

# David Lean and Melodrama

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## DIPLOMSKI RAD

David Lean and Melodrama

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## ABSTRACT

This paper shall analyse three films by David Lean, one of the most esteemed British film directors of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The three titles under examination are *Brief Encounter*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter*. In the analysis, these films are observed for the manifestation of the elements of melodrama, a particular mode for representing the world in cinema. The focus shall be on the main female characters of the films and their narrative metamorphosis, as individuals and alongside the men. For the elaboration of the melodramatic condition in the three films, the paper shall employ psychoanalytical notions and thus attempt to draw a parallel between the treatment of women on screen and in psychoanalysis.

Keywords: David Lean, cinema, melodrama, psychoanalysis, love story, couple

## SAŽETAK

Ovaj rad analizira tri filma Davida Leana, jednog od najcjedenijih britanskih filmskih redatelja 20. stoljeća. Analizirana su tri naslova: *Brief Encounter*, *Doctor Zhivago* i *Ryan's Daughter*. Odabrani nalovi promatraju se kroz manifestaciju elemenata melodrame, posebnog načina prikazivanja svijeta u kinu. Fokus je na glavnim ženskim likovima filmova i njihovoj narativnoj metamorfozi: kao pojedinaca i uz muškarce. Za razradu melodramskog stanja u ta tri filma, u radu se upotrebljavaju pojmove iz područja psihoanalize te se na taj način pokušava povući paralelu između postupanja prema žena na ekranu i u psihoanalizi.

Ključne riječi: David Lean, kino, melodrama, psihoanaliza, ljubavna priča, par

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

David Lean was a British film director whose prolific career began in the 1930s and continued until his death in 1991. Although he is mostly remembered today as a director of epic films, such as *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Laurence of Arabia* or *A Passage to India*, Lean remains highly regarded for the cinematic accumulation of interest in the history of the individual faced with the struggle of life in society, a theme interwoven into many of his epic narrative films. However, Lean resorts to melodrama as a particularly pliable cinematic form for representing the individual's emotional constitution which had previously been repressed, but in now at a point of emergence within the abovementioned theme. The aptness of melodrama is justified by way of it constituting a historically sanctioned mode for the representation of the individual faced with the world, as inherited by the cinema from the jointure of literary and musical art forms. This amalgamation of reference to traditional representation manifests itself in Lean's continuous reference to literature as the articulatory origin of his films and the conscious use of music within the cinematic image as an instrument for the articulation of the locus of verbal absence. The melodramatic focus on the representation of the unarticulated within the individual is incarnated in the woman in front of the camera.<sup>1</sup> In Lean's body of work, the comprehensive occurrence of melodrama shall be examined by way of the feminine occurrence staged in three films: *Brief Encounter*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter*.

*Brief Encounter*, released in 1945, follows the development of a relationship between two married people, Laura Jessen (Celia Johnson) and Alec Harvey (Trevor Howard) who meet as strangers in the refreshment room of a railway station. Their affair lasts for six weeks, scheduled for Thursdays, when Laura does her weekly shopping in Milford, a quiet English town where Alec works at the hospital. *Doctor Zhivago*, released in 1965, is a story about Yuri Zhivago (Omar Sharif) and Laura Antipova (Julie Christie) whose lives are changed and brought together by the Russian Revolution. *Ryan's Daughter*, released in 1970, is a story about Rosy Ryan, it follows her marriage to the schoolteacher Charles Shaughnessy (Robert Mitchum) and her affair with the British Soldier Randolph Doryan (Christopher Jones), set in a quiet Irish village, during the time of the Irish Republican movement.

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<sup>1</sup> A claim supported by the research conducted into the origin of melodrama and published in the works by Thomas Elsaesser, "Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama" (p. 70), Christian Metz, *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier* (p.39), Peter Brooks, *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess* (p.xiii, 5), Gene D. Phillips, *Beyond the Epic. The Life and Films of David Lean* (p.444), as discussed further in the paper.

The chosen films form a cinematic narrative set which explores the effect of the melodramatic condition on the romantic couple. In addition, all three film stories have their origin in works of literature, which builds into the argument of them being the perfect cross section between the history of the individual in the film universe of David Lean and the interest of melodrama. Lean explores the capacity of melodrama to illuminate the individual struggle within the order of social structure through a story of romance.

