⁶⁰ This type of description, directly and intrinsically connected to Hugo's worldview, will undergo a transformation over the course of the novel. Javert will emerge from this physiognomic straitjacket and become human by the end of novel. Laughton, however, has no interest in the physiognomic aspect of Hugo's Javert. From the very start, Laughton's Javert lacks the stability and definition that physiognomy implies. There is literally *nothing* innate in the character, only a self in seemingly dynamic tension with a series of personal memories, other characters and uncontrollable impulses.

Javert is an unsettling character partly due to the contradictory roles Laughton brings into play. This functions as, in some respects, a parody of the usual applicability of the physiognomy. Benjamin describes an important comforting function that physiognomies served during their heyday in 19th century Paris: "They assured people that everyone was, unencumbered by any factual knowledge, able to make out the

profession, the character, the background, and the life-style of passers-by. In these writings the ability appears as a gift which a good fairy bestows upon an inhabitant of a big city at birth.”⁶¹ Laughton rarely allows physiognomies to define his characters, and instead makes it difficult to dismiss them as understood and comprehensible.

Laughton does, however, give a physiognomic performance as Bligh in *Mutiny*. Like Javert, Laughton’s performance of Bligh is structured around issues of adherence to law, maintaining appearances and class antagonism (“*Mister Christian*”). But unlike Javert, Bligh never wavers. In some respects, the performance is a demonic portrait of power gone awry. More importantly, the performance explores what it is that makes us human by showing us someone who is utterly inhuman. Something in the script must have alighted Laughton to the birdlike characteristics of Bligh, for that is how he plays him. Head jutting forward, gazing out to the horizon, the character is a bird with his jealously guarded nest of stolen breadfruit and his shifting desires from nesting to hunting as the movie progresses. There are no indications of the human elements of conscience, doubt or self-knowledge in Bligh.

Indicative of the fundamental difference between this physiognomic performance and the dialogical Javert, Laughton’s performance of Bligh not only demonstrates this character’s lack of interest in communicating – choosing to command rather than engage in dialogue – but also demonstrates his *inability* to engage in dialogue. There is a price to pay for adopting the monologic voice of power, and Bligh represents this.

When Bligh is forced to engage in a speaking situation with a person who concerns him, there is a frightening absence of engagement. Early in the film, he enters his cabin with Christian, and as he hangs up his hat and readies his map, he makes small

talk and tries to strike a tone of familiarity. When Christian tells him that working on the ship was “not at my choosing sir” Bligh faces him and explains that he knew that. He says, “I like having a gentleman as my subordinate,” turns away, “being a self-made man,” grabs his nose and sniffs. Christian changes the subject and Bligh, in a terrifying image, continues to stare at him with a piercing, almost bemused look. As he explains the trip, he tilts his head down a little, and shifts his eyes on Christian slightly, until they’re almost shut. When Christian looks at him, he looks away for a moment. But then his eyes bulge as they defiantly stare back. Christian, all the time looking at him, acts as if he’s oblivious to this predatory gaze. It is a very strange moment – the only one like it in the entire film – and it effectively encapsulates Bligh’s birdlike way of interrelating with the world. That the eyes become *more* exaggerated when Christian turns to face him only indicates the animalistic way that Bligh will look, see and devour.

A similar representation of dialogue can be seen in the meeting between Bligh and the leader of the island on which they have landed. Bligh’s awkward and nervous movements as he *tries* to act friendly create a sad, pitiful image of a man who simply cannot and never will be able to relate to another human being. Bligh seems to think that communicating a look of sympathy and careful attention is accomplished by leaning forward as if in a search, carefully attending to every word another says. He is play-acting at listening, and it is a rather dark image of an inhuman self. He bows his head when he leaves the frame, and it is as if he is exiting stage right, relieved to be escaping from a performance where he forgot how to act.

Laughton’s villainous Bligh is not a dissimulator. It is a much more common approach in classical film to perform the villain as someone who is in control of

discourse, who can move between truth and falsehood in a manipulative and efficient fashion. Bligh does not seem to have this choice. His lies appear “out there,” his hidden selves are visible, his selfishness is clear. This obsessive, distanced behavior is shown to cost him his ability to communicate. Laughton’s performance of Javert also lacks the appeal of many film villains – rather than a character who seems free to act out his darkest impulses and desires, Javert seems ready to combust due to his confusion and lack of self-awareness. Unlike popular images of villainy, Laughton’s characters do not have power at their disposal. Whether through their exaggerated humanity (Javert’s conflicted emotions) or their exaggerated inhumanity (Bligh’s rigidity), their struggle to be part of the world is sad rather than impressive.

Statements of Self

A speaking situation which, by its very nature, seems to preclude the dialogization of a character is the “statement of self,” a key example of the “rhetorical excess” of melodrama.⁶² Peter Brooks writes that “One of the most immediately striking features of melodrama is the extent to which characters tend to say, directly and explicitly, their moral judgments of the world. From the start, they launch into a vocabulary of psychological and moral abstractions to characterize themselves and others.”⁶³ He describes this as indicating “a concern to be clear and unambiguous, related of course to an audience unused to subtleties, but also constitutive of the play’s structure and subject. Saying one’s own and another’s moral nature is an important part of melodrama’s action and substance.”⁶⁴ One archetypal locale for the statement of self is the trial, “a final public reading and judgment of signs which brings immanent justice into the open, into

operative relation with men's lives."⁶⁵ Bakhtin notes that "Toward the psychology of his day – as it was expressed in scientific and artistic literature, and as it was practiced in the law courts – Dostoevsky had no sympathy at all. He saw in it a degrading reification of a person's soul, a discounting of its freedom and its unfinalizability..."⁶⁶ Laughton performs trial scenes, which function as statements of self, in both *Les Misérables* and *Hunchback*. In keeping with his dialogical performances, Laughton inverts and parodies the function of the trial as a locus for expressing one's true nature.

A quite literal representation of the statement of self occurs in *Hunchback*. Quasimodo speaks for the first time when he is put on trial for pursuing Esmerelda. Surrounded by four guards and a crowd, shackled, he looks around and cries in a soft, raspy voice, "Quiet, quiet." It is a strange comment for a deaf man to take, and the sense of this tortured soul dealing with issues beyond his surroundings, from deep inside, is unmistakable. The judge is also deaf. He quickly asks Quasimodo his name, age and profession without noticing that his questions are met with only uncertain silence. The judge asks a scribe, "have you got all the prisoner's answers down?" The audience erupts in laughter, and Quasimodo, unaware that he is being humiliated, joins in and laughs along with them. We see his silent, open-mouthed laugh dwindle, and as if to end this openness, he lets out an abrupt sigh, exhaling and bringing his shoulders down. The judge finishes the questioning, "what is your defence?" Confused, but with a dawning awareness of his situation, Quasimodo shouts out a series of responses, "Quasimodo. Twenty-five next month. Bell ringer at nottera dame." He has answered the questions in the order they were given, met up with the precise definition of self demanded of him by the judge. The judge hears nothing, and between each description he builds on his

misinterpretation, deciding that Quasimodo pleads guilty and must be whipped.

Quasimodo stands restlessly and suddenly his head jerks down and we hear him whimper, as if slapped. The scene functions as a cruel parody of external dialogue – two deaf people in a trial, one laughing at oneself without knowing it. Quasimodo accentuates the cruelty by his willingness to play along, with neither resistance nor understanding.

In the first scene in *Les Misérables*, Javert stands before the police commissioner who asks him the reasons why his applications for promotion have so far been declined. In a close-up, Javert's lips tremble noticeably, his eyes swell and he says, "It's quite true what it says there. My mother *was* a tramp, my father *died* in the galleys, I myself *was* born in prison." He stops abruptly, his lips awkwardly sealed. It is worth noting how Laughton emphasizes the verbs. By foregoing the more obvious emphasis on the descriptive nouns, a lilting, free verse rhythm is created, where one sentence flows into the next rather than ending abruptly. Simon Callow notes how, when he mentions that his father was in prison, "The orb cracks – only for a second, but it is unforgettable, because it seems as if the whole man might split straight down the middle, such is the force of the impulse."⁶⁷ So slight is the fissure in his countenance, that if one looks away for a moment one would miss it completely. Having established such a rigid bearing, the slightest twinge stands out in sharp relief.

The commissioner asks for more and Javert continues, "I swore to myself that I would not be of that class. I swore to get out of it, and I did get out." Up to this point his eyes have been directed slightly upwards from the commissioner. His pupils now shift almost imperceptibly to look more in his direction, and his expression becomes more outwardly directed and more troubled, as if searching for approval. He continues: "I said

to myself there are only two classes of society, those who attack it and those who guard it. The book of regulations are *my bible*.” He draws out these words emphatically. The hint of what is demanded of one in a post-sacred world (some sort of law) continues, when he says, “Why, if you take this away from me... what is there left?” His nostrils flare, he pauses, opens and closes his mouth. “I beg you to believe, sir, that never would I fail in my duty to the *law*.” His head shifts slightly, as if straightening. “It’s my whole life, ever to fail would break me, sir.”

The awkwardness at the end, the searching for words once his gaze shifted to look at another, stands opposed to the painfully restrained delivery of the speech which had preceded it. Laughton creates the sense that Javert has rehearsed this speech, which makes the moments of vulnerability all the more powerful. Despite the most careful preparations, one reveals oneself. The scene is all the more astonishing if we consider the difference it is from Hugo’s text. In *Les Misérables*, Javert’s self-description is not reproduced through dialogue, but is instead part of the narration (e.g., “His mother was a fortune-teller whose husband was in the galleys.”⁶⁸) Laughton’s intonations and his creation of a specific speaking context – prepared, nervous, internal – adds a dialogic dimension to what is, for Hugo, a rather monologic description of self.

Laughton does, however, provide a monologic statement of self in his most famous scene from *Mutiny*. In a medium long shot, upon the shaky little boat that he has been given by the mutineers, Bligh cuts an archetypal figure dressed in white, a “man against the sea” with one hand on the boat and the other on his own leg. He shouts out in a loud, slightly hoarse voice, “Casting me adrift, thirty five hundred miles from port of *call*, you’re sending me to my doom, *eh*?” And then, elongating and stressing each word

in a shout of complete determination, “well you’re wrong Christian!” His fist shoots up when he says “Christian.” “I’ll take this boat as she *floats* to England if I must,” he says, his arm pointing into the ocean. His arm then points toward Christian, “I’ll live to see *you*,” and he then points to all of the sailors who remain on the ship in a broad gestural sweep, “all of you,” and finally upwards to the ship’s mast, shaking due to the fury of his speech, “hanging from the highest yardarm in the British fleet!” This synopsis of what has happened and what is to become of him is typically melodramatic. Its lack of irony, its gestural determinacy, and its one line of thought all separate it from Quasimodo and Javert’s thwarted self-expressions. The animal that is Bligh stands certain.

The Chronotope

The affinities with dialogism and grotesque realism that Laughton’s performances create inflect the narrative structure of the films through a focalization of a particular vision of space and time as it relates to character. This focalization is described by Bakhtin as a chronotope, “Literally ‘time-space.’ A unit of analysis for studying texts according to the ratio and nature of the temporal and spatial categories represented... The chronotope is an optic for reading texts as x-rays of the forces at work in the culture system from which they spring.”⁶⁹

The chronotope, in discussions of film, is often used to understand genre. For example, Vivian Sobchack, in her essay on the chronotope of film noir, uses the concept “as a way to comprehend how the concrete premises of noir ground its narrative premises...”⁷⁰ Sobchack’s use of the chronotope seems neutral, but behind it there is a devaluation of the individual’s centrality to narrative. She notes that “The men and

women who inhabit the urban lounges, hotels, and isolated roadside cafes and diners of noir are restless, are transients... In sum, they embody and narrativize the very quality of the spaces in which they spend aimless time: they are centers for emotional activity without social commitment, are fractured by random appeals to their basic drives and desires.”⁷¹ These characters do more than merely embody a pre-defined space, they can be seen as creating it as well.

The chronotope depends upon the representation of a narrative’s protagonist: “The chronotope as a formally constitutive category determines to a significant degree the image of man in literature as well. The image of man is always intrinsically chronotopic.”⁷² The way a protagonist interrelates with time and space is the crucial focus of the chronotope. Whether it is statically (as in the Greek romance), with crisis metamorphoses (as in the *Golden Ass*), or in a public state (as in the *Ancient Biography*), the time and space of a novel becomes entwined with and expressed by the depiction of the form of a hero’s relation to others. The centrepiece of Bakhtin’s discussion – the Rabelaisian chronotope – is essentially the novelistic manifestation of folk culture. This chronotope is most visible when situated next to the modern, individualistic conception of time-space. The crucial difference between the two is the representation of an individual, the way they interrelate with the world and their status as public or private. The importance Bakhtin attributes to this aspect of a novel’s social, cultural and artistic implications gives the performer – the creator of an individual’s existence – a potential to enrich or alter a film’s basic chronotope.

For example, Laughton’s performance in *Henry VIII* essentially shapes that film’s chronotope – moving its progression from one of an individual and historically

determined time-space to a folkloric and open time-space. His performance thus becomes crucial for the film's structure. The ability to create characters who refigure the narrative in order to demonstrate the indeterminacy of identity is one of Laughton's most insistent performance modes – and it is a powerful challenge to the forms he worked in and modern expectations of character.

2. The Instability of the Gaze

Is it not the cinema's perpetual destiny to make us move from one of its poles to the other, that is, from an objective perception to a subjective perception, and vice versa?

– Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma I*

In one of his earliest roles, as Nero in *The Sign of the Cross*, Laughton indicates Nero's narcissism through a consistently distracted gaze. In the film's last segment, Nero watches the spectacle of gladiator battles and Christian sacrifices. It begins with him engaged with the image, however ironically, tossing a laurel wreath playfully to the gladiators in the forum. Laughton then plunges us into the character's self-satisfaction. After we see a man die after having his face slashed by razored knuckles, the scene cuts to Nero. He is eating a peach. His eyes are closed, and he is in quiet ecstasy, letting the juice run down his arm. Later, he takes a flower from one of the bare-chested male attendants sitting beside him, and turns to watch the show. We witness the excessive spectacle announced earlier in the film: "Blonde Barbarians" battling "pygmies." The scene cuts back to Nero, and he moves as if to smell the flower, but instead eats a petal. These scenes contain no interaction with the world or others at all, only self-satisfaction.

Eric Bentley describes a scene in *Galileo* where Laughton misses an important line by "not seeming to take in what [another character] was saying." He writes that it is an effect not of "arrogant overconfidence but merely lack of rapport or... trivial vanity."⁷³ This reading is common to descriptions of Laughton's absent gazes. Yet it seems directly

opposed to Laughton's performances of dialogism and interaction. Callow recounts how this became a major issue during the filming of *Mutiny*: "[Gable's] only real complaint about Laughton... [was] that he wouldn't look him in the eye... If Laughton delivered his speeches sideways, into the ocean, he was lost... Gable was not the first to complain of it... It is, in fact, rather in the nature of Laughton's view of his characters: each man a self-contained universe of pain."⁷⁴ While Laughton's gaze functions consistently in *Mutiny* to establish Bligh's roles as sailor and predator, it also raises issues of this character's relation to the world.

How do we explain the apparent contradiction between dialogism and this self-sufficient gaze? Laughton's characters are Janus-faced: both spectacle and spectator, object and subject. In Laughton's performances, this split would be consistently explored in terms of the difference between representing a character to be viewed by the audience and a character with whom the audience views the world. Rather than settling on one mode of representing himself, Laughton explores this tension.

The first image we have of Quasimodo in *Hunchback* is of an eye in extreme close-up; the first image of Poirot in *Man on the Eiffel Tower* (Meredith, 1949) is of a huge eye distorted by a magnifying glass. These synecdoches immediately raise basic questions about image production. In *Hunchback*, Laughton begins as a spectacle; in *Eiffel*, he begins as an investigator. Similarly, typical aspects of Laughton's performances shift registers between being observed and observing. On the one hand, we have eyes which reflect inner storms: bulging to depict turmoil (e.g. *The Big Clock*), staring blankly to depict thought (e.g. *Rembrandt*) and darting to depict anxiety (e.g. *Les Misérables*). Bakhtin sees this as the function of the image of the eyes, which seem to be – of their

very nature – a form of expressivity largely outside the realm of grotesque realism: “The eyes have no part in [the] comic images; they express an individual, so to speak, self-sufficient human life, which is not essential to the grotesque. The grotesque is interested only in protruding eyes, like the eyes of the stutterer...”⁷⁵ But, on the other hand, we have Laughton’s gazes which we may share: the steady gaze of absorption (e.g. *Rembrandt*), the hawklike surveying of the horizon (e.g. *Mutiny*) and the wide-eyed gaze of desire (e.g. *Les Misérables*).