The issue of melodrama in David Lean shall be approached by way of a closer examination of the origins of melodrama and its manifestation in the three films. The paper shall also investigate the melodramatic organization of the three lead female characters in the films, individually and as an accumulation of knowledge in the representation of women on screen. The three women constitute a repository of cinematic memory that constitutes cinematic expression of melodrama for the elaboration of which the paper shall refer to psychoanalysis as a tool of articulation.

## 2. MELODRAMA, PSYCHOANALYSIS AND DAVID LEAN

Melodrama as a genre offers a condensed experience of the world; however, it differs from realism in the fact that it strives to explore that which is beyond the verbally expressed. In other words, melodrama is not only concerned with reality as such, but also representations which are found within it and which point at something removed beyond the surface of what is real. The notion of representation is narrowed down by Peter Brooks in his book *The Melodramatic Imagination: Balzac, Henry James, Melodrama, and the Mode of Excess*, a classic work for the understanding of melodrama on stage and in film. He identifies the abovementioned representations as the moral occult,

We might say that the center of interest and the scene of the underlying drama reside within what we could call the "moral occult," the domain of operative spiritual values which is both indicated within and masked by the surface of reality (...) It bears comparison to unconscious mind, for it is a sphere of being where our most basic desires and interdictions lie...The melodramatic mode in large measure exists to locate and to articulate the moral occult (5)

The word 'occult' carries the idea of non-revelation, signalling that there is a lack in knowledge, suggesting that the moral occult in melodrama can only be reached by way of an examination of the narrative in order to trace the representation of lack within it. Brooks names the unconscious as the place of production for the unspoken desires whose presence becomes visible only by way of non-verbal means, i.e. "acting out" (Brooks 159), which gives it

fleshliness. The unconscious is a term associated with psychoanalysis, designating that which remains wordless and nameless on the plain of reality, but which is nevertheless present through its repression. Stanley Cavell legitimizes the value of the representative lack in structuring a film narrative by referring to film as “the medium of visible absences” (*Contesting Tears* 109). In Cavell’s definition, absence is aligned with lack as a narrative void wherein the unconscious is at work.

For the visual examination of a story to be legitimized on screen, it has to be sustained by the illusion of reality which is achieved through the camera as the operative tool for shaping coherent narratives on screen. Stanley Cavell proposes that the role of the camera is to transpose human beings of flesh and blood, or women in particular, into psychic shadows of themselves (*Contesting Tears* 86). The suggestion is that cinema represents a psychological truth by way of the camera. In melodrama, fleshliness is accumulated in the image of the human body which becomes the tool for the articulation of repressed emotions. Peter Brooks elaborates on the body becoming the point of convergence between melodrama and psychoanalysis as, “the place for the inscription of highly emotional messages that cannot be written elsewhere and cannot be articulated verbally” (xi). Both melodrama and psychoanalysis are concerned reading the emotional messages of the unconscious ego that have not been articulated by way of language, but which are manifested through afflictions of the body. On that note, it is important to harken back to Cavell’s work on melodrama, where he states that from its inception, psychoanalysis had claimed that the hysterical condition had been caused by the woman’s knowledge (*Contesting Tears* 53). Therefore, the woman’s body is further denominated as a body in grips of hysteria, subject to a psychoanalytical reading which subsequently articulates the existence of the unconscious. Jackie Byers examines Freud’s description of the domestic romance and the psychic development necessary for its realization in *All That Hollywood Allows: Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*. She concludes that in psychoanalytical terms, the woman always figures as not-male, or the unknown and unknowable Other (99), with knowledge referring to the man’s inability to completely know the woman and by extension establish control over her, which then become a point of crisis. The brewing fascination of man with the story of woman thus makes her the victim of this crisis. By extension, melodrama on film becomes a women’s picture, where the conflicts of good and evil are made into issues concerning women. It becomes a site for the devolution of psychoanalytical interest in the woman’s story by way of knowing and reading the women on screen. The mystery of the unconscious is the mystery of woman. As Peter Brooks formulates, melodrama is the

exteriorization of the world within (202), with its value located in the effort to understand the bigger picture of society through an interest in the crisis of the individual.

It is this final point that firmly ties David Lean into the history of melodrama, as the construction of the romantic narrative in his films displays an acute concern for the melodramatic structure. His work on films such as *Brief Encounter*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter* is proof of Lean's continuous examination of the constitution of an individual as projected onto the woman in crisis.