One way in which this materializes is through the typical Laughton performance motif of shifting registers between a distracted, internal gaze and a relational, external gaze. In *Henry VIII*, messengers have brought the news that Henry’s wife, Jane, has given birth, and he races back from hunting to discover that his wife has died in childbirth. Henry turns his head slowly so that he faces forward, and half-whispers, “Poor pretty little Jane,” takes off his hat, “God rest her sweet *soul*.” He pauses, staring forward, and then suddenly blinks as if waking from a deep reverie, turns to Cromwell and loudly asks him, “Where’s the prince?” Laughton’s characters consistently shift registers in conversation within themselves and between others. This shift from inward to outward is often demonstrative or excessive, marking the crucial distinctions within the gaze for Laughton.

This chapter explores Laughton careful and complex attention to the gaze and related issues of perception. He consistently problematizes his position as a character, shifting between depicting someone for us to look at and someone for us to look with. This will be discussed in terms of the oscillation between Laughton as object and subject, with a particular focus on the film in which he explores the distinction most expressively,

Rembrandt. The analysis will then turn to two specific uses of the gaze: absorption in *Rembrandt* as a means to depict genius and to share a vision of the world; and free indirect discourse in *Night of the Hunter* as a means to explore the tension of depicting a world as a subjective experience and as an objective reality. In addition to destabilizing our apprehension of character and narrative, Laughton's use of the gaze commands our attention. It also allows him, through performance, to contribute to shaping the space and effect of the *mise-en-scène*. The gaze is a rich and powerful performance tool which Laughton uses to brilliant and subtle effect.

Control of Space

An early scene in *Rembrandt* will help clarify what I mean by the distinction between an outward and inward gaze. A drunken Rembrandt, seated between his protégé and the woman who has fallen in love with him, has been describing his failures as an artist and as a man. His eyebrows are drawn up and his right hand rests softly upon his temple. He pauses, after drinking the last sip from a glass of wine which he holds in his hand. He gazes at the glass with droopy eyes, brings it down in front of his face, still staring at it, and his mouth opens slightly. His eyebrows draw together until his appearance of calm defeat has become one of intense focus. He tilts the glass around, inspecting it from different angles, and his mouth twitches in a shudder. He lets the glass fall in his hand, so that he holds it by its stem.

And suddenly his tone and his view changes. He sadly tells his student that "Every man has a destined path. If it leads him into the wilderness he's got to follow it with his head high and a smile on his lips." After his student interjects, he continues,

whispering while gently stroking his temple with his hand, "What is success? A soldier can reckon his success in victories. A merchant in money. But my world is insubstantial." At the last word, his hand lifts and gestures in a gently dismissive way – this fleeting movement seems to poetically signify the transience of his life and his world. He rubs his temple again, pauses, draws in a breath, and continues in a more serious – though still poetic – whisper, "I live in a beautiful, blinding, swirling mist. The world can offer me nothing, what I need is a woman I can call my wife." His eyes suddenly shut in despair, and his body shakes as he throws the glass to the ground, smashing it to bits.

Why does his vision of his life change from one of frustration to despair, from simple failure to abstract nothingness? Clearly, the glass signals a shift in Rembrandt's self-conception. There is a typical allegorical association of the empty glass with the passage of time, or even death. In the scene, Rembrandt explores fundamental issues in his life – its immateriality and need for love – with an awareness of his own mortality and his place in the world. Could the attention drawn to the glass be a gesture to demonstrate this allegorically? We would really have to force this reading onto the scene. Not only does the performance have a psychological and naturalistic tone, but the film itself is clearly not concerned with this kind of allegorical imagery or tableau. It seems apparent, although perhaps not on first viewing, that when Laughton suddenly shifts his tone, it is because he sees his reflection in the glass. We never see this reflection, nor does he refer to it. But it is surely the reason why Rembrandt tilts the glass, changes tone, throws the glass aside. The sudden realization of his image leads him to reconsider who he is – and his life as an image maker – which in turn indicates his awareness of his own insubstantial self.

Noël Burch, in *Theory of Film*, distinguishes between two kinds of space which the frame can withhold: “either predictive and imaginary or retrospective and concrete...”⁷⁶ The former is never shown by the film itself, the latter is ultimately depicted. What Laughton is doing in this scene – as well as throughout this and other performances – is forcing the spectator to make a predictive and imaginary space real due to our assumption of a character’s vantage point. No longer is it only a cut to a point-of-view shot or a camera movement which makes space real, but it is also a character’s internality. Laughton creates a reflection in that glass through his character, whether one is there or not. Burch notes that off-screen space can be activated by a character’s glance, “Nana’s servants are constantly sticking their heads through doors to find out what is going on in the space we cannot see behind them, and both the invisible space thus defined and the invisible persons who occupy it are at least as important as what the viewer actually sees on screen.”⁷⁷ But ultimately Burch approaches the use of off-screen space as essentially a director’s function; he mentions no actors who create it independently of the director. For Laughton, it is a central characteristic of his performances. While Laughton’s performances are not parametric in Burch’s sense, they nevertheless function to consistently *explore*, rather than occasionally stumble upon, the manipulation of off-screen space.

One scene in *Mutiny* provides a sharp example of this play with form. Bligh’s relationship with Christian has reached a breaking point. Christian moves aggressively toward Bligh, who stands defiant. But our expectation of a fight is interrupted – the ship has finally reached its destination. The scene’s tension evaporates, and we see a montage of excited sailors looking towards land, accompanied by merry sailing music. The

montage ends with a shot of Bligh, looking off-screen towards land as well, smiling. His head moves jerkily away from this sight, and he walks toward Christian, still with a smile on his face. He says quickly, "So you'll face me with a court of inquiry in England, eh. Well Mister Christian we're a long way from England and what can happen on this ship may surprise even you." Bligh's thoughts are thus revealed only retroactively. Beginning with a smile on his face and gazing towards land, we must assume that he is thinking of the sight. But when he confronts Christian with the same smile, we realize that it reflects not what he sees but something inside – a satisfaction with his continued control and power over this "mutinous dog." What is important here is not that Bligh's self is revealed – we know what his feelings towards Christian are – but that a character so committed to the outside view of the world would rely on an inside vision to satisfy himself at this crucial moment. It speaks to both the intensity of his feelings to Christian, as well as his immense hubris. He does not care that they have found land, and by using the gaze and facial expression to retroactively reflect this element of character, Laughton creates a powerful and striking image.

This tension between the expressive and the psychological gaze is used throughout *Hunchback* to reflect the immense fears that Quasimodo has in facing the world and himself. Near the end of the film, Quasimodo approaches Esmerelda, pauses in front of her, staring at her, and slowly extends the gift of a bird in a cage which he has brought for her. He hesitantly hands it to her. She looks toward him, in the counter-shot, and he covers his deformed eye with his hand, then brings his other hand to cover his mouth. He tells her softly and clearly, "I have something to say to you." He is deeply in love with her. He inhales and exhales, tensing and relaxing his body. He pauses and

inhales again in nervous preparation. He drops both hands, ready to speak, but instead seems to catch a glimpse of the hand which had covered his eye, and which remains held up for a brief moment. His mouth opens in mute horror. He looks around in terror, his eyes falling on nothing. He brings his hands up to his head, pulls at his hair, looks up at her momentarily, and runs off clutching his head in hands.

Quasimodo falls apart in the instant that his sight turns from the inward absorption in his thoughtful preparation of what he will tell Esmerelda to the sudden realization of the material facts of the world, of his own body. The use of the gaze changes the focus from an internal self to one aware of the world. Through the shift of perception from inside to outside, his status shifts from subject to object. And he falls apart. It is telling that in these moments of self-reflection rather than a more singular and defined self emerging, the selves seem to fracture (in *Hunchback*) or disappear (in *Rembrandt*). It would seem to be a representation of a self in an essentially dialogic position where self-perception leads to multiplicity rather than unity.

The complexities of inner/outer, subject/object are not restricted to the gaze. For example, in *Les Misérables*, Javert stands stiffly at the doorway after trapping Valjean for the first time. He demands that Valjean come with him, and his hand points to the door. As the discussion shifts topics, the hand remains there, immobile, a constant reminder that Valjean is delivering orders, demanding punishment, attempting to control the *mise-en-scène*. As the scene develops, Javert confiscates some money from Valjean, and this hand which is still pointing to the doorway suddenly becomes rigidly extended to take money. The tableau that is created does not appear to be the director's design – the countershots and inserts don't match the blocking – but rather Laughton's representation

of a certain style of performance. One could suggest that Valjean is so absorbed in the proceedings that he simply forgets that his hand is extended. It becomes only something external to his mind, since he is deep within his thoughts and emotions. Or one could suggest that Laughton is creating a presentational tableau through gesture. We are, as usual in Laughton's performances, caught between two theatrical traditions, two implications of performance, and two readings of the same moment. Laughton has effectively taken over the *mise-en-scène*, and he explores the possibilities of this as a means to raise our awareness of a character's being in the world. But the tension between the eyes as a presentational device and a psychological device is probably the most direct representation of inward and outward, subjective vision and objective appearance, that Laughton can communicate through performance.

Absorption

In December 1947, *Theatre Arts Monthly* published a brief article about Pelican Productions, including a description of their staging of *Galileo*. A full page photo of Laughton, who played the role of *Galileo*, accompanies the article. He is seated behind a low table, and his body is hunched forward, his hand is holding a tool of some sort and he seems to be intently working at a scientific instrument. It is difficult to make out exactly what he is doing. It appears as if he is making marks on a chute, but the actual activity is of less importance than the state of mind which Laughton is representing. He appears utterly absorbed in his project, his eyes squinting, his head tilted, his mouth slightly open. It is almost as if the image is a candid shot of his preparations for the role, so naturalistic and non-theatrical does his state of concentration and focus appear.

Michael Fried, in *Absorption and Theatricality*, analyzes the effect that this intense state of concentration had on 19th century French painting and Diderot's approach to drama. Fried illustrates the central importance accorded to the representation of "the state or condition of rapt absorption, of being completely occupied or engrossed or (as I prefer to say) absorbed in what he or she is doing, hearing, thinking, feeling."⁷⁸ The depiction of this state became a crucial aspect for the quality of a painting, where "primary evidence" of an artist's "mastery of expression" is seen in "the contrast between the inattention... and the absorption" rather than the "depiction of specific passions or emotions."⁷⁹ Fried draws out a series of implications and explanations for this interest. The implications of his study of absorption can help us understand Laughton's use of the gaze and his use of the effects of absorption.

We are given little access to *what* Rembrandt sees in the world, but we are constantly reminded of *how* he is seeing. There are few images of the paintings, except over the opening credits, and Rembrandt is consistently challenged, questioned, insulted – we are given little sense of the brilliance of his work. It is through the performance of absorption that Laughton represents the depth of intensity and focus in Rembrandt. Elsa Lanchester writes that

You can imagine the difficulty Charles had searching for the look in the painter's eye or the feeling expressed by the hand, when he had a close-up camera on him. He had to show Rembrandt in the act of creating, and what is more, make people believe in his genius. To reveal the inner struggle of a man who had so much to give the world, seemed at times almost impossible. Charles had re-takes and re-takes just to get the look of inspiration in his eyes.⁸⁰

Callow writes that "Laughton at the canvas [in *Rembrandt*] is possessed by the concentration only ever seen in a painter's eye."⁸¹

Laughton's performance of absorption provides as profound a representation of the creative act as the more material possibilities of light, colour and framing. In his discussion of color in *The Film Sense*, Sergei Eisenstein writes of "the unfortunate image of the aged Rembrandt presented by Alexander Korda and Charles Laughton in *Rembrandt*. As scrupulously costumed and made-up as Laughton was for these concluding scenes, no attempt was made to mirror this tragic *chromatic scale*, so typical of the late Rembrandt, with an equivalent *light-scale*."⁸² Eisenstein's observation speaks to *what* is seen, rather than *how* it is seen. It is the latter which structures the representation of Rembrandt.

Absorption can also be seen as a means whereby a painting or an actor can represent a state of being as important irrespective of its aim, so that "absorption emerges as good in and of itself, without regard to its occasion..."⁸³ Describing a similar effect in *The Piano* (Campion, 1993), Claudia Gorbman writes, "One could hardly call [Ada's] self-absorbed playing technically polished. On the other hand, calling her an amateur would be trivializing the ferocity of her musical devotion and the centrality of piano playing to her existence."⁸⁴ Bentley writes that in *Galileo*, Laughton "was able to seem an intellectual, and even a genius.... In regard to playing the intellectual... It is not done by playing the intellect itself. It is done by making the characteristic attitudes of the intellectual live – emotionally."⁸⁵ Representing the state of absorption allows Laughton to communicate genius through his eyes.

Absorption is also a means of denying the presence of the spectator, and representing the integrity of the world depicted. A character is caught up in that world, and the illusion of its internal coherence is established. Thus, absorption appears to be a

realist gesture. The audience is excluded from the world – little is used to elicit its sympathy or acknowledge its presence. Paradoxically, absorption is also a means to draw in the spectator, and represent their state of apprehension through the scene *within* the painting. Thus, the beholder or spectator sees that their absorption in front of the painting is reflected in the absorption of figures within the painting, “a proleptic mirroring of what [the painter] trusted would be the absorption of the beholder before the finished work.”⁸⁶ The beholder, kept at a distance through the internal coherence of the work is drawn deeply inside the world of the work. This is reflected in the use of the tableau, where characters are absorbed in what they or other characters are doing. We are invited to participate in the state of absorption.

Laughton represents Rembrandt’s vision as both something that we observe and something that we share. The first scene of *Rembrandt* establishes this dual relation to vision. Rembrandt enters an artist supply store and walks directly toward a picture frame which sits resting against the edge of a table. After distractedly ordering some different painting materials, he responds to his advisor’s demand that he paint the city guards, “I don’t like their faces. Now leave me alone, I’m busy painting Saskja.” As he says this, he looks down at the frame in his hand, and brings it up so that it flatly frames him in the image. He then brings his pipe up (neither in a declamatory gesture nor to smoke it) so that it runs parallel to the bottom line of the frame. Rather than ironically distancing us, Laughton is inviting us to view Rembrandt as Rembrandt views the world – to enter into a state of absorption and vision which depends upon seeing the world in a frame. Later in this opening scene, he gazes at a necklace, holding it in his outstretched hands, ignoring all else, completely subsumed in the imaginary image (“red fire of the rubies on the

whiteness of Saskja's neck, the goddess flora") which it stirs within him. We are invited to play along as well – in this complex back and forth between looking at Rembrandt as an object and seeing with Rembrandt's subjectivity.

Free Indirect Discourse

When Laughton turned to directing, the same concern with showing the fluctuation between subject and object informed his work. In order to connect these elements of performance to *Hunter* it will be useful to approach these issues through a broader examination of filmic subjectivity and objectivity, Pasolini's discussions of free indirect discourse. Deleuze, drawing on Pasolini's essays, writes that "It might be said that a subjective perception-image is a direct discourse and, in a more complex way, that the objective perception-image is like an indirect discourse."⁸⁷ Between these two forms of discourse lies a free indirect discourse, a linguistic category more common to Russian and Italian than English, where the "I" in a text is written as a "he."⁸⁸ Deleuze offers an example taken from Bakhtin's *Marxism and the Philosophy of Language*: "She summons up her strength: *she will rather endure torture than lose her virginity.*"⁸⁹ Pasolini describes the translation into cinema of the free indirect discourse as "the immersion of the filmmaker in the mind of his character and then the adoption on the part of the filmmaker not only of the psychology of his character but also of his language."⁹⁰ The category functions as a useful means to approach the representation of point of view in film. Rather than assuming *either* a subjective vision or an objective image, the category of free indirect discourse describes subjective images which are shown as utterly real. It

is an analogous form of representation to the reflection on the glass which is there only if we pass through Rembrandt's vision.

Night of the Hunter is built on this tension. For example, once Pearl and John have escaped from Powell, Pearl sings a song: "Once upon a time there was a pretty fly, he had a pretty wife this pretty fly, but one day she flew away, flew away, she had two pretty children, but one night these two pretty children, flew away, flew away, into the sky, into the moon." Before she begins to sing the song, we see the image of a bright white spiderweb dominating the foreground, with the children on the boat floating by in the mid-background. Without looking at the spiderweb, Pearl makes it the subject of her song. Is it an allegorical image which is intended to echo the content of the song and her situation? Certainly its artificiality and archetypal nature suggest this. But it also seems to be very much part of the world. The boat enters the frame with the web, and the children interrelate with similar natural images as if they were real. The web may be a visual echo of the song which Pearl sings, but once onscreen, it assumes a tangible and objective reality in the film's diegetic world.

Rather than settling on a child's fantasy vision of the world or a more realist vision, the film consistently problematizes and explores point-of-view. This is reflected in the scene which begins the film. Rachel introduces a story that she will tell, accompanied by the children who end up with her at the end of the tale. Is this a flashforward, beginning from the end of the diegesis? Or is Gish/Rachel narrating *this* story? We do not know whether the image of Gish/Rachel at the start of the film is an objective flashforward or whether it introduces us to her subjective account of the story to follow. Although the latter effect seems more plausible, the tension still remains.

The free indirect discourse is also articulated in film through specific stylistic devices. In his discussion of *Red Desert* (Antonioni, 1964), Pasolini describes two formal techniques which lead to free indirect discourse in the film: incessant framing which “becomes the myth of the actual, distressing, autonomous beauty of things” and the use of dead space so that “the world is presented as if regulated by a myth of pure pictorial beauty that the personages invade, it is true, but adapting themselves to the rules of that beauty instead of profaning them with their presence.”⁹¹ Pasolini selects these two formal elements because they allow an integral world apart from the character which is both the character’s world and Antonioni’s; Antonioni “*has substituted in toto for the worldview of a neurotic his own delirious view of aesthetics*, a wholesale substitution which is justified by the possible analogy of the two views.”⁹² It is not a question of specific formal elements which create free indirect discourse, but rather the overlapping of two worldviews, where what would seem to come second (the character) defines what would seem to come first (the world). So, even when the character is not present, their personal vision shapes the world of the film.

Like Antonioni, Laughton uses insistent framing and dead space. The latter is a recurring formal device in *Hunter*. Significant scenes often begin in empty spaces (e.g., a blank wall before the hangman enters the frame, the rough texture of a wall before the children enter the frame, an image of the riverbank before the tip of the skiff slowly settles in) or gradually move to reveal a subject of attention (e.g., the image of seaweed which gradually reveals Willa’s dead body at the bottom of the river).

The film’s allegorical images are positioned in a complex relation to characters, reflecting their states of mind as well as shaping them. For example, Gish witnesses a

hawk attack a mouse and says, "God save little children." Through the variations of subjectivity and objectivity, the image does not represent a stable meaning – is it an allegory of Powell's pursuit, or is it a distinctly different type of natural image? Can we really say that the sadism of the preacher is in any way analogous to the actions of a real natural predator? Does the film show us realities which are so well-defined?

If we compare this predatory scene with a much earlier scene of predator watching prey, the distinction the film is setting up becomes visible. The scene begins with a keyhole iris on a stripper, in full shot in the spotlight, in front of a curtain. Burlesque music plays as she dances. In a retroactive point-of-view shot, the scene cuts to Mitchum, looking straight ahead with a stern, tight-lipped countenance. It is a self-reflexive moment – highlighted by the iris, the spotlight and the act of seeing. As his sneer tightens, the camera quickly moves down to a close-shot of his hand, on which is written the word "HATE" in dark letters. The hand tightens into a fist, and decisively makes its way into the preacher's pocket. This cuts to another image of the preacher, sneering. The tension in him is released, however, in the next image. It is a close-up of the preacher's jacket, with the material filling most of the frame. Immediately, a knife cuts through the material – accompanied by a sound of cutting fabric – creating a black slit, jutting out obliquely from the jacket pocket. This is another reflexive image – aggressively cutting through the screen. The preacher, who is leaning slightly back (rather than the tense forward position), is looking up, rather than at the dancer. The sexual metaphor is explicit. He tilts his head back further, and says, whispering, calmly but imploringly as if he had sinned, "There are too many of them: you can't kill a world." Whose vision does this scene articulate? The situation of watching and spectacle that the

preacher embodies implies that it is his, the reflexivity implies that is the filmmaker's. These distinctions of subjectivity and objectivity drive the film, and reveal a reality which is not lodged and static, but transitory and wavering.

Do we believe Mitchum who says throughout the film that the world is the battle of love and hate? Does the film show us a world which could be so clearly defined? Or is it only a secondary reflection of character subjectivities and the ways in which they fear. This tension is creative in the film, and becomes a crucial lesson. Deleuze writes that "A character acts on screen, and is assumed to see the world in a certain way. But simultaneously the camera sees him, and sees his world, from another point of view which thinks, reflects and transforms the viewpoint of the character... We are no longer faced with subjective *or* objective images; we are caught in a correlation between a perception-image and a camera-consciousness which transforms it."⁹³ This overlapping of viewpoints in *Hunter* serves the same function as Laughton's mingling of subject and object through his use of the gaze. Brecht writes of how "Aiming not put his audience into a trance, [the actor] must not go into a trance himself. His muscles must remain loose, for a turn of the head... will 'magically' lead the spectators' eyes and even their heads to turn with it, and this can only detract from any speculation or reaction which the gesture may bring about."⁹⁴ The insistent shift between different viewpoints – where sometimes we share a character's vision and at other moments we simply observe – creates the consistent tone of uncertainty and attention which is so crucial to Laughton's performances.

3. Storytelling and the Recital

Listen to the waves of the sea. Absorb their sweeping change of time with your body, brain and soul. Listen to them as Demosthenes did, and don't weaken after your first attempt. Let the meaning and the Rhythm of your words be a continuation of their eternal sound.

– Richard Boleslawski, "A Sixth Lesson in Film Acting"

Laughton's preferred role, later in his career, was that of a storyteller: "I'm not an actor; I'm really not. I don't want to be an actor. I'm a storyteller!"⁹⁵ Laughton wrote a brief article for *Atlantic Monthly* in 1950, entitled "Charles Laughton on Storytelling." In this relaxed piece, he describes the beginnings of his love of performing public recitals of literary texts, a major aspect of his career in the 1950s:

During the recent war I was in Hollywood. I was not actively in the war and I was restless... I was in a still department one day, up at Universal, I think. There were two wounded men there from Birmingham Hospital and I asked what the fellows did of an evening. They said, "Nothing," and I asked them if they would be interested in anybody's coming and reading to them a couple of times a week for two hours or so. They said they would, so I had a full occupation.⁹⁶

Laughton continues, in his article, writing that "There is something about reading aloud to a group of people, however scarred, that turns them into children. They would sit and listen to fairy stories. They found a reflection of their sufferings, which they thought to be unique, in the tragedies of Shakespeare, and felt better."⁹⁷ This love of storytelling also reflects a deep trust in his audience: "I found that they all had – contrary to what I had been told in the entertainment industry – a shy hunger for knowledge."⁹⁸

Callow writes that although Laughton “simply wasn’t at home in verse,” he “had an astonishing command of rhetoric.”⁹⁹ Callow goes on to note that Laughton “in film after film, would fit a speech, whether it was the Gettysburg address or something from the Bible, into his performance, and it would be spellbinding. He was a master of phrasing, and colour – but he must bring these from within – every pause and hesitation, every change of gear, every new register, from within, in response to a sequence of impulses felt by him.” Laughton was brilliant in these recitals, but not for the reasons that Callow describes. His readings would carry one along with the words, certainly, but there would be little indication of the sort of internal turmoil that we see in his dialogical moments. In the recitals, body and word merge in an exploration of the limits of unity in performance.

Laughton’s performances often include recitals, but instead of focusing on the words which he speaks, we can instead turn to an analysis of the form of storytelling and how it inflects his representation of character. We will see that these significant moments in his films work toward the transcendence of performance and self by unifying the body, the voice and the text in moments of escape from the confinement of narrative. This is a specific form of Laughton’s explorations of identities which are in constant transition and characters whose position as subject or object is consistently problematized. Through his performance of the transcendent moments of storytelling in his films, Laughton centralizes meaning in the body, avoiding aligning himself with psychological or narrative definitions. This chapter will explore how Laughton’s storytelling couples the centrality of the body with wisdom: first, I will examine how voice, body and word are unified through acting technique in *Henry VIII*; second, I will discuss the implications of

this for the character of Rembrandt, and how Laughton signifies Rembrandt's artistic genius through his recitals; I will conclude with a discussion of the framing narrative of *Night of the Hunter* and the ways in which it draws on traditions of oral storytelling to create meaning and authority. These different subjects are unified by a consistent appeal on Laughton's part to the centrality of the body – rather than the words or the motivation of character – to communicate meaning.

“Mea Culpa”

One important and atypical scene in *The Private Life of Henry VIII* can serve as an introduction to Laughton's recitals. The scene sets up the interconnection of mind, body and word that will shape the later recitals. Henry has discovered that his beloved Katherine Parr has been unfaithful to him, falling in love with a bland assistant. The political machine embodied by Cromwell has demanded her death and Henry has reluctantly agreed. Just before her execution, he stands alone in a room bordering the chopping block. It is the only scene in the film where Henry is alone. Shown in a long shot, Henry is pacing in the room with his hands pressed together against his chin, as if in prayer or contemplation. A drum sounds. He suddenly stops, brings his arms down and trembles as if reverberating from this sign of Katherine's death. He then calls out her name. This cuts to a close-up of him as he repeats her name with a strained voice, gazing steadily offscreen, about to break into tears. His hands are fidgeting, nervously moving one on top the other. Henry, to put it simply, is beside himself. He is awkward, and appears lost in thoughts and feelings of uncertainty, powerlessness and remorse. Laughton plays it awkwardly, in the best sense of the word.

Laughton was a master of performing awkwardness. For example, we see his creative awkwardness in the scenes of dialogue with his superiors in *Mutiny* and the terribly uncomfortable moments with his daughter in *Barretts of Wimpole Street*. A similar expression of Henry's anxiety occurs in an earlier scene, as Anne Boleyn is about to be executed. Henry stands behind a window, tapping rhythmically against the pane of glass. He stares forward with a profoundly serious expression. As the scene progresses, he manages to hide his unease by shifting the discussion to affairs of state, but his awkwardness as he waits suggests an internality which stands out from his usual excessive expressivity.

Stanley Cavell analyzes a similar mode of behavior in Frank Capra's *Mr. Deeds Goes to Town*:

Mr. Deeds appeals to fidgetiness as a universal human attribute, if not exactly a normal one, in defense of his playing the tuba at odd hours, a practice taken by the prosecution and its witnesses as a major piece of evidence of madness. Deeds's defense is that his tuba playing is his version of something every human being does under certain universally recurrent conditions. The other versions he cites of such behavior are tics... and doodling... It is [Deeds's] acknowledgement that to provide such illustration or evidence is a power and possible glory natural to the moving picture camera, that the most insignificant repetitions, turnings, pauses, and yielding of human beings are as interesting to it as is the beauty or the science of movement.¹⁰⁰

Cavell uses this representation of fidgeting, and its thematization in the film, to demonstrate how motion pictures can show thinking, for the very act of fidgeting demonstrates that we are "a creature in whom the body and the soul do not everywhere fit together" and that this discordance "proves thinking, or the inclination to think..."¹⁰¹ It is something innate to the medium of film to be able to show this, for it requires the image in movement. But Cavell does not analyze the distinction which makes this thought

visible – fidgets by themselves betray thoughtlessness whereas fidgets coupled with absorption or some other state of intense concentration indicate thought.

Thus, for Henry, as for Deeds, the point is not to wonder “what are they thinking” but rather to observe thought through contrast. This is clearly visible in scenes where the steady gaze is undermined by the fidgeting hands. Laughton’s amazing moments of discomfort – something all too rarely seen in films – are partly a product of Laughton’s fearlessness to appear to act badly. Stanislavski writes of the actors who “defeat their own purposes by fussy movements, winding the clock, stopping the chimes. They betray their own powerlessness, their fear of pauses, their senseless fidgets... They should proceed quite differently: they should quietly, without undue pauses between lines, carry out the needed movements in accordance with the inner beat.”¹⁰² Laughton’s movements use this distracted performance as a counterpoint for moments of focused intensity.

Stanislavski distinguishes this aimless fidgeting from the tempo-rhythm in a performer’s speech and movement which should run “like a thread through all movements, words, pauses, the emotional experience of a part and its physical interpretation.”¹⁰³ Usually the thread of a performance has many strands, a polyphony of rhythms, so that within each actor different rhythms are at work.¹⁰⁴ We see this in the scenes of Laughton’s microdialogues, discussed earlier, which constantly provide new contrasts in tempo-rhythm.

While Stanislavski stresses the multiplicity of tempo-rhythms – a veritable internal rhythmic polyphony – he also accords one place where the chaos can dwindle: “At the point when the hero of the play or some particular person has to take a definite and strong stand there are no contradictions and doubts – one all-embracing tempo-

rhythm is not only appropriate, it is even necessary.”¹⁰⁵ These are the moments where the motive forces of performance, thought, desire and feeling, find a unity. While Stanislavski's description of the point at which these meet stresses the primacy of desire (the super-objective), unity can also be brought into play through feeling or thought. For instance, a central place accorded to words might shift the tone to an intensely introspective moment – as perhaps a soliloquy or an explanation would afford.¹⁰⁶ For Laughton, however, feeling becomes the motive force. Tempo-rhythm, the form associated with feeling, stabilizes thought and desire.

As the scene introduced earlier continues, Henry's right hand falls away and with his left hand he presses into his chest as he inhales and says, “mea culpa.” He repeats the gesture, pressing into his chest as he says the words again. And he finishes with the same gesture repeated for the third time, saying “mea maxima culpa.” It is an almost pure example of speech and body unified in feeling. It is a moment of immense power because of its clear illustration of a unity of human emotion. Emotion has bound thought and desire through the expression of a body. It is the feeling and the body which deepens the almost primal rhythm.

An earlier scene demonstrates a more complex manifestation of Laughton's use of contrast in tempo-rhythm in performance. Henry welcomes his newborn son into the world, seeing him for the first time. Shushed by the nurse when entering the baby's nursery, Henry's booming voice and laughter become whispers and exhalations throughout the scene. He walks cautiously towards his son, and leaning over the cradle tells him, “My son. One day you'll rule England. A greater England than mine. That is if you're strong enough to hold a sceptre firmly. Here it is,” and he gives him his forefinger.

The infant holds his finger, and Henry laughs a rolling laugh, straightens up, and himself like a child who has just seen a wonderful show, excitedly looks back and forth between the infant and the nurse. His eyes never actually rest on the nurse, and the movement seems more automatic than an actual scene of engagement. He crouches near the cradle again and continues, his laugh still petering out. "Bravely done my little prince," and then in a hoarse voice that is emitted as if in a wheezing breath, "That's the way of it." It is a chilling line reading, difficult to describe, something like a gentle gasp.

He continues to laugh, but his laughter suddenly stops as he addresses his son in a tone of utter simplicity, "Through tears and cruelty and pain you came into the world. By the same road you'll reach the throne. And by the same road hold it." The poetic passage ends and, still looking down, he begins to laugh again slightly. "You smile do you?" he asks rhetorically, "Smile while you may, you'll find the throne of England no smiling matter," and laughs slightly. He moves back from the cradle and his hands clench and unclench automatically, as if he wants to hold the child, but does not really know what to do.¹⁰⁷

We have here an ideal example of the ways in which Laughton manipulates tempo-rhythm. The scene begins with restraint – he is too loud, too quick. Awkward with the child, he tries to unify his own movements. He gives him his finger to hold, but Henry is bursting with energy, laughing proudly. The brief recital becomes the one moment of unity in the scene, bracketed by nervous laughter. In the recital, the rhythm of voice dominates, and no longer does Laughton represent the polyphony, but he represents unity through the connection of thought, feeling and desire. It is rather as if he were offering his son a baptism (as father and king) into a world of hidden and innate suffering – the

intense feelings aroused by this erase all but the most basic form. It is this primacy of pure speech, the quotation, which underlies Laughton's performances of the recital. When it is over, he returns to his awkward actions.

Three Recitals in Rembrandt

In Rembrandt, the recital becomes entwined with the gesture of painting. The gaze in *Rembrandt*, particularly the state of absorption, is used to depict the intensity of Rembrandt's vision of the world. The recitals are used to depict the intensity of the artistic and creative process. Together, these two performance motifs create a complex image of artistic creation, one later described by Laughton in terms of film acting:

Great acting is like painting. In the great masters of fine art one can see and recognize the small gesture of a finger, the turn of a head, the vitriolic stare, the glazed eye, the pompous mouth, the back bending under a fearful load. In every swerve and stroke of a painter's brush, there is an abundance of life. Great artists reveal the god in man; and every character an actor plays must be this sort of creation. Not imitation – that is merely caricature – and any fool can be a mimic! But creation is a secret. The better – the truer – the creation, the more it will resemble a great painter's immortal work.¹⁰⁸

Laughton's performance portray the genius of Rembrandt not by mimicking a painter's artistic realm, but by performing analogous elements through an actor's artistic realm.