It is important to note that all three stories are set against significant events in history, for *Brief Encounter* it is the inter-war period of the late 1930s, the Russian Revolution and the First World War in *Doctor Zhivago* and for *Ryan's Daughter* that event is the First World War and the Irish resistance to British rule. However; in Lean these monumental events are relegated to the position of backdrop for the playing out of the love story, proving his predilection for intimacy. Lean's choice of melodrama as the cinematic form for portraying failed love stories in historical times of trouble supports the principal claim that melodrama explains the world through a crisis narrative of individual history.

## 2.1. Text as Origin

Christian Metz, a French film theorist, positions film as a legitimate continuation of the Western current of artistic representation in his work on cinema entitled *Psychoanalysis and Cinema. The Imaginary Signifier*,

Since its birth at the end of the nineteenth century the cinema has, as it were, been snapped up by the Western, Aristotelian tradition of the fictional and representational arts, of diegesis and mimesis, for which its spectators were prepared - prepared in spirit, but also instinctually - by their experience of the novel, of theatre, of figurative painting, and which was thus the most profitable tradition for the cinema industry (39)

According to Metz's argument, cinema inherits its zeal for making sense of the world by way of telling stories from the novel and theatre as its direct historical predecessors. Traditionally, telling stories is an instrument of making sense of the world by fusing the imaginary with critical thinking. The argument that cinema is a form of critical thinking is sustainable due to its use of storytelling in a bid to hold up a mirror to reality and reveal the lack hidden just below the surface. Furthermore, the cinematic genre of melodrama is a particularly pliable site of elaboration due to its historic appetite for love stories, which Thomas



Elsaesser traces to the post-French Revolution romantic drama in the article *Tales of Sound and Fury: Observations on the Family Melodrama* (70). The love story in melodrama clearly reveals the disentanglement of the manner in which cinema tells its audience about themselves. Thus, the reality as seen in cinema becomes a melodramatized one.

In order to articulate intimate stories on a cinematic stage, Lean based his films in literature, including *Doctor Zhivago*, *Laurence of Arabia*, *Ryan's Daughter*, *Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*. Constantine Santas analyses Lean's approach to making a film based on a literary work in his book *The Epic Films of David Lean*. He claims that Lean as filmmaker endorsed the liberation of film from the literariness of the literary original since he considered visual substance to be the greatest cinematic value that ought to be preserved above all (xxviii). *Brief Encounter* is based on a play entitled *Still Life* by Noël Coward, a British playwright who was Lean's frequent collaborator and served as film producer on *Brief Encounter*. Alongside Lean, Coward adapted his original text for the film as well. Gene D. Phillips writes in *Beyond the Epic: The Life and Films of David Lean*, "It is true that, in some ways, Coward's plays seemed to be ready-made for filming; after all, his somewhat fevered world, with its violent clashes of temperament, could be transposed easily to the film medium" (77). While additional dialogue had to be written for the film version, Lean's most important task as filmmaker was to set the scene so that it visually emulates for the cinema audience the intensity of emotion torment gripping the main characters, "The movie reflects a somber world, one in which buildings loom over Laura and Alec, who seem 'isolated and vulnerable', as they attempt to pursue their doomed relationship" (Phillips 91). *Brief Encounter* exemplifies Lean's attention to the build-up of the screen image so as to tell the story. *Doctor Zhivago*, the second film in the melodramatic set, is based on the novel of the same title by the Russian author Boris Pasternak. According to Lean's recollections, he found the story itself fairly simple, but he was drawn to it by the way Pasternak managed to bring the characters together in a manner reminiscent of Charles Dickens (qtd. in Phillips 326), another novelist whose work Lean had previously adapted for the screen (*Great Expectations* and *Oliver Twist*), making him both a literary and a visual precursor in Lean's imaginary. The last of the three films, *Ryan's Daughter* was also adapted for the screen from a literary text, this time the French classic novel *Madame Bovary* by Gustave Flaubert. The film version appears to have retained only the broad narrative frame of marital discord from the original novel- Lean stores an important trace to *Madame Bovary* in his treatment of Rosy Ryan as a victim of *le Bovarysme*, a condition where the afflicted live in an imaginary world of their own creation due to day-dreaming. Inevitably, they become

incapacitated when this world collapses in the so-called *vengeance de la réalité*, a notion referred to by Jules de Gaultier in the article *Le Bovarysme, la Psychologie dans l'oeuvre de Flaubert* (39).