The subjects of Rembrandt's recitals in public places – the veils we place overtop the essential beauty of love, the inner holiness of the heart, the vanity of human effort – reflect the act of painting and performance. But it is through the use of speech and gesture rather than the words themselves that we can *see* the activity and power of artistic creation emerging before our eyes. The primacy of speech is created partly through his absorption when speaking, but it also created through a strong rhythm of language and

gesture unified in the body rather than the mind. It is an effect of contrast and context as well as the commitment Laughton has to the speech act, rather than any rhetorical or goal-oriented or subtextual aim behind it. Laughton creates a unity of feeling, desire and thought which culminate in the *images* created by words.

The analogy is not irrelevant. Stanislavski is fond of a visual metaphor for speaking (just as he is fond of a cinematic metaphor for the subconscious) and he often compares the structure of speech to that of painting. For example, he writes that "As in painting, where there are strong and light tones, half tones, quarter tones, in colors or chiaroscuro, there is in speech a corresponding gamut of varying degrees of force and accentuation."¹⁰⁹ He also notes that the primary purpose of speech is to create images, writing that "Nature has so arranged matters that when we are in verbal communication with others we first see the word on the retina of the mind's eye and then we speak of what we have thus seen... To an actor a word is not just a sound, it is the evocation of images. So when you are in verbal intercourse on the stage, speak not so much to the ear as to the eye."¹¹⁰

Rembrandt's first recital occurs in a local pub as he addresses a group of city councilors. As they laugh at the question that one of them posed of how a man could paint his wife after seven years of marriage, Rembrandt commands their attention with a suddenly strong intonation, "There was a man in the land of Oz and the lord gave him all that the human heart could desire but above all this man was in love with his wife." As the line reading ends, the strength of his voice drops. He continues to speak and his voice is more precise, more rhythmic and often dwindles to almost a whisper, punctuated by strong caesuras and sudden contrasts in volume. It is a stunning recital that varies speech

patterns in a brilliant performance of a voice carrying us away on its flight. He tells them of how this man “had a vision once... And of a sudden he knew that when one woman gives herself to you, you possess all women... Throw a purple garment lightly over her shoulders and she becomes a Queen of Sheba. Lay your tousled head blindly upon her breast, she is a Delilah waiting to enthrall you. Take her garments from her, strip the last veil from her body and she is a chaste Susanna, covering her nakedness with flattering hands. Gaze upon her as you'd gaze upon a thousand strange women but never call her yours. For her secrets are inexhaustible. You'll never know them. Call her by one name only.” He inhales, leans back, and says plainly, “I call her Saskja.”

As he begins the speech, his gaze roves around his audience. But when he really begins, saying “he had a vision once,” he looks down to his hands and blinks. The stare accompanied by the blink is a typical Laughton sign that a character is switching registers from internal to external or from external to internal. While he does look up to the audience after this, one does have the sense that his vision has moved inward. It is very much in keeping with the content of the recital – this expression of a universal beauty for which all the outward manifestations of role and appearance are simply veils. The love for the unattainable inward soul which one cannot capture but only see through creation and imagination is very much a metaphor for the struggle of the painter and the struggle of the actor.

Much of the scene is made up of needless reaction shots, perhaps similar to what Bill Rothman describes as a means for the cinema to declare the virtue of a character through “a community joined in astonishment at the beauty of [a] performance, sign of the beauty of [a] soul.”¹¹¹ Graham Greene writes contemptuously of the effect of this in

Rembrandt: “the camera takes us from one whiskered face to another, each one baring his emotions with the dreadful intimacy of a peeress recommending a cream for oily skins...”¹¹² But, instead of playing to the crowd in the diegesis or relying on reaction shots inserted in post-production, Laughton works to create a sense of internal unity that directly communicates an authenticity for the audience of the film. Laughton saw storytelling as an essentially communal event, writing that:

I have been asked which of the great authors I like best... sometimes James Thurber (they wanted to laugh together); sometimes a psalm (they wanted to be solemn together); and sometimes Shakespeare’s magic wood from “A Midsummer Night’s Dream” (they were indulging in magic together).... That is the beauty of being in a theater. That we all – fifteen hundred or so of us in a big room – do the same thing together at the same moment – laugh or wonder or pity – and we feel good and safe because the people around us are the same as we are.¹¹³

He concludes his article, saying, “the communion in a theater is one of the best things we have in life.”¹¹⁴ It is through his speech and his gestures that we are drawn into the wisdom of his words – creating in his performance a deeply human authority and community.

Rembrandt, who we are shown only once during much of the recital, speaks with his eyelids almost shut, looking down, and we sense that he is drawing on images in his mind. When Rembrandt is finishing speaking, his eyes return to the outside world, perusing the reactions. His hands lie on the table in front of him, visible in the bottom of the frame. Once he begins to speak, his fingers interlace and the palms of his hands begin to press together and pull apart. There is nothing fidgety about the movement – it is rhythmic and controlled, the body in accord with speech. His gaze first moves from the audience when he looks at his hands, where his thumbs press together. After returning his gaze to the audience, his hands continue to clasp and unclasp in a slow rhythm, mirroring

his speech. When next we see him, after the inserts, he is staring at his hands; the thumbs push together, the hands unclasp, still in rhythm to the words. The process of vision and speech become embodied in this gesture.

Before the next recital, Rembrandt has been sketching a beggar dressed as King Saul. The man strikes up a conversation. Rembrandt, occupied with the sketching, tells him dryly and calmly, "you're an old king. You've had all the women you want. What's more, the evil spirit has entered into you." When the man asks him what he means, Rembrandt replies, "You've never heard the story of King Saul?" The man hasn't, and Rembrandt tells him a poetic tale of David and King Saul, ending the recital with a recitation of the Lord's Prayer.

The form and content of this recital is markedly more intense than the previous recital. The gathering is more intimate, just Rembrandt and the models for Saul and David. Laughton does not vary volume as much; the rhythm is more insistent, as is the enunciation of each word. One gets the sense that this time it is less that we are carried along as if in the flight of speech, and instead drift steadily forward upon rippling waves. The intensity of the recital is created through the speech as well as through Rembrandt's unwavering gaze at the men and his body's gradual shift forward. Rembrandt remains still after the last words, with a scowl upon face. Shifting registers at the end of the speech, he slowly relaxes his body backward, blinks, drops his hand which has been holding a piece of charcoal that he had been sketching with, and readies to recommence sketching. His appearance in this new frame is virtually the same as with the speech, showing the similarities between the two forms of artistic expression. When a sudden banging on the

door interrupts this momentary return to painting, Rembrandt is furious – that is of another world.

As in the first scene, the tempo-rhythm of Laughton's speech is echoed in his use of his hands. His right hand holds a piece of charcoal, echoing the connection between painting and the bodily gestures of speech. Midway through the scene, he briefly waves with the charcoal and leans forward with his arm upon his knee. When he says, "It matters not what a man sees, for a man sees only with his eyes, but God sees into the heart," he points the charcoal outward at "sees," and toward himself at "heart." He continues to make subtle gestures with the charcoal, turning it around in his fingers, pointing it slightly. They are rhythmic gestures – never punctuating or digressing from a point, but only following the path of the words. When he begins to recite the Lord's Prayer, the hand moves in rhythm for a moment, as if carried away by the force of the words.

In the film's penultimate scene, Rembrandt ends up in a pub with a group of youths who – thinking him a funny old man – demand that he deliver a toast. As in the first recital scene, he ends his speech with a drink. It is a communal event, and the festive sense this drinking imparts adds to the communicative power of the recitals. But his performance does not adopt a Bakhtinian tone – the speech comes from a specifically individual body. Related to this, Bakhtin's ideas about the quotation are very different than the uses to which Laughton puts his speeches; this is reflected in Bakhtin's discussion of *skaz* and his observation that "Someone else's words introduced into our own speech inevitably assume a new (our own) interpretation and become subject to our evaluation of them."¹⁵ Rather than an interaction with discourse, there is an

abandonment to the word through the body and voice – the recitals become examples of pure expressivity tied to the author’s words, a metonymy of performance, this liberation of “a living and expressive material that speaks for itself and has no need of being put into a form.”¹¹⁶

In this last recital, he proceeds to tell his listeners “the best words” that he knows: “Vanity of vanities, all is vanity. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun and behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow. Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better than that a man shall rejoice in his own works, for that is his portion.” In this scene, his gaze fixes more solidly on individual faces; his eyes may rove but one gets the sense that he sees those to whom he is speaking. His head also seems to move more freely, nodding with words, turning with his eyes. Nevertheless, the well-known words seem to come from somewhere deep within. He begins each line with a hard stress, and ends each line in a whisper. This may be seen as the typical speaking form we had heard in the earlier recitals, where he commands our attention by varying rhythm and volume. The dwindling of volume creates the sense of expectation, and each new line startles us back into focus since our ears are attuned to the softer speech. But more importantly, Laughton uses this as a form for the entire speech, which lends a powerful impression of a life dwindling through age and time. Like Benjamin’s storyteller, Laughton “has counsel – not for a few situations, as the proverb does, but for many, like the sage. For it is granted to him to reach back a whole lifetime... His gift is the ability to relate his life; his distinction, to be able to tell his entire life. The storyteller: he is the man who could let the wick of his life be consumed completely by the gentle flame of his story.”¹¹⁷

The choice of the speech is extraordinary. Bentley writes that “Lillian Hellman has said that the great plays of our time are ‘Threepenny Opera’ and ‘Mother Courage’. I would add that a song named ‘The Solomon Song’ is at the heart of both, and that they are really the same play... ‘Vanity of vanities, sayeth the Preacher, all is vanity,’ says the Bible, and its commentators explain that the reiterated word means emptiness, nullity: our life begins and ends in nothingness – a leitmotiv of literature, especially modern literature, especially Brecht and Beckett.”¹¹⁸ Laughton creates a similar incarnation of speech and mortality through the recital of this passage.

Night of the Hunter’s Framing Narrative

Laughton’s most direct use of the implications of storytelling in film is Gish’s introduction to the fairy tale narrative of *Hunter*. Laughton described the film as “a fairy-story, really a nightmarish sort of Mother Goose tale.”¹¹⁹ As early as 1933, Laughton was expressing these interests in interviews: when he offered his comments on winning the Academy award for his performance in *The Private Life of Henry VIII*, he “suggested that Disney should have got the award instead of himself. ‘There’s your great man. Great because he is simple and unaffected... He is already a greater storyteller than Hans Christian Andersen, and there is no telling to what heights he will still rise.’”¹²⁰

Night of the Hunter’s credit sequence is set against a night sky. When the credits end, Gish appears superimposed in front of this starry sky. She faces the camera and addresses us, introducing the film as a Biblical lesson, arranged around the theme of “beware of false prophets.” As she speaks, her gaggle of children are shown in a “countershot” against the stars. The scene functions as a commentary of sorts upon film

history.¹²¹ Lillian Gish was not the first choice for the film, but her appearance focuses our attention on the intertext of D.W. Griffith's films. Stanley Cortez relates how Laughton screened all of Griffith's films before beginning work on *Hunter*.¹²² By using Gish to introduce *Night of the Hunter*, Laughton goes far beyond merely making a nod towards Griffith's films. The image of Gish as the "Woman Who Rocks the Cradle" is one of *Intolerance*'s most well-known moments. *Hunter* addresses the implications of this image. Miriam Hansen's analysis of the framing narrative of *Intolerance* will provide an important reference point for the discussion which follows. The close reading of these beginning moments of Laughton's film are further validated by their absence from Grubb's book. This is Laughton's addition, and its simple form belies its complex and rich associations.

Hansen describes how *Intolerance* arranges several images to introduce its complex interweaving of four narratives, beginning with a book: "The initial close-up of the book shows a leather cover bearing the gilded inscription 'Intolerance'; in the same shot the book is being opened by an invisible hand. With this device the film asserts its cultural respectability by invoking the Western tradition of the Book, a prime token of authority and continuity, of closure and truth."¹²³ Hansen notes also that "it belongs to the numerous strategies through which Griffith sought to affiliate the cinema – and himself – with the Great Tradition of the Book, from the Bible through Shakespeare to Whitman."¹²⁴ *Hunter* changes the adherence from the written word to the spoken word. It is notable that the works with which Griffith chose to affiliate himself have crucial affinities to spoken language: the scriptural lessons of the Bible, the plays of Shakespeare and the poetic songs of Whitman. In his career as storyteller, Shakespeare and Whitman

were two of Laughton's favorite sources for reading aloud (along with, among others, Dickens, Aesop, Maupassant and Hans Christian Andersen.)¹²⁵

Laughton recounts how it was the reading from the Bible which most interested him: "I had to prove to them that it was not dull to me, and I used every trick that I had learned, and they liked it and asked for more."¹²⁶ This, from the man who disrupted the filming of *Barretts of Wimpole Street* because he would break into laughter when his character had to read a fire and brimstone passage in the Bible; "Every time he picked up the Bible he found it irresistibly funny. He would start thinking of his own youth – the terrible times he had had trying to memorize Bible verses – the torments he had suffered when he accused himself of being a sinner. It seemed too good to be true that he had shaken all that off. He was having a fine revenge on the doctrine of hellfire and damnation."¹²⁷ The Bible, in the context of *Hunter*, is wrested from its context of punishment and law and returned to community and body. By focusing on the oral tradition of the Bible in *Night of the Hunter*, Laughton is minimizing its power as text of authority and returning it to a status as body of wisdom.

Laughton is also drawing on traditions of fairy tale telling by placing the narrative within the speech of a woman storyteller. The image is a reworking of Griffith's framing narrative, where Gish is not alone: "The shot itself displays the dualistic structure... Lillian Gish is seated at the cradle in the foreground to the right, etherealized under a cone of light... To the left of the frame, three hooded old women huddle in the background, tagged as the mythological Fates by their spinning, measuring, and cutting of yarn."¹²⁸ Thus, a "translucent, living, universally appealing image" is opposed to an "ancient and disturbing allegory that associates a fatal femininity with a particular kind of

writing.”¹²⁹ Unlike Griffith's image, Laughton does not split the image of women between the domestic and the threatening, the silent mother and the spinning fates. Gish combines the traditionally marginalized image of the elderly woman storyteller and the source of moral authority. Neither crone nor priest, the image of Gish is a self-conscious attempt at regaining and reinterpreting codes of authority.

Warner notes how the Sibyl of antiquity, who embodies women's speech, became integrated into the fairy tale as the fairy, who embodies a helper to the heroine or hero. The Sibyl and fairy tales are etymologically linked: “*Fatum*, literally, that which is spoken... gives French *fée*, Italian *fata*, Spanish *hada*, all meaning ‘fairy’, and enclosing connotations of fate...”¹³⁰ They also both reflect a “knowledge of the future and the past, and in the stories which feature them, both types of figures foretell events to come, and give warnings.”¹³¹ This is one example of how characters can be associated with fate and wisdom – as a teller of stories within the narrative. Laughton managed to suffuse his roles and his film with these elements of storytelling, either by explicitly framing the narrative through a character expressing wisdom, or by performing the sharing of wisdom within a role. This creates moments of immense power, rooting authority and knowledge in the body. Benjamin's description of the story is reflected in Laughton's storytelling in film: “[The story] does not aim to convey the pure essence of the thing, like information or a report. It sinks the thing into the life of the storyteller, in order to bring it out of him again. Thus traces of the storyteller cling to the story the way the handprints of the potter cling to the clay vessel.”¹³²

4. Formless Expression

[A new religion] will set about doing as nature does, mingling in its creations – but without confounding them – darkness and light, the grotesque and the sublime; in other words, the body and the soul, the beast and the intellect; for the starting-point of religion is always the starting-point of poetry. All things are connected.

– Victor Hugo, "Preface to Cromwell"

[The] genuine grotesque is a vivid and bold externalization based on such tremendous, all-embracing inner content that reaches the limits of exaggeration. An actor must not only feel and experience human passions in all their universal, component elements – he must over and above this condense them and produce a manifestation of them so vivid, so irresistible in its expressiveness, so audacious, so bold that it borders on the burlesque.

– Constantin Stanislavski, "What is the Grotesque?"

Deleuze's schematization of what he terms the affection-image can help us understand the relation between oral storytelling and other aspects of Laughton's performances. Deleuze describes this image category:

power or quality considered for themselves, as expressed. It is clear that powers and qualities can also exist in a completely different way: as actualised, embodied in states of things. A state of things includes a determinate space-time, spatio-temporal co-ordinates, objects and people, real connections between all these givens... power becomes action or passion, affect becomes sensation, sentiment, emotion or even impulse in a person, the face becomes the character or mask of the person... But we are no longer in the domain of the affection-image, we have entered the domain of the action-image. The affection-image, for its part, is abstracted from the spatio-temporal co-ordinates which would relate it to a state of things, and abstracts the face from the person to which it belongs in the state of things.¹³³

Similarly, the recital is a gap or a pause in the narrative, creating separation from narrative flow and even from the space and time of the film, much like the close-up which has close affinities to the affection-image.

However, the most visible form of the affection-image, the close-up, is not necessary to the scenes of recital; rather, Laughton takes control over the film and creates moments with a strong affinity to Deleuze's category solely through performance. Callow describes Laughton's ability to command attention in a series of performances in *Shakespeare plays in 1933*:

Marius Goring watched every performance that Laughton gave during that season: he attributed the overwhelming impact of Angelo to Laughton's mastery of close-up technique, which he somehow adapted to theatre. This is what Agate was describing when he wrote: "whenever the actor comes to anchor to deliver his soliloquies of torment the house falls into a hush the like of which is rarely heard in our theatre."¹³⁴

The ability for a performer to seemingly step outside the bounds of narrative and character can be achieved in different ways, and in Laughton's films it is brought about partly through his performances of recitals.

Deleuze proposes a useful polarity in the affection-image: desire and wonder. Desire is essentially a microphysiognomy which expresses a series of emotions; wonder is an expressed totality, an icon. Deleuze sets up a series of oppositions which relate to the dualism of desire/wonder: micro-movements/immobility, series/unity, hate-love/admiration-surprise, characteristics/outline.¹³⁵ Certain filmmakers combine both aspects of the affection-image. Deleuze finds this ability to shift poles a major innovation of Eisenstein's works, which "produced compact and continuous intensive series, which go beyond all binary structures and exceed the duality of the collective [wonder] and the individual [desire]. Rather, they attain a new reality which could be called Dividual,

directly uniting an immense collective reflection with the particular emotions of each individual; in short expressing the unity of power and quality.”¹³⁶

For Laughton, his performances create the same sense of the Dividual. This is not through beginning with one form – the chaos of emotions – which then becomes resolved in an image of unity. Rather, he moves between the two poles, and shows us their essentially analogous state as a reflection of humanity which exceeds the boundaries of a single motivation or identity. In the last scene of *Les Misérables*, Javert is holding the manacles with which he would bind Valjean. He flips and twists them, and then, with outstretched fingers, lets them simply rest between his palms. As he does this, he first gazes at them intently with an open mouth and then turns his gaze upward, wetting his lips momentarily. It is a grotesque image, rather than the resolute stance we might expect from a character about to kill himself. Javert’s lip twitches and his eyes jitter as if about to break into tears. The last image of Javert, with his sunken mouth and gently shut eyelids, head tilted slightly back, is angelic in its peacefulness, and sublimely sad. What these moments show us is his final embodiment of a Dividual life, where the chaos of impulses is stabilized. He does not turn to a goal – the law – to satisfy his confusion. Rather, he depicts an image of wonder.

This chapter explores a manifestation of these issues in *Hunter* and *Hunchback*. Both films couple transcendent moments not only with wisdom, as in the recital, but with images of escape and freedom. The scenes of the children fleeing on the river in *Hunter* will be discussed in terms of an escape from an adult world. The voyage reflects a profound freedom in and of itself, irrespective of destination, through the mingling of sound and image which informs the world of the journey. A similar relation to the

mingling and interconnection of distinctions, a Dividual performance, is seen in *Hunchback*. Quasimodo communicates lines of escape through Laughton's repeated performances of the pure expressivity of laughter and the ringing of bells. These two films expand on the earlier discussion of the recitals, and build on the element of freedom from constraints and definitions which informs Laughton's performances and expressions of identity.

The Children on the River

As the children flee from Powell along the riverbank, we hear him shout "Children!" This, the only word he says while chasing them, serves as a fitting introduction to the river scenes, for the journey of John and Pearl in the river is for them and for them alone. Following the offscreen shout, as Powell pursues the children, we cut to a shot of land and sky, with a low horizon line, and trees and shrubbery in black silhouette. Powell emerges from the bottom of the horizon, in silhouette as well. This demonic image is undercut when we return to Powell, after seeing John unrope the skiff. Wearing his suit, he presents a comedic figure noisily and awkwardly fighting his way through the trees and branches, stumbling clumsily in the mud. He is also a figure far removed from animality, struggling to navigate through nature. It seems as if the land itself works against him, whereas the children are quick, light and efficient.

Before the next river scene, we see Powell standing around a campfire with a group of laborers. The subtext of poverty has been introduced in an earlier scene where the two children, begging on the countryside, are given one potato each by a woman who exhaustedly tells them, "Go away, go away." At the campfire, Powell – dressed in

labourer's clothes – is speaking, in his deep preacherly voice, “An ungrateful child is an abomination before the eyes of god. The world is fast going to damnation because of impudent younguns’ flying in the face of age.” The scene is lit from the campfire, and men in the background are silhouetted, and appear quite bored with Powell. One of them distractedly spits in the fire. The distinction between his preacherly tone and Pearl’s magical song about the “two pretty children” who “flew away, flew away, into the sky, into the moon” indicates the distinction between his limited world and the children’s limitless world. Pearl’s song is a prayer, in some respects, for freedom from this adult world of poverty and oppression.

The third river scene is initiated when John sights Powell riding atop a horse in the distance, silhouetted on the horizon. John comments “Don’t he ever sleep?” The contrast here can be seen as one of movement – along the land Powell pushes forward on horseback, in the river the children are propelled forward by the currents of nature. Bettelheim describes the figure of the hunter in fairy tales as “a most attractive figure, to boys as well as girls, because he rescues the good and punishes the bad. All children encounter difficulties in obeying the reality principle, and they easily recognize in the opposite figures of wolf and hunter the conflict between the id and the ego-superego aspects of their personality.”¹³⁷ By coupling social and animal, hunter and wolf, and in turn demonstrating their weaknesses, desperation and futility, the film essentially depicts the reality principle as a farcical solution to real problems of social, psychological and ethical freedom in a society dominated by poverty, repression and spectacle.

The river scenes themselves are constructed out of four basic camera setups: shots within the boat showing Pearl and John; a bird's eye views of the boat; static shots

showing the boat drifting by, usually with an element of nature dominating in the foreground of the frame; and lateral tracking shots, roughly from the vantage point of the boat. The first two elements – shots within the boat and shots of the boat – essentially stabilize the subject of the scenes, whereas the latter two elements – the static shots and tracking shots – effectively create the sense of movement which is so essential to these scenes. The static shots with nature in the foreground begin when Pearl first sings. As she sings, we see the huge white spider web and the bullfrog dominating the foreground. The second river scene shows a pair of rabbits in the foreground in a very similar setup to the spider web and bullfrog images. This first scene of the river dissolves to a large patch of bullrushes with their seeds scattered by the wind in slow motion, and this gives an objective correlative to the children's drifting movement along the river. Accentuating its dreamlike quality, there is no visible earth or sky – it is an image which seems beyond both space and time. The camera also inserts specific images of animals which may or may not be in the same world as the children – the owl which hoots and turns its head, the fox which leaps off a branch. None of the nature images are static. The spiderweb trembles, the bullfrog croaks and turns its head, the fox leaps, the owl hoots and turns to the side, the turtle crawls, the rabbits twitch excitedly. The animals, however iconic, do seem to be of this world. Moreover, they contribute to the scene's overall tone of movement, which reflects the children's escape from stasis and the limitations of the adult world.

In the second river scene, the boat slowly enters the image of a silhouetted riverbank and the river below and sky above. For the first time, the camera tracks with them – revealing a flock of sheep in a barren landscape behind the fence. On the river,

after an insert of the two children watching intently, there is a closer shot of the sheep behind the fence, from the vantage point of the boat. The linearity of the tracking shot is accentuated by the lines of the fence, across the top and bottom of the screen. After seeing the sheep, John says, "we're going to spend the night on land." Nature is movement, in a sense, and the stability which seems most tempting, land for instance, is also the most risky.

As well as depicting movement, the river scenes are structured by the recurring mingling of images and sounds. Powell's pursuit of the children ends with him caught in the river, brandishing his knife aloft. We see his staring, hungry face and he lets loose an animalistic cry. The scene cuts to a bird's eye view of Powell in a long shot bottom frame left, and the children in the boat in a long shot upper frame right. The river separates them. In the river, currents form a cross pattern with Powell on one side, the children on the other. (It forms an "X", one of the film's many linear forms.) This visual merging of water is echoed on the soundtrack when Powell's cry becomes a wail of music, which transitions to the background music for the song that Pearl sings. Visually and aurally, the two worlds have merged. In the second river scene, after hearing Powell's bitter invectives against children, an elderly man spits into the fire. The sizzle of his spit burning is sonically bridged by the hoot of an owl, which we are then shown in close-up, staring forward and then turning his head. The turn of his head dissolves to a turtle crawling on land, which then cues a cut to John, who is looking at the turtle. This bizarre series of sonic transitions, retroactive matches, and point-of-view shots which cross space and time is emblematic of Laughton's mingling of the forms of the world in the river scenes.

Duras points to a similar crucial event elsewhere in the film, referring to the scene where Rachel is threatened by the waiting Powell:

La vieille dame invente donc de chanter pour passer le temps que dure la menace de mort, cet écoulement de la nuit. Nuit propice au meurtre, qui s'écoule comme le fleuve. La vieille dame invente de chanter *Moses*. Elle invente de chanter le chant même que sifflait le criminel, l'appel à Dieu à son secours. Dehors et dedans la maison, entre le criminel et l'innocence des enfants, la vieille dame invente d'élever cette barrière du chant. Le miracle est là... D'abord son chant est proposé comme un défi, ensuite il est partagé par le père [Mitchum] et ensuite encore oui, il devient un chant de joie, de fête. Le criminel et la vieille dame chantent ensemble le retour à la vie, la dernière fête du père, et les enfants baignent dans ce chant jusqu'au matin...¹³⁸

The world of *Hunter* – represented most poetically in the river scenes – is a world defined by the *connection* of voice and movements.

The film and the river scenes also rely on an erasure of dualities which goes beyond the film's typical uses of chiaroscuro and conflict. For example, the editing strategies of the film often shift between near and far. The opening scenes begin in an abstract night sky, move to an aerial view, approach to a close-up of a dead body and then return to an aerial view. The first image of Pearl and John is against a lawn filled with blooming flowers – forming a series of bright stars on the grass surrounding the children and serving as a visual echo of the film's first image of a starry night sky.

The last image in the river scenes, just before the children encounter Rachel for the first time, encapsulates these concerns. The camera pans up from the riverbed to the night sky and then cuts to a shot of the sky in the day. We have moved from river to sky, from night to day. In the image of the day, a cloud is visible, behind which streaks of light permeate the shadow. These refracted streams of light are seen throughout the first scenes on the river, where the reflection of moonlight creates beams of streaked light

shooting up in the image. It is a poetic image of the integration of light and dark – the resolving of dualities which informs the theme and style of the film.

A Creaturely Voice

The mingling that leads to an integrated and formless expression created through aspects of film language is found also in Laughton's performances. Deleuze discusses the gestures of formless expression, the use of voice and movement in the dematerialization of thought and desire, in his analysis of Kafka's stories. Deleuze writes,

What interests Kafka is a pure and intense sonorous material that is always connected to *its own abolition* – a deterritorialized musical sound, a cry that escapes signification, composition, song, words – a sonority that ruptures in order to break away from a chain that is still all too signifying... In short, sound doesn't show up here as a form of expression, but rather as an *unformed material of expression*, that will act on other terms... it serves to express contents that will reveal themselves to be relatively less and less formalized; thus, the head that straightens up ceases to matter in itself and becomes formally no more than a deformable substance swept away by the flow of sonorous expression.¹³⁹

The recital's relation to content – no matter how transcendent – draws them outside of the pure deterritorialization that Deleuze is observing. Throughout *Hunchback*, however, Laughton does create a sense of the purely creatural and expressive through gesture, voice and movement.

One way in which he does this is through verbal repetitions: the first words we hear in the film are “quiet, quiet.” He also shouts “water, water” and “sanctuary, sanctuary” in key scenes later in the film. The kind of automatic, primal force that these repetitions bring to mind, in the Freudian sense, is also reflected in his recurring gesture of the sigh. We see his inhalations and exhalations, racking his whole body, frequently in the film. It is particularly forceful in the scene at the trial and at the scene of his last

approach to Esmeralda. Benjamin writes that "...because the most forgotten alien land is one's own body, one can understand why Kafka called the cough that erupted from within him "the animal." It was the most advanced outpost of the great herd."¹⁴⁰ One gets the impression of hidden forces at work within Quasimodo's own body, forces which defy social or psychological definition and instead lead to pure expression.

We see a similar type of expression in the scenes of bell-ringing. Laughton described his approach to playing Quasimodo: "Naturally, I won't play it as Lon Chaney did. Any actor understands his stuff plays to catch the tempo of the moment."¹⁴¹ The "moment" is the eve of World War II. Charles Higham quotes the director, William Dieterle, on the relationship of the film – and particularly Laughton's performance – to the impending war:

When England and France declared war on the Third Reich the tension on the soundstage was unbearable. The scene in which Quasimodo rings the bells for Esmerelda, high in the bell tower, one of the most important scenes in the story, was supposed to be a kind of love scene between these two, but it developed into something so powerful, that everybody including myself forgot that we were shooting a scene. Something superdimensional happened at that moment, so that I forgot to call "cut" according to custom, as the scene ended.

Laughton went on ringing the bells after the scene was really over. Finally, completely exhausted, he stopped.... Charles could only say: "I couldn't think of Esmerelda in that scene at all. I could only think of the poor people out there, going to fight that bloody, bloody war! To arouse the world, to stop that terrible butchery! Awake! Awake! That's what I felt when I was ringing the bells!"¹⁴²

The immense power of this scene is a difficult thing to describe. But one gets the sense of an unformed, almost primordial desire to escape, to express, to be.

The first time we see Quasimodo ringing the bells, it is a frightening image. He has been reprimanded by Frollo, and he walks quickly to the bells, looks up and laughs slightly. He is still carrying the crown that he had been given during the Feast of Fools

and he puts it on before ringing the bell. His face is serious, contorted, and it appears as if he is sobbing or laughing – an almost shapeless expression. When next we see him ringing the bells, in two brief scenes midway through the film, he is similarly focused, except this time rather than pulling the rope, he uses his body to ring them. Sitting between two of them, his legs dangling over the beam which supports him, his head tilts up after the movement of throwing his body into each push. They seem to carry him as much as he carries them. It is a violently intense image, befitting both the context of the scene (Quasimodo's frustration) and his relationship to the bells. He stops when Frollo appears, looking at him in terror.

The third and final sequence of bell ringing continues the intensification of emotion and body associated with the bells. After giving Esmerelda a guided tour of his bells – calling out each of their names in the tone that they ring – he tells her of how “Big Marie” made him deaf. He looks at the bell with a strangely emotional gaze, as if recalling difficult memories, his eyes intent and his mouth open. With a look of pride, he knocks on Big Marie, and tells Esmerelda, “They’re my friends.” He asks, “Shall I play them for you?” and proceeds to sit on a plank of wood, suspended between two bells, Big Marie and Guillaume, pushing them so that they will begin to ring. He starts methodically, but as he hears their sounds, his head tilts back and his mouth opens as if in ecstasy. He lies down and kicks them with his feet, and his look is sexually charged, animalistic and childlike all at once. We hear his ecstatic noises. He stands, readies himself, and leaps onto Big Marie. He rides the massive bell, laughing, grunting and shouting in ecstasy – lost to the world in a sexualized image of rapture.

The way in which Laughton plays the bells certainly represents a parodic treatment to religion, or in the context of the film, hierarchy and power. Bakhtin describes an episode in Rabelais' novel where "Gargantua steals the historic bells [of Notre Dame cathedral] in order to hang them on the harness of his giant mare... Uncrowning the cathedral bells and hanging them on a horse is a typical carnivalesque gesture of debasement..."¹⁴³ One reason for this association is that "The ringing and jingling of bells is to mark the movement of the munching jaws."¹⁴⁴ The tinkling bells on the jester's crown and the giant resounding bells of the cathedral are both used to interconnect, and then uncrown, the bell. But Laughton's performance shifts the tone away from parody. His abandonment to pure movement and expression is crucial. The bells provide a striking image of escaping oneself through the intermingling of emotion, body and sound.

This creaturely expression is also visible in Quasimodo's laughter. Despite the major similarities between Laughton's performances and Bakhtin's conception of grotesque realism, one finds that laughter has much more of a valence of individual escape rather than social rebirth. When Quasimodo is with Esmerelda in the bell tower, explaining himself to her, he begins to laugh. As Callow notes, the laugh comes from somewhere "very deep indeed, and is sustained so long that it becomes a laugh at the whole idea of deformity, at the idea of appearance at all."¹⁴⁵ We see his body tremble with the waves of laughter. It is almost like a wheeze, an exhalation, which takes over his body. The laughter, which continues offscreen, sounds as if it has given way to sobbing, but when we return to Quasimodo we see that he is still laughing. A similar effect, except in reverse, is seen in *Henry VIII*. Henry has been told about his beloved Katherine's

infidelities. He sits, sunken in his throne, his hands clenching, his body tightening, and begins to cry. He brings his arms in to cover his face and breaks down in tears. It is a strange cry though, sounding quite like his laughter – only deeper, softer, and hidden.