## 2.2. Use of Music

Alongside text, music is also a historically important investigative site of human expression. Peter Brooks argues that music is integral for the coherent structure of melodrama, “Not only is the very existence of melodrama as a distinct genre originally linked to its use of music, music is inherent to its representations, as to those of the cinema, its inheritor in this convention” (48). Music is used for the dramatization of life, according to Brooks’ argument. Its purpose is to provide additional colouring to the characters particular story events. Stanley Cavell goes even further in pronouncing the opera as predecessor of melodrama in music by associating the opera diva singing with the finding and presenting of a voice for the woman in the melodramatic narrative (*Contesting Tears* 16). In melodrama, song and melody become the site of expression for the woman outside the spoken dialogue, which constitutes the feminine identity production place controlled by the man. The view that the spoken word is the origin of the man-made woman is upheld by Jackie Byars in *All That Hollywood Allows. Re-reading Gender in 1950s Melodrama*, wherein she invokes the claim of Lacanian psychoanalysis that an individual is a social construct, constituted in language through the initiation into the symbolic order, “that establishes for the individual a sense of separateness from the rest of the world and awareness of the nature of signification. Sexuality, he argued, is only ever in language, and language defines woman as not man. This symbol system privileges, not surprisingly, the masculine authority it supports and is supported by (100). Since language is appropriated by man, sound emerges as the site of difference, where the true essence of woman is revealed in the absence of words. This importance of sound as a place of absence or lack within the man-made woman, wherein the immerging psychological truth of the woman as a separate self rather than the not-male surfaces, is another point of convergence for the three Lean films.

In the films, music is the crisis trigger. In *Brief Encounter*, excerpts from Sergei Rachmaninoff’s Piano Concerto No. 2 induces Laura Jessen’s memory. The scene begins in the narrative present, set in the sitting room of her family home, with her husband Fred solving his *Times* crossword and Laura mending a piece of clothing. According to Phillips, Fred is only alluded to in the Noël Coward’s play, but on film he is shown at home with Laura (88). Lean’s conscious decision to intervene into the original story to give the husband a screen presence

points to the importance of showing the couple's interaction. Laura plays the Rachmaninoff record, with the couple plunging into silence and the sound launching Laura's flashback, which is the backbone of the love story devolution in the film. Lean resorts again to Rachmaninoff to pierce the linear flow of her memory, cutting off her story following the image of first romantic transgression in the guise of a kiss between the two lovers, Laura and Alec, with the deafening musical crescendo bringing Laura back to the present, before the change in melody allows her to drift "miles away" (*Brief Encounter* [BE]). In this interplay of memory and the present, Rachmaninoff's Piano Concerto No. 2 tells the viewer that which Laura has no words to describe, the rawness of the trauma that is unknown to Laura herself as it is situated in the unarticulated unconscious. The final scene of the film firmly establishes that the music has always belonged to Laura's realm of articulation. Even when played out before Fred, he fails to understand its language of sound as his masculine order is that of the word and language, established in the continuous image of Fred solving the crossword throughout the film. At the end of the film, Rachmaninoff serves as the bridge between the final memory of the separation from Alec and her present wordless acceptance of the failure of their romantic union, which allows for the reconstitution of her marriage, "FRED: You've been a long way away. LAURA: Yes. FRED: Thank you for coming back to me" (BE). The final notes of the Piano Concerto No.2 then soar in harmony with the sound of Laura's tears, marking the final resolution of her story on film.

Rachmaninoff spills over into the next Lean film from the tripartite set, *Doctor Zhivago*. It is played in the scene situated at a bourgeois private party, seemingly accompanying the last moments of a society that still labours to keep appearances on the brink of imminent collapse into the Revolution. The scene of musical respite comes between two major narrative events, the attempted suicide by poison of Lara's mother and the arrival of the doctor with his young protégé Yuri Zhivago and him first laying eyes on Lara. The presence of Rachmaninoff's music carries the knowledge of the doomed love affair between Laura and Alec. Through music, the story of *Brief Encounter* appears as filmic pre-history that informs the viewer of the irreversible faith that awaits the Lara and Yuri couple.

Another piece of music that plays a prominent role in the film is the so-called Lara's theme that appears throughout *Doctor Zhivago*, an original composition by the French composer and conductor Maurice Jarre. In *Doctor Zhivago*, Lara's theme exemplifies Cavell's abovementioned observation regarding opera in the scene when Lara first reads the poems Yuri Zhivago had written about her, "LARA: This isn't me, Yuri. / YURI: Yes, it is. / LARA: No...