The scene of Quasimodo's laughter near the end of the film, after he has poured the molten lead on the crowds below, further reflects the implications of laughter. He is seen atop the cathedral, holding onto the balustrades, his body heaving up and down in laughter. It is a much different laugh than the ones discussed previously – one gets the sense of something vicious in it, like a laugh at hurting an animal. The third time we see him, in a close shot, the laugh has become more unrestrained, and Quasimodo is flinging his head back in complete abandonment to this ambiguous feeling of power. In his penultimate scene, he stands tall between the pillars, and then quickly sits down, facing one pillar. His head jerks up, he faces to the heavens, and his hands clasp together as if in victory. But his laughter has transformed into something like sobbing. His hands are clasped as if in an entreaty to God. It is a difficult scene to read, because little really separates the cruel laughter from the joyous laughter, the tears of joy from the tears of pain. Quasimodo's expression becomes almost a pure sound combining guilt and joy, sorrow and power. His formlessness translates to this most human of expressions, and Quasimodo's connection to the denatured purity of expression is made manifest.

The ambiguity of Quasimodo's expression is only deepened when one considers the source novel. Hugo portrays Quasimodo as concerned for the well-being of the church and Esmerelda, and seemingly drawing no personal satisfaction from his power.¹⁴⁶ When help finally does come – not through his actions as in the film, but rather through the message of the king – Hugo writes that Quasimodo “fell to his knees and

raised his hands heavenwards; then, drunk with delight, he ran, he climbed swiftly as a bird to the cell whose approaches he had defended so intrepidly.”¹⁴⁷ The differences in plot and incident notwithstanding, Quasimodo's reaction is much more single-toned and restrained in Hugo's novel than it is in Laughton's performance.

More archetypal readings of this scene would likely suggest a sense of superhuman power. In *The Interpretation of Dreams*, Freud writes that “The stream of urine that washes everything clean is an unmistakable allusion to greatness. It is in this manner that Gulliver extinguishes the great fire in Lilliput... In this way, too, Gargantua, the superman of Master Rabelais, takes vengeance upon the Parisians, straddling Notre Dame and training his stream of urine upon the city...”¹⁴⁸ Bakhtin also writes about Gargantua’s “drowning of 260, 418 people in his urine ‘exclusive of women and children.’”¹⁴⁹ Bakhtin writes that “Before performing his carnivalesque gesture, Gargantua declares that he will do this only *par ris*, for sport or laughter's sake. And the crowd concludes its volley of oaths by using the same expression, which, as the author tells us, is the origin of the word Paris. Thus, the entire episode is a gay carnivalesque travesty of the city's name.”¹⁵⁰

But Laughton's performances go beyond definitions of character, towards something more abstract and formless. While these performance motifs – the repetitions of words, the sighs, the laughs, the ringing of the bells – contribute to and shape the specific meaning of the character, they also function as self-contained gestures. They are the unformed lines of expressive escape which recur throughout Laughton's performances and which later find powerful expression in the one film that Laughton directed.

5. Impulses and Desires

The question posed by desire is not "What does it mean?" but rather "How does it work?" How do these machines, these desiring-machines, work – yours and mine?

– Gilles Deleuze, *Anti-Oedipus*

An interview with me by Sydney Edwards has appeared in the Evening Standard, illustrated by a Quasimodo-like picture where my resemblance to Charles Laughton becomes stronger. It is very strange how one never looks as one feels. I don't feel as fat or as puffy – or as sly.

– Peter Hall, *Peter Hall's Diaries*

Throughout *The Island of Lost Souls* (Erle C. Kenton, 1933), Dr. Moreau (Laughton) looks impeccably dapper in his white suit. He is nimble-footed, graceful and nonchalant in his navigation of his jungle as he points out the sights to the stranded traveler, Mr. Parker. As he tells Parker, who is gradually learning of his horrific experiments, to "spare me these youthful horrors, please," his voice's urbane and blasé tone is beautifully supported by a flippant little wave of the hand. Disturbed when he observes "the stubborn beast flesh creeping back" in one of his creations, the panther-woman, he confides to his assistant, "I may as well quit." A smile plays across his lips, and it lends him a sense of desperation mingled with abandon; Laughton captures the emotion of a man accustomed to power feeling it fade. The scene ends, however, with a pleasant surprise for Moreau – the panther-woman can cry. There is humanity in her, and all that needs to be done is for him to "burn" the rest of the animal out of her.

What is this Dr. Moreau? A mad scientist, certainly. But what do we make of his urbane attitude and his human element. Does this merely embroider his cruelty? On the

contrary, his world *combines* humanity and animality, rationality and insanity; it is the nightmarish world of pure impulse where desires of different kinds blur into each other. When Moreau hears the sounds of his creatures growing restless a look of ecstasy plays across his face – a growing smile, a glance of the eyes off into space and a slowly tilting head. He responds to their cries not with worry, not with fearlessness, but with pleasure. We see the same sexualization of character in Laughton's Father Barrett, the brusque and awkward man, desiring his daughter sexually, utterly devastated and disempowered when she leaves the dominating embrace of his home. In an interview soon after the release of that film, Laughton described the role as "the sort of thing one wouldn't want to do oftener than, say, once in several years. It's too tragic and sinister, too unpleasantly wearing on everybody concerned."¹⁵¹ He continues, in terms which have little to do with moral categories and everything to do with the connection of different impulses, describing Barrett as "grim and sadistic, with the suggestion of a relentless force driving him from outside. You have to feel that there is something deeply human about him, if one could only get the emotional balance better adjusted. He's the driving sort of leader, applying his power to parental affairs rather than to the world of finance or business." Barrett and Moreau are of the same world, sexualized and animalistic, charged with power and desire, and altogether human.

Laughton's characters are constantly wresting objects, settings, characters and their own selves away from narrative progression or stasis and into the world of their impulses. Rather than chewing the scenery, Laughton devours it by implicating everything that he touches in a play of formless desire. Deleuze uses his category of the impulse-image to explore this manifestation of instinct in film. (Bruno Bettelheim

describes how Freud's term "instinct," translated as *pulsion* in French, is better translated as "impulse" in English.¹⁵²) Deleuze describes the activity of the impulse-image as a "constant predator-prey relationship" between the impulse and its milieu.¹⁵³ This is a relationship which can "assume configurations which are very complex, bizarre and unusual in relation to the derived milieux in which they appear. Certainly, they are often relatively simple – like the impulse of hunger, impulses to nourishment, sexual impulses, or even the impulse for gold in *Greed*. But already they are inseparable from the perverse modes of behaviour which they produce and animate..."¹⁵⁴

Neither Deleuze's category nor Laughton's performances take part in the same structure that Freud assigns to instincts. Freud writes that "An instinct... never operates as a force giving a *momentary* impact but always a *constant* one. Moreover, since it impinges not from without but from within the organism, no flight can avail it. A better term for instinctual stimulus is a 'need'. What does away with a need is 'satisfaction'. This can be attained only by an appropriate ('adequate') alteration of the internal source of stimulation."¹⁵⁵ The Freudian notions of constant instinctual pressure released by the satisfaction of a need is very different from what Laughton creates through performance. The idea of satisfaction is far from the performances. Laughton's characters never attain peace. They are created as expressions of impulses, not as pathways or solutions to problems. Moreover, impulses seem to come in flows, displacing one another, disappearing for scenes and then suddenly bursting forth.

The power of the impulse is a force which Deleuze describes as "not merely internal or innate, but static, whose only equivalent is that of Bacon in painting, when he summons up an 'emanation' which arises from an immobile character, or that of Jean

Genet in literature, when he describes the extraordinary violence which can be contained in a motionless hand at rest.”¹⁵⁶ Callow sees this force in Captain Bligh, who “became a universal symbol of the cruelty bred by repression, a kind of Francis Bacon-like image of distorted emotion and warped authority.”¹⁵⁷ Despite Bligh’s propensity to explosiveness, he seems much more restrained in his expression of impulses than the tortured figures of Javert and Quasimodo.

When manifest, impulses do not take a single, direct form. Freud writes of how they build up over time: “We can divide the life of each instinct into a series of separate successive waves, each of which is homogenous during whatever period of time it may last, and whose relation to one another is comparable to that of successive eruptions of lava.”¹⁵⁸ These movements of instinct – where old forms linger with new forms and are constantly replaced by different manifestations – is what Laughton gives us throughout his performances: an instinctual life to behold, where the vicissitudes, in terms of direction, intensity, sublimation, repression and form constantly fluctuate.

Laughton structures his performances around shifting impulses, refusing to regulate his characters to a single desire, refusing to submit them to an explanation, refusing to adapt them to the constraints of their milieu. But one impulse does seem to loom over most, if not all, of Laughton’s creations. His characters are pulled toward death and aggression – manifestations of the death instinct – throughout his films. It is no coincidence that he won an Academy Award for *Henry VIII*, playing a character for whom sexual desire and death will be forever entwined; that *Night of the Hunter* is about a man with “love” and “hate” written on his body; that his performances of the same duty-bound character type – Bligh and Javert – explore the relationship between pleasure

and pain, the control of others and the abolition of oneself. Laughton's characters revolve around the impulse for death and destruction, the impulse with which "naturalism is saturated..."¹⁵⁹

This chapter explores the manifestations of the death instinct in three of Laughton's performances (Bligh, Javert and Quasimodo) and in *Hunter*. The play between sadism and masochism, between aggressiveness and abandonment, inform these creations. Bligh and Javert reflect different elements of institutional violence; I will examine the ways in which Laughton's performance inflects them with different, opposed visions of punishment and pain which correspond to Deleuze's distinctions between sadism and masochism. I will then discuss a scene from *Hunter* which combines these two expressions of the death instinct, and which depicts the lyrical beauty of death and the ugly spectacle of violence. I will conclude with a discussion of a scene in *Hunchback*, which, in all of Laughton's films, seems the most powerful encapsulation of the dignity of human desire restricted by enforced roles and identities. Ultimately, Laughton's expressions of the death instinct, whether aggressive or passive, contrast the essential beauty of sensualized desires with the cold, sharp cruelty of the pursuit of goals and the following of duty.

Suffering and Desire

Perhaps the most famous example of Laughton's impulse-image is in his performance as the Barrett patriarch in *The Barretts of Wimpole Street*. Aware that he could not actually construct the character out of the play's subtext of a father's incestuous desires for his daughter, Laughton said, "They can't censor the glint in the eye."¹⁶⁰ It is

this glint in the eye which operates in scenes in both *Mutiny* and *Les Misérables* to charge a space of violence with sexuality. There are two scenes in *Les Misérables* where Javert gazes at the suffering of Valjean, just as there are two scene in *Mutiny* where Bligh gazes at a flogging. The differences are telling.

In *Les Misérables*, Valjean is being beaten with batons for finally rebelling against the merciless prison conditions. Javert watches him silently and without expression, except for a brief moment where he gazes at him as if examining a sculpture, looking straight at him, then down and back up. Later in the film, when Valjean assists a man trapped underneath a wagon stuck in the mud, Javert again observes Valjean in a situation of physical pain. The narrative function of this repetition is clear: this follows a scene where Javert's suspicions about Valjean have been raised and it serves to connect this situation with Valjean's past. Javert stands motionless without shifting his expression; with droopy eyes and an open mouth, he watches Valjean slowly lower the weight on his back. There is not a flicker of emotion, and the tension of the image is powerful due to its simplicity. Once Valjean has extricated himself, Javert tells him, in a voice tinged with irony, "That was amazing, Monsieur Madeleine, amazing. I didn't know anybody could do that. You must be stronger than I thought." His eyes are fixed on him, glancing at his back, as he says, "You know the only men I knew with muscles developed enough to do a thing like that were those who served a term in the galleys." Javert helps Valjean straighten the back of his coat. As he dryly notes where the prisoners would get their muscles, he presses Valjean's back with his hands, slides them down and then pats the back again. Valjean turns and Javert's eyes – which had been fixed on his back – look up. He pauses for a moment as he faces Valjean, and as if he has forgotten

what he was saying, awkwardly adds, "from the oars," and exhales a slight nervous gasp. As he says this, his eyes quickly look up and down Valjean's face, and then meet his eyes in a stare. Valjean moves away and Javert says, "A wonderful effort, Monsieur Madeleine." Then he adds, with a strangely emotional resonance, "wonderful," accompanied by a pronounced blink of the eyes. As Valjean departs, Javert watches him, with a slight squint in the eyes. The touch, the betrayal of the open mouth, the gasps and the intensity all sexualize this scene of suffering.

A much plainer effect is created in one of the first scenes in *Mutiny*. Bligh stands with Sir Joseph, his superior, and Sir Joseph's son, Byam. Bligh has no interest in either of these two people, and his apathy is communicated through his gaze. Steady and focused on watching a flogging, his eyes only address Sir Joseph for moments, and then hurriedly look away. When Sir Joseph bids him farewell, he suddenly reacts as if stirred from a reverie, and responds. His real interests lie in the flogging, and it seems as if neither of the men he is with should know about this, or even be affected by it. At one point, he excitedly says, "You think there's no science in flogging, you should watch my bosun," but rather than asking the question of the first clause, he simply runs through it as a statement. Later in the film, when demanding to continue flogging a man who has died, Bligh watches from his own private world without emotion, only a rigid desire to observe the law and its consequences.

Laughton's gaze inscribes him in a different relationship to the dynamic of pleasure and pain in the two films. Whereas Bligh's apathetic disregard for anything but the law indicates a deeply institutional sadism, Javert's sensualization of pain draws the scene into his own complex world. Bligh is set apart, distinct from the world. Javert

incorporates it into his own world of impulse. The distinctions that Deleuze draws between the sadist and the masochist in *Coldness and Cruelty* are relevant to these two connected, but fundamentally different, performances. For Deleuze, one major area of distinction is the masochist's adherence to the contract and the sadist's adherence to the institution which "renders laws unnecessary [and] replace[s] the system of rights and duties by a dynamic model of action, authority and power."¹⁶¹ Deleuze writes that, "The aesthetic and dramatic suspense of Masoch contrasts with the mechanical, cumulative repetition of Sade... in Sade [repetition] is a function of acceleration and condensation and in Masoch it is characterized by the 'frozen' quality and the suspense."¹⁶² The two desires on display differ in this way. Bligh's demand to continue and his blank stare which accompanies the whipping show us "The 'apathy' of the sadist [which] is essentially directed against feeling...."¹⁶³ This bland focus, demanding repetition despite the absurdity of the situation – flogging a dead man – inclines us to see a sadistic impulse which does not involve an aestheticized suffering or the externalization of impulses; there is pleasure to be had, but it is of a different form from Javert's. Javert's pause at assisting and his erotically charged stare which accompanies the suffering create a different effect. Through expression and the gaze, Laughton brings Javert's approach to duty, law and punishment into a world of sexuality and impulse.

Although the environment of these scenes suggests violence, and even perhaps sensuality, Laughton goes beyond. The network of pleasure and pain that shows forth demonstrates a cruelty much more tangible than that of narrative or setting. The characters implicitly reflect a social critique, functioning partly as a commentary on these institutionalized spaces and the roles they impose upon their administrators: "By

scrupulously applying the law we are able to demonstrate its absurdity and provoke the very disorder that it is intended to prevent or to conjure... The law is no longer subverted by the upward movement of irony to a principle that overrides it, but by the downward movement of humor which seeks to reduce the law to its furthest consequences.”¹⁶⁴

Laughton does not create characters of pure evil which we can safely see as fundamentally distinct from ourselves; while careful not to pity his creations, he always shows at least a glimpse of their humanity. His characters are profoundly unaware of their own impulses and oblivious to their excesses. The effect of this is to heighten their humanity and sympathy – they seem driven by forces beyond their control or understanding. One of the few scenes in *Mutiny* which communicate this occurs when Bligh is finally captured by the mutineers. He is completely surprised, dressed in his nightshirt while waking up in the morning. He stretches, yawns and rubs his nose. As the mutineers enter the room, Bligh’s wide open-mouth reflects his shock. When the men come at him, he dashes with astonishing speed for a gun in his desk. But he is restrained, and his resistance is less one of concerted effort than desperate flailing. Later, tied to the mast, he tries to master the situation again, but he has lost. With a hoarse voice he says, pitifully, “but you’re taking my ship.” These images of powerlessness – communicated largely by showing the body beneath the uniform – lend Bligh a humanity rarely seen elsewhere in the film. But Bligh, who will soon deliver his famous “hanging from the highest yardarm” speech is terrified of revealing this self – immediately drawing upon the goal of vengeance rather than encountering a moment of self-awareness. He is bound to the hard, sharp edges of life, and his defeat offers us only a fleeting glimpse of a human being underneath.

In a similar situation near the end of *Les Misérables*, Javert appears similarly rigid and non-sensuous in his being. In the midst of a riot – a dangerous place for a police officer to remain – we see him searching for Valjean with a twitching lip and squinting eyes. As he stands looking out, a rioter asks, “Who are you?” Javert does not react, but then – a beat after the question – his eyelids shut, he turns suddenly and as his eyelids open, he fires out, “What’s that?” as if perturbed and distracted. His reverie is broken. Suddenly, he has entered another frame, one where he is powerless. Defiantly, after the youth taps Javert’s chest and says, “police,” Javert replies, “I might be a spy and I’m certainly the police.” His head dashes back in the other direction, they seize him, and he is aghast at this impertinence, his face literally shaking with frustration.

When he faces off with Valjean soon after, a much different character is revealed. Valjean tells him, “hunt ends,” and Javert retreats so that his back is pressed against a wall, “End it then. Do your part, I’ve done mine. I stand by everything I’ve done.” A smile plays across his face, and no sign of anxiety or uncertainty is visible – he wants to die. Valjean hesitates. Javert, still with a look of smirking satisfaction and contentment remains silent, until he realizes that Valjean is cutting the ropes which bind him. Javert says, quickly, “What are you doing?” And then repeats the question, with a drawn out waver on each word. His mouth hanging open, his shoulders heaving, he desperately says, “Do you think... I’d take my freedom from you,” and then cries out, “Shoot! Go ahead, shoot!” He has flung his cap on the ground in a gesture of resignation, and his body reverberates from the action. His face is bursting with emotion – almost on the verge of tears – as he tells Valjean, “You’re a fool, you know what’ll happen, I’ll take you in the end, you know I will, you know I must.” His speech is powerfully rhythmic,

and an effect of expelling these words of duty from his body is manifest. Valjean walks away, and a terrified and shocked Javert mutters “Ahei, ahei” holding his cane and making as if to follow him. The world of Javert’s impulses is not in accord with the world around him, and he is terrified by this discordance.

When Valjean encounters his nemesis for the last time, Javert’s expression is utterly ambiguous: neither joy nor sadness. These opposites remain potentialities as Valjean tells him in a tone of utter defeat, “I am ready. All I ask is a few moments to say goodbye.” Javert’s expression does not change, and he says in a voice of deathly calm, “The law allows you nothing.” His eyes, barely visible, are roving Valjean’s face. Valjean, in a state of fury, raises his hand slowly. Javert nervously and quickly dampens this gesture by placing his hands overtop Valjean’s hands, saying in a gentle voice, “Here...” This cuts to a medium close-up of the two men, where Javert tells him, “Here, see, it isn’t me, it’s got nothing to do with me, it’s the law that wants you, it’s the law, see.” He says this, elongating the word “law,” and pushing his face forward. He pauses, and in this brief moment, his drooping mouth tells us the chaos of emotions that he is experiencing: pursed in fear to continue, quickly pushing forward verging on tears, drawn back in horror. Javert tells him, “Will you go ahead, I’ll wait,” and – in one of the most compressed scenes of facial expression in Laughton’s entire oeuvre – his mouth purses uncontrollably and his eyes twitch briefly. As Valjean turns away, Javert’s eyes widen as if searching for something within this man who he has been examining and pursuing, fearing and needing.

Laughton’s facial movements have reached an almost rarefied level of complexity in this scene. Clearly, it is too complex and human an activity for Laughton to have

actually controlled, but one can see the layers of complexity bursting through the boundaries of this character. A range of emotions are expressed within seconds: fear, death, love, uncertainty, sadness, resignation and respect. It is not a matter of one affect shifting to another, it is a chaos of human emotions. Even if they flicker by too quickly for us to recognize them, they have enormous impact in that they depict a self exploding with half-understood yet fully felt impulses.

The Murder in *Night of the Hunter*

Midway through *Night of the Hunter*, Powell murders Willa. This scene mingles intense cruelty with astonishing beauty, and its subject is both that of the sadism and masochism. The scene takes place in a space much like a church or theater, with a pronounced A-frame roof. It is as if it were on a stage. The atmosphere is strongly ritualistic and theatrical. The scene begins with Powell turned aside, and Willa in bed, her arms crossed on her chest. Her lips move almost without making a sound, but we hear her end a prayer, whispering, "Amen." Her associations with religious martyrdom are thus introduced by her pose, her prayer, a strange calmness and – later in the scene – an ethereal light which shines upon her. Without turning, Mitchum tilts his head up and says strongly, with a note of impatient anger in his voice, "Are you through praying?" Willa responds plainly, half-whispering, "I'm through Harry." The ironic status of this comment, echoed later in the scene where she tells him "the rest of it don't matter," accentuates Willa's understanding of what is happening to her, and her acquiescence to this martyrdom.

When the scene focuses on Powell rather than Willa, we are caught in a similar dreamlike trance, but one which reflects a growing tension rather than an abandonment to death. The scene cuts to a close-up of Powell, his head tilted upwards and to the side, stiffly facing the window. His mouth twitches in a sneer or a gasp, somewhere between restrained hatred and ecstasy, as he holds the pose of his arm reaching out to heaven. His eyes, which are barely visible in the blackness of their sockets, seem to move as if in search of something. This cuts to a medium shot of him by the window, suddenly lowering his arm and returning to a less gestural and ritualistic position. He quickly pulls the window shade down and takes out his knife and, in a close-up insert, shoots the blade out. Powell is going through these motions as if on a stage; he is not interacting with his environment in a way which is not self-aware, he is moving automatically, ritualistically, coldly. The black shadow that fills the left side of his face stands out in sharp contrast to the light on the right side, but this is not an indication of duality – Powell is only about hate.

He walks to the bed, slowly lays his hand down to the right of Willa and, using it for balance, extends his right arm up and left leg back. His posture is rigid and straight, as if he were about to perform a ritual sacrifice. This cut to an insert of Willa on the bed looking up with an expressionless, blank face. She shuts her eyes. The scene wipes to the children's bedroom in a visual corollary to the cutting of the knife. This is one of many examples of the seeming complicity to the filmmaker with Powell's character. Earlier in the scene, after his violent slap on her face, the scene cuts on the slap to a shot of Willa on the bed. The music stops after the slap, with slight strains of Powell's theme

introduced, until Sibelius' *Valse Triste* begins again. The complicity of the editing and music heighten the dramatic inevitability of this ritual.

We follow these activities in a dreamlike trance, but whose dream is it? The question is an important one, since point-of-view is crucial to our understanding of the film's style and theme. After the murder, we see Powell telling the couple who own the local diner, "Spoons," an absurd story about how Willa abandoned him, "Can't nobody say I didn't do my best to save her." Of course, the entire situation is highly implausible from any sort of logical standpoint – clearly the couple have known Willa for years, just met Powell, and have no reason to leave such a bizarre statement unchallenged and uninvestigated. However, by this point in the film, the dominance of the preacher's show is well-established: his every movement and every word of sin and redemption, hate and love, casts a spell over his adult listeners.

Willa is caught in Powell's web, but there is a sad dignity in the ways in which her fatalistic masochism is represented. Before arriving at the house, where she will be killed, Willa leaves her friends at "Spoons." She tells them that the relationship of hatred between her son, John, and Powell "is my burden and I'm proud of it." She stands with a determined face, pulling her coat into her, speaking with decisiveness; the low angle of the shot complements her stoic posture. Behind her, however, we can see only a slight glimmer of light lower screen left; the rest of the image is obscured in a thick fog. The image lingers as she walks off until only the back of her head is visible at the bottom of the frame. She has almost disappeared into nothingness.

When we return to her following the murder, she *has* disappeared into nothingness. The camera is positioned underwater in the river, and we see three large

strands of seaweed waving in the water. It is completely silent. Sun glints through and the camera follows the waving seaweed to reveal Willa's dead body in a car, with a strand of seaweed licking her face. This cuts to another shot of her in the car, at an oblique angle. Each of these shots linger for several seconds, as we see a fishing line tugging at the car. It is an eerie, unreal scene. Slowly, the camera tilts up from the body to show a boat, sun shining through the waves. We exit this underwater resting place to see a man standing in his boat, thinking he's caught a fish. He looks down when he can't land it, and we see in his point-of-view shot the ghostly river tableau: Willa dead in her car. We return once again to the underwater image of Willa. She is in the mid background, low in the frame, the black body of the car taking up the bottom quarter of the frame. Her hair and the seaweed wave in the water as sun streams through. It is dead silent, until we hear a dialogue overlap of Powell singing "Leaning, leaning, safe and secure from all of our harms." The static shot, before a slow dissolve to Powell, lasts a full fourteen seconds. It is a brilliantly lyrical encapsulation of death. Like the earlier scene of Willa's departure and the murder, it is accompanied by Sibelius' *Valse Triste*.

The murder scene emblemizes the characters of Powell and Willa. Powell's image is a spectacle of domination, reflected in assertive gesture and harsh light. Willa's image is of transcendent death, reflected in religious imagery, ethereal light, deterritorialized setting and a deathly beautiful song. There is something utterly peaceful and supremely lyrical about Willa floating in the car. There is something utterly ironic and supremely artificial about Preacher's explanation of what has occurred. We cannot simply attribute the tone of the murder scene to one participant or another – their images meet. The scene depicts a sadistic performance of killing and a masochistic performance

of death. The murder seizes the film, and bends it to both finalities – but it is doubtless the lyrical representation of Willa's death which dominates its vision. This is the limit of expression, and the beauty it is accorded cuts through the film like a knife.

Aesthetic Desire

Quasimodo embodies, in some respects, “the restoration of a limitless narcissism”¹⁶⁵ that Freud finds typical of spiritual aspirations. But unlike the religious tone that Freud finds in such a notion (“The ‘oneness with the universe’ which constitutes its ideational content sounds like a first attempt at a religious consolation, as though it were another way of disclaiming the danger which the ego recognizes as threatening it from the external world...”¹⁶⁶) Quasimodo's “oceanic” feeling relies upon the erasure of boundaries through the expressivity of the body in a state of constant metamorphosis and engagement with the world. Quasimodo pursues rather than flees from the world.

This culminates in a scene with Esmerelda which occurs midway through the film. Quasimodo has been whipped, in punishment for following his father's orders. He is left bound on a dais. He cries for water. Finally, someone comes to his aid: Esmeralda climbs the scaffolding, slowly and elegantly. Quasimodo's body rises in expectation, despite his tight constraints. This cuts to a close-up of Quasimodo looking at her, averting his gaze downward, and then returning to her. He looks away and moves his head down as if retreating again into a shell, nuzzling in to himself like a skittish cat. As she comes nearer to him with the water, he slowly pulls his body away until his back is completely arched. He will not face her. A sick animal, a hesitant child. With his body extended fully backward, she pours water in his mouth. He then straightens and looks at her directly.

Almost imperceptibly, his body relaxes, his head sinks and he begins to move forward now that he trusts her. He has looked at her, shyly and exhaustedly seen her face and her body. He remains in this relaxed position, with the appearance of immense tranquility and patience. He tilts his head to look at her coyly, and then slowly rotates his head so that it falls beside her breast. She gives him more water as he drinks greedily, and he is obscured by her arm and body. After a reaction shot of a startled crowd, we see him sitting up straight – almost to her height – and we realize just how collapsed inward he had been throughout the scene. He gulps down more water, stops and looks at her, while pursing his lips and then suddenly falls forward into her stomach and hands. All the tension in the body is erased through this scene of consumption and communication. She backs away quickly, and he remains immobile. The entire scene is wordless.

Laughton has seized Esmerelda and the film in the most tender of embraces. Through his body he has turned this moment of suffering, humiliation and need into an active act. He has cautiously seized time, movement and love. This desire to forestall the satisfaction of the much-needed water is a profound exploration of human suffering and yearning, an impulse to draw the most horrific situations into a world of one's own, into one's own power. It is the form which Laughton works toward in all of his performances and which has at its core a deep understanding of human suffering and a profound respect for human yearnings.

Conclusions: “About as Shapeless as the Man in the Moon”

Perhaps the scene most emblematic of Laughton's investment of meaning in performance occurs in the first conversation between Quasimodo and Esmerelda, in the

bell tower. The scene explores the tensions of vision (does Quasimodo look away from Esmerelda shyly or does he look down into an abyss fatalistically?), gesture (is Quasimodo lost in rapture as he “rides” Big Marie or is the bell that made him deaf only a joyful pain?) and laughter (are these heaving sobs signs of desperation or pleasure?) There is not an instant in this scene where we can assuredly say that Laughton is performing to create a single effect. Similarly, there is not a moment where impulses are not drawn into play.

Esmerelda leads a tender, awkward and childlike Quasimodo – like a child at their first day of school – to an overlook in the bell tower of Notre Dame Cathedral. Quasimodo’s eyes glance nervously and he walks cautiously. He sits down only after she has sat down, and he glances at her demurely. As he begins to speak, joy crawls into his face. He awkwardly speaks, “You... you... called me back. I’m deaf you know, you... you would think that there’d be nothing more wrong with me, wouldn’t you. I’m deaf too.” He looks away quickly, then turns back and adds, “terrible.” And he laughs softly, with a slight grunt. The polyphony of emotion is communicated with fluidity: from joy at her calling him back, to an utter seriousness as he explains his deafness, to a preemptive description of how he imagines she sees him as he says “terrible,” to a nervous and awkward laugh to relieve his tension.

Glancing up at her, he wraps his legs around a rope. Looking down from the heights – into the abyss – he tells her, “I never realized ‘til now how ugly I am.” He exhales the words and thus draws them out in a rhythm of breath and body. Looking up to her with a mixture of love and awe, he exhales, “That’s because you’re so beautiful.” It is a soft line reading, tempered with a depth of feeling that goes beyond description. Then,

in a moment of heartbreaking intensity, he looks at her and then turns his head down while he exhales sadly. He tells her, "I'm not a man. I'm not a beast. I'm about as shapeless as the man in the moon." He begins in defiance, he continues with frustration and he ends with an untameable laughter. The scene becomes about acting, about ugliness, about sexuality; it is about escape and entrapment, fear and desire. The lines have impact as well: in the medieval tradition, Cain is man in the moon; for Deleuze, Cain is the emblem for the impulse-image ("This is the world of Cain, the signs of Cain"¹⁶⁷). The diverse expressions are bound through a thread of immense self-revelation.

The rest of the scene cannot match the intensity of this moment, and Laughton uses it as an opportunity to layer the complexity of the character. Quasimodo tells her why he saved her in a pitiful and sad voice, "Oh, oh I tried to carry you off and the next day you gave me a drink of water, and a little pity." But he shifts tone suddenly, describing his role as her protector in a tone of hurried insistence, waving his hand to drive the point home, "Listen, you must never leave the church, or they'll hang you." He shifts focus again, to a self-awareness of his position, and says seriously, "They'll have to kill me." He looks down, and the complexity of the direction of his gaze is created – he has been wrapping his legs in the rope earlier, tying himself to the abyss below, but he now uses this position also to transition to a discussion of the safety of the church. With a childlike desire to demonstrate something, he tells her, "It's good in the church," and extends his hand higher and higher above his head, "It's high, high." He then shows her the world onto which the church overlooks: "Look. People. Little people," and waves his hand dismissively. His anger, his disgust peer through. Then he leads her to the bells, his

secret joys, "Look. Look. Here. Up here. Friends. Up there. Babies. Jaqueline. Gabrielle. Guillame. Big Marie. You can hear – she made me deaf you know. I can hear my friends. Shall I play them for you?"

In *An Actor Prepares*, Stanislavski describes a fascinating lesson in performance. The teacher has set up a series of lights in the auditorium which would literally illuminate whatever the actor threw their concentration upon. The exercise (however fantastic) is meant to illustrate "the unbroken chain of changing objects on which we concentrate our attention either coherently or in a haphazard manner in real life."¹⁶⁸ Like a small child showing an adult their most treasured possession, Quasimodo is shining lights on the different elements of his lonely and private world in the bell tower. It is a child's halting explanation of what they think constitutes them: their face, their dreams, their frustrations and their desires. As in all of Laughton's performances, nothing is solid, nothing is absolute, nothing is final or finalizable. For Quasimodo – as for Laughton's other creations – these different elements of his life and his desire can only be fragments of self-awareness, power, anger and sexuality. Laughton brings us into Quasimodo's secret world and allows us to view the impulses which are attached to the innermost doubts and joys of a human soul. Through Laughton's performance, which draws together formless expression, naked exposure and basic impulses, we see ourselves reflected in an unstable image.