It's you. / YURI: Read the title. / LARA: Lara...." (*Doctor Zhivago* [DZ]). At this moment, the dialogue is abruptly over and the film cuts to Lara's theme. The poems represent the infusion of Lara as a stand-in symbol for Yuri, whose masculine dominance over the symbolic order of language is represented in him being a poet. However, the scene implies Yuri's misrecognition of Lara. It is constructed in accordance with how Laura Mulvey describes the place of the woman in patriarchal culture in her article *Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema*. According to Mulvey, the woman's position as the male other is bound with signification, meaning that the man has freedom to live out his fantasies on the silent image of woman as the bearer of meaning (834). Consequently, Lara is organized as a picture of a woman, whose explanation is worded by Yuri, the poet. In turn, the abrupt introduction of music provides a voice for Lara, assuming the place of the words that Yuri had provided for her and which she in turn denounces as a failure on his part to know her. In terms of melodrama, it marks the visibility of the lack, wherein the woman takes charge of the story she struggles to tell about herself, since it has been monopolized by the word of man. Sound marks the point of Cavellian absence within representation by way of which the essence of woman makes an appearance. Lean abruptly ending the dialogue in the scene with Lara's theme is a sign to the viewer of the woman's capacity to refuse to be explained away by the man and a revelation of her true self through primordial sound that fills the absence of words.

In *Ryan's Daughter*, the final of the three Lean films, Rachmaninoff is replaced by Beethoven as the consistent musical reference for the articulation of the condition of crisis within the Rosy and Charles couple. In the book *Melodrama, An Aesthetics of Impossibility*, Jonathan Goldberg writes about Beethoven's opera *Fidelio* in the context of melodrama,

Beethoven interrupts the separation of speaking voice and music that prevails in *Fidelio*, joining melos and drama together in a moment the score names technically, formally, as "Melodram"; spoken words are underscored, interrupted, punctuated by music that plays beneath, alongside the dialogue, music that offers itself in no necessary or predictable harmonic sequence. Musical invention in the Melodram intimates ways past the impasses of the impossible gender/political situation; it discovers new possibilities of relationality (156)

Beethoven as sound appears on two occasions in the narrative, functioning in adherence to Goldberg's argument about Beethoven's permissiveness. Firstly, the sound of Beethoven

underscores the conversation between Rosy and Charles at the beginning of the film where she confesses her love for him in the classroom, “ROSY: I feel like a child in this place and I am not a child, do you know that?” (*Ryan’s Daughter* [RD]). The music accompanies the fulfilment of Rosy’s fantasies in the revelation of sexuality and the formation of the romantic couple. The second appearance of Beethoven’s music marks the *vengeance de la réalité* for Rosy the fantasist in the scene following her move to the marital home. The music highlights the difference between Rosy’s fantasy of marriage and its reality in the visual displacement of the two characters, with Rosy sitting on the bed implying romantic desire and Charles standing away from her, announcing his impotence to satisfy her unspoken wish. This silent realization stressed by the presence of Beethoven’s music points to it being established as the site of conscious silence in the narrative. At the beginning of the film Charles is shown telling Rosy about his trip to Dublin and giving her the programme sheet for a concert that he had kept for her, “ROSY: No Beethoven? CHARLES: No Beethoven – D’you know the British Government has a law now, forbidding German music to be played” (RD). The law of silence accumulated in the knowledge of Beethoven becomes legitimized in the bust of Beethoven that dominates Charles Shaughnessy’s house. When Charles brings his young bride Rosy to the school outback, the bust of Beethoven becomes the constant silent witness of the crisis of Charles’ impotence that rules the marital home, which in turn collapses the imaginary world Rosy had fantasized to life. This silence is therefore the law-sanctioned site for the filmic revelation of the unspoken unconscious.

Thus, music is shown to be an important aspect of the melodramatic structure that constructs an expressionist space for the voicing of the feminine condition outside of male-dominated language. In the three Lean films, music is purposively placed to speak where words fail to reveal the unconscious state of the three women in crisis. Music operates as feminine narrative expression whose understanding appears inaccessible to their male counterparts, but the viewer is given privileged knowledge by way of the overflow of signification in music within the set of the three films.