Endnotes

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- ² John Grierson, *Grierson on the Movies* (London: Faber and Faber, 1981), 124.
- ³ Simon Callow, *Charles Laughton: A Difficult Actor* (New York: Fromm International Publishing Corporation, 1997), 22.
- ⁴ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 19.
- ⁵ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 25.
- ⁶ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 169.
- ⁷ David Bordwell, Kristin Thompson and Janet Staiger, *The Classical Hollywood Cinema: Film Style & Mode of Production to 1960* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1985), 16.
- ⁸ Marina Warner, *From the Beast to the Blonde: On Fairy Tales and Their Tellers* (New York: Noonday Press, 1996), xvi.
- ⁹ Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, xvi.
- ¹⁰ See "Origins" in Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 3-12.
- ¹¹ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 12.
- ¹² Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 12.
- ¹³ Alexei Bartoshevich, "Theodore Komisarjevsky, Chekhov, and Shakespeare" *Wandering Stars: Russian Émigré Theatre, 1905-1940* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1992), 105.
- ¹⁴ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 288.
- ¹⁵ Paul Hammond, "Melmoth in Norman Rockwell Land" in *Sight and Sound* 48:2 (Spring 1979), 105.
- ¹⁶ Robert Mitchum, who starred in *Hunter*, says that Laughton "cut the film." *Voices of Film Experience: 1894 to the Present*, ed. Jay Leyda (New York: Macmillan, 1977), 317.
- ¹⁷ Quoted in George E. Turner, "Creating The Night of the Hunter" in *American Cinematographer* (December 1982), 1273-1274.
- ¹⁸ Quoted in Charles Higham, *Hollywood Cameramen: Sources of Light* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1970), 110-111.
- ¹⁹ Graham Greene, "Rembrandt" in *The Pleasure-Dome: The Collected Film Criticism 1935-1940*, ed. John Russell Taylor (London: Secker and Warburg, 1972), 117.
- ²⁰ Josef von Sternberg, *Fun in a Chinese Laundry* (London: Jecker & Warburg, 1965), 175.
- ²¹ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 119.
- ²² Béla Balázs, *Theory of the Film: Character and Growth of a New Art*, trans. Edith Bone (New York: Arno Press, 1972), 84-85.
- ²³ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 46.
- ²⁴ Sigmund Freud, *A General Introduction to Psychoanalysis*, trans. Joan Riviere (New York: Washington Square Press, 1952), 31.
- ²⁵ Walter Benjamin, "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 235-236.
- ²⁶ Benjamin, "The Work of Art," 236.
- ²⁷ Bertolt Brecht, "Short Description of a New Technique in Acting which Produces an Alienation Effect" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 137.
- ²⁸ Bertolt Brecht, "Building Up a Part: Laughton's Galileo" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 164.
- ²⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Rabelais and His World*, trans. Helene Iswolsky (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1984), 301-302.
- ³⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 38.
- ³¹ Tzvetan Todorov, *Literature and its Theorists: A Personal View of Twentieth-Century Criticism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1987), 81.
- ³² Wayne C. Booth, introduction to Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), xxv.
- ³³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 321.
- ³⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 11-12.
- ³⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 302.
- ³⁶ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 321-322.

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- ³⁷ Lajos Biro and Arthur Wimperis, *The Private Life of Henry VIII* (New York: Garland Pub., 1978), 108.
- ³⁸ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 283.
- ³⁹ *Actors on Acting for the Screen*, ed. Doug Tomlinson (New York: Garland Pub., 1994), 325.
- ⁴⁰ Sigmund Freud, "On Narcissism: An Introduction (1914)" in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 85.
- ⁴¹ Freud, "On Narcissism," 83.
- ⁴² R. Barton Palmer, "Bakhtinian Translinguistics and Film Criticism: The Dialogical Image?" in *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 335.
- ⁴³ Palmer, "Bakhtinian Translinguistics," 336-337.
- ⁴⁴ Robert Stam, "Bakhtinian Translinguistics: A Postscriptum" in *The Cinematic Text: Methods and Approaches*, ed. R. Barton Palmer (New York: AMS Press, 1989), 347.
- ⁴⁵ Laughton's performance is, in some ways, a dry run for his performance in *Les Misérables* (just as his performance as Nero in *Sign of the Cross* reminds us of *Henry VIII* and Dr. Moreau in *The Island of Dr. Moreau* reminds us of Captain Bligh in *Mutiny*).
- ⁴⁶ Victor Hugo, *Les Misérables*, trans. Charles E. Wilbour (New York: The Modern Library, 1931), 171-172.
- ⁴⁷ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 172.
- ⁴⁸ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 177.
- ⁴⁹ Mikhail Bakhtin, *Problems of Dostoevsky's Poetics*, ed. and trans. Caryl Emerson (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 229.
- ⁵⁰ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 64.
- ⁵¹ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 64.
- ⁵² Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 68.
- ⁵³ Marguerite Duras, "La Nuit du chasseur" in *Cahiers du cinéma*, 501 (April 1996), 47.
- ⁵⁴ Duras, "Nuit du chasseur," 47-48.
- ⁵⁵ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 142.
- ⁵⁶ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 143.
- ⁵⁷ Balázs, *Theory of the Film*, 60.
- ⁵⁸ Lotte H. Eisner, *The Haunted Screen: Expressionism in the German Cinema and the Influence of Max Reinhardt*, trans. Robert Greaves (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973), 11.
- ⁵⁹ Eisner, *Haunted Screen*, 11.
- ⁶⁰ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 143.
- ⁶¹ Walter Benjamin, *Charles Baudelaire: A Lyric Poet in the Era of High Capitalism*, trans. Harry Zohn (London: Verso, 1983), 39.
- ⁶² Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 36.
- ⁶³ Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 36-37.
- ⁶⁴ Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 37.
- ⁶⁵ Brooks, *Melodramatic Imagination*, 45.
- ⁶⁶ Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 61.
- ⁶⁷ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 93.
- ⁶⁸ Hugo, *Les Misérables*, 143.
- ⁶⁹ Michael Holquist, "Glossary" in Mikhail Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 425-426.
- ⁷⁰ Vivian Sobchack, "Lounge Time: Postwar Crises and the Chronotope of Film Noir" in *Refiguring American Film Genres: History and Theory*, ed. Nick Browne (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1998), 148.
- ⁷¹ Sobchack, "Lounge Time," 159.
- ⁷² Mikhail Bakhtin, "Forms of Time and of the Chronotope in the Novel" in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays by M. M. Bakhtin*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson and Michael Holquist (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1981), 85.
- ⁷³ Eric Bentley, *The Brecht Commentaries, 1943-1980* (New York: Grove Press, 1981), 193.
- ⁷⁴ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 96-97.
- ⁷⁵ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 316.

- ⁷⁶ Noël Burch, *Theory of Film Practice*, trans. Helen R. Lane (London: Secker and Warburg, 1973), 23.
- ⁷⁷ Burch, *Film Practice*, 20.
- ⁷⁸ Michael Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality: Painting and Beholder in the Age of Diderot* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980), 10.
- ⁷⁹ Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 24.
- ⁸⁰ Elsa Lanchester, *Charles Laughton and I* (London: Faber and Faber, 1938), 226.
- ⁸¹ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 108.
- ⁸² Sergei Eisenstein, *The Film Sense*, ed. and trans. Jay Leyda (New York: Meridian Books, 1957), 124.
- ⁸³ Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 51.
- ⁸⁴ Claudia Gorbman, "Music in The Piano" in *Jane Campion's The Piano*, ed. Harriet Margolis (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 45.
- ⁸⁵ Bentley, *Brecht Commentaries*, 210.
- ⁸⁶ Fried, *Absorption and Theatricality*, 51.
- ⁸⁷ Gilles Deleuze, *Cinéma 1: The Movement-Image*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (London: Athlone, 1986), 72.
- ⁸⁸ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "Comments on Free Indirect Discourse" in *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 90.
- ⁸⁹ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 73.
- ⁹⁰ Pier Paolo Pasolini, "The Cinema of Poetry" in *Heretical Empiricism*, ed. Louise K. Barnett, trans. Ben Lawton and Louise K. Barnett (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1988), 175.
- ⁹¹ Pasolini, "Cinema," 179.
- ⁹² Pasolini, "Cinema," 179-180.
- ⁹³ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 74.
- ⁹⁴ Bertolt Brecht, "A Short Organum for Theatre" in *Brecht on Theatre*, ed. and trans. John Willett (London: Methuen, 1964), 193.
- ⁹⁵ Quoted in Kurt Singer, *The Laughton Story: An Intimate Story of Charles Laughton*, (Philadelphia: The John C. Winston Company, 1954), 6.
- ⁹⁶ Singer, *Laughton Story*, ix.
- ⁹⁷ Singer, *Laughton Story*, x.
- ⁹⁸ Singer, *Laughton Story*, x.
- ⁹⁹ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 175.
- ¹⁰⁰ Stanley Cavell, "What Photography Calls Thinking" in *Raritan: A Quarterly Review* 4:3 (Spring 1985), 13.
- ¹⁰¹ Cavell, "Photography," 15.
- ¹⁰² Constantin Stanislavski, *Building a Character*, trans. Elizabeth Reynolds Hapgood (London: Reinhardt & Evans, 1949), 237.
- ¹⁰³ Stanislavski, *Character*, 238.
- ¹⁰⁴ To illustrate this, Stanislavski writes of an acting exercise where the teacher sets up three metronomes where the tempo of each represents a different aspect of a character's state: "Say I am an actor, getting ready for a performance, I am reciting verse and pronouncing them deliberately, with pauses, in the tempo of the first metronome. As I do this I am so nervous that I tramp up and down my dressing-room at the tempo of the second metronome, and at the same time I am hastily dressing myself, tying my necktie and the rest at the most rapid tempo of the third metronome." (Stanislavski, *Character*, 207.) This type of performance is crucial to Laughton – where various rhythms are entwined in a single moment.
- ¹⁰⁵ Stanislavski, *Character*, 206.
- ¹⁰⁶ Stanislavski writes that there is no necessary precedence: "Actors whose feelings over-balance their intellects, will naturally... emphasize the emotional side. Actors in whom will is the most powerful attribute, will play Macbeth or Brand and underscore ambition or fanaticism. The third type will unconsciously stress, more than is necessary, the intellectual shadings of a part like Hamlet or Nathan der Weise. It is, however, necessary not to allow any one of the three elements to crush out either of the others and thereby upset the balance and necessary harmony." (Stanislavski, *An Actor Prepares*, 235.) Laughton draws sharp lines between these elements in his performances. Javert, for instance, seems to be only desire when pursuing his goals, and only feeling when forced into dialogue.
- ¹⁰⁷ The scene references the historical motif of the passage of social wisdom occurring next to a child's cradle or bed. (See "Chapter 3: Word of Mouth: Gossips II" in Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 27-50.)

- ¹⁰⁸ Quoted in Simon Callow, *The Night of the Hunter* (London: BFI Publishing, 2000), 7.
- ¹⁰⁹ Stanislavski, *Character*, 162.
- ¹¹⁰ Stanislavski, *Character*, 118.
- ¹¹¹ William Rothman, *The "I" of the Camera* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 81.
- ¹¹² Graham Greene, "Rembrandt," 120.
- ¹¹³ Singer, *Laughton Story*, x-xi.
- ¹¹⁴ Singer, *Laughton Story*, xi.
- ¹¹⁵ Bakhtin, *Dostoevsky's Poetics*, 195.
- ¹¹⁶ Gilles Deleuze, *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature*, trans. Dana Polan (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 21.
- ¹¹⁷ Walter Benjamin, "The Storyteller" in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 108-109.
- ¹¹⁸ Bentley, *Brecht Commentaries*, 271.
- ¹¹⁹ Quoted in Callow, *Hunter*, 26.
- ¹²⁰ Quoted in Singer, *Laughton Story*, 125.
- ¹²¹ The connection to early cinema practices is reflected also in the film's use of varied cinematic forms. In early cinema, the juxtaposition is characterized partly by "the adaptation of stylistic elements of the newsreel genre (authentic locations, mobile framing, greater variety of camera distance and angle) to the narrative film, a tendency which set in around 1903." (Hansen, *Babylon*, 54) As well as juxtaposing more complex genres than the newsreel, such as the thriller, the horror film, the melodrama, Americana, and the fairy tale, *Hunter* combines artistic trends (expressionism, surrealism), multiple modes of song and various theatrical traditions. We also witness a mixture of artificiality and authenticity, typical of early cinema, in theatrical spaces and location shooting; Hansen notes that this is common to films of the early 1900s where "The mixture of two-dimensional painted backdrops and outdoor locations can be found not only in shifting genres or moods from one scene to the next... but also within a single shot, whether suggesting a greater sense of depth... or just curiously incongruous..." (Hansen, *Babylon*, 55.)
- ¹²² Callow, *Hunter*, 26.
- ¹²³ Miriam Hansen, *Babel and Babylon: Spectatorship in American Silent Film* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1991), 143-144.
- ¹²⁴ Hansen, *Babylon*, 202.
- ¹²⁵ Singer, *Laughton Story*, x.
- ¹²⁶ Singer, *Laughton Story*, ix.
- ¹²⁷ Singer, *Laughton Story*, 145.
- ¹²⁸ Hansen, *Babylon*, 207.
- ¹²⁹ Hansen, *Babylon*, 207.
- ¹³⁰ Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 15.
- ¹³¹ Warner, *Beast to the Blonde*, 15.
- ¹³² Benjamin, "Storyteller", 91-92.
- ¹³³ Deleuze, *Cinéma I*, 97.
- ¹³⁴ Callow, *Laughton*, 68.
- ¹³⁵ Deleuze, *Cinéma I*, 90-91.
- ¹³⁶ Deleuze, *Cinéma I*, 92.
- ¹³⁷ Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 177.
- ¹³⁸ Duras, "Nuit du chasseur," 48.
- ¹³⁹ Deleuze, *Kafka*, 6.
- ¹⁴⁰ Walter Benjamin, "Franz Kafka: On the Tenth Anniversary of His Death," in *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1969), 132.
- ¹⁴¹ Quoted in Charles Higham, *Laughton: An Intimate Biography* (London: W. H. Allen, 1976), 96.
- ¹⁴² Quoted in Higham, *Laughton*, 98-99.
- ¹⁴³ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 213-214.
- ¹⁴⁴ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 214.
- ¹⁴⁵ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 137.
- ¹⁴⁶ Victor Hugo, *Notre-Dame of Paris*, trans. John Sturrock (London: Penguin Books, 1978). See especially 412-420.

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- ¹⁴⁷ Hugo, *Notre-Dame*, 451.
- ¹⁴⁸ Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, trans. A. A. Brill (New York: Random House, 1950), 332.
- ¹⁴⁹ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 192.
- ¹⁵⁰ Bakhtin, *Rabelais*, 192.
- ¹⁵¹ *Actors on Acting*, 325.
- ¹⁵² Bruno Bettelheim, *Freud and Man's Soul* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 103-106.
- ¹⁵³ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 128.
- ¹⁵⁴ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 128.
- ¹⁵⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Instincts and Their Vicissitudes (1915)" in *On Metapsychology: The Theory of Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 115.
- ¹⁵⁶ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 136.
- ¹⁵⁷ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 175.
- ¹⁵⁸ Freud, "Instincts," 128.
- ¹⁵⁹ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 130.
- ¹⁶⁰ Callow, *Charles Laughton*, 82.
- ¹⁶¹ Gilles Deleuze, *Masochism*, trans. Jean McNeill (New York: Zone Books, 1989), 77.
- ¹⁶² Deleuze, *Masochism*, 34.
- ¹⁶³ Deleuze, *Masochism*, 51.
- ¹⁶⁴ Deleuze, *Masochism*, 88.
- ¹⁶⁵ Sigmund Freud, "Civilization and its Discontents (1930)[1929]" in *Civilization, Society and Religion*, trans. James Strachey (London: Penguin Books, 1991), 260.
- ¹⁶⁶ Freud, "Civilization," 260.
- ¹⁶⁷ Deleuze, *Cinéma 1*, 125.
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The Big Clock (Farrow, 1948)

The Hunchback of Notre Dame (Dieterle, 1939)

The Island of Lost Souls (Kenton, 1933)

Love Me Tonight (Mamoulian, 1932)

Man on the Eiffel Tower (Meredith, 1949)

Les Misérables (Boleslawski, 1935)

Mutiny on the Bounty (Lloyd, 1935)

The Night of the Hunter (Laughton, 1955)

The Old Dark House (Whale, 1932)

The Piano (Campion, 1993)

Picadilly (Dupont, 1929)

The Private Life of Henry VIII (Korda, 1933)

Red Desert (Antonioni, 1964)

Rembrandt (Korda, 1936)

The Sign of the Cross (De Mille, 1932)

St. Martin's Lane (Whelan, 1938)