### 3. NARRATION

David Lean’s tripartite cinematic narrative set explores the issue of the silent image of the woman on screen whose story is intimated to the spectator. The three films find their interpretative arc in the first of the three titles, *Brief Encounter*. The character of Laura accumulates the origin of the melodramatic woman in David Lean’s filmography. He imbues Laura with the cumulative history of his own life, with Gene D. Phillips noting how in the

1920s, young Lean used to sit in the Victoria Station refreshment room following a visit to the cinema before returning to his mother's house (15). All the films he saw at the cinema would have been silent, an important fact which supports the argument that Laura is Lean's original screen woman, as Kent Puckett point out in his analysis of Celia Johnson's screen portrayal, "The performance is all the more remarkable once one realizes that her voice-overs were recorded later and added to the film and that much of *Brief Encounter* is, in fact, Celia Johnson simply and silently sitting and thinking and feeling in front of a movie camera" ("*Celia Johnson's Face: Before and After Brief Encounter*" 141). Laura can now be perceived as residual from the silent era of film and thus, Lean's homage to thinking, which he considered to be the ultimate expression of good acting (Puckett 141). This process of thinking is portrayed in the film through narration.

*Brief Encounter* is narrated by Laura, in the form of a prolonged flashback. Phillips comments on the importance of having Laura narrate her story, "In this fashion, the film foregrounds Laura not only as the principal character but also as a presence – someone whose comments presents in voice-over color the viewer's perception of events" (87). She provides free direct insight into her psyche and, through recollection, relives the events that had passed. Her body becomes the vessel of melodrama as it brings to the fore the world within. Laura narrates the story of her doomed love affair with Alec in the form of a confession to her husband Fred, "LAURA: Fred. Fred, dear Fred. There's so much that I want to say to you. You're the only one in the world with enough wisdom and gentleness to understand. If only it were somebody else's story and not mine. As it is, you are the only one in the world that I can never tell. Never, never" (BE). Her monologue emphasizes the contentment that she had felt in the ordinariness provided by her home life, "LAURA: You see, we are a happily married couple... and must never forget that. This is my home. You are my husband, and my children are upstairs in bed. I am a happily married woman..." (BE). Laura's description of her domestic world adheres to what is considered the social order. Christine Gledhill writes how the legitimization of the social order is the work of the individual psyche, wherein one must incorporate within oneself a motivating rationale (*Signs of Melodrama* 212). Thus, the appearance of a melodramatic turn in the performance of the woman's role as wife and mother subverts the workings of the ordained social order.

In the film, this threat to social order by way of a crisis in its family nucleus happens following Laura's self-admittance to a sense of shame for allowing herself to enjoy the company of Alec. It is upon returning from spending time with him that Laura learns her son

Bobby had been hit by a car. Laura professes that at that point she felt hysterical inside, “LAURA: I tried not to show it, but I was quite hysterical inside, as though the whole thing were my fault... a sort of punishment, an awful, sinister warning” (BE). She maintains the mask of silence and the subsequent interaction with her husband is shown to centre around the children, which constitutes mundane talk but not conversation. The talking cure is faulty within the couple as nothing is said that she would wish to disclose because a verbal confession would constitute, as Cavell puts it, something traumatic in her language (*Contesting Tears* 88). It is her body that suffers the violence of the unspoken turmoil that seized Laura, since words are inaccessible for they belong to the man. Lean visually denounces this division of expression between man and wife in the next scene which sees Fred doing his usual newspaper crossword. Therefore, Laura’s truth is relegated to the realm of silence. However, the privileged access to her psyche via narration transforms the image on screen into a fleshly woman, whose exposure is both bodily and psychic. Lean employs the character of Laura to reveal the essence of woman to the spectator, the hidden truth that the man is always searching for, but the woman never confesses. It is the assimilation of the body and psyche of woman in Laura Jessen that allows Lean the filmmaker to accumulate knowledge of feminine subjectivity to subsequently shape the characters of Lara Antipova in *Doctor Zhivago* and Rosy Ryan in *Ryan’s Daughter*.

Neither Lara nor Rosy possesses the narrative command that has been provided for Laura due to a lack of words, which the film script had withheld from them. Lara’s story is doubly narrated in *Doctor Zhivago*. Her first narrator is Yuri, who writes down his image of Laura into the ‘Lara poems’. As previously discussed, Lara’s poems constitute a misrecognition, where Laura becomes the symbol for Yuri in words. The viewer is informed that the poems are greatly admired in Russia in film’s narrative present by the second Lara narrator, Yuri’s older half-brother Yevgraf Zhivago, a high-ranking official in the Soviet state, “YEVGRAF: I knew her name from the Lara poems.....which I’d found among my brother's manuscripts” (DZ). Again, Lean signals to the viewer that the story on screen is in the form of a flashback, however; this time the past events are retold by an outside observer Yevgraf Zhivago as played by Alec Guinness<sup>2</sup>, rather than the actual actants, as in the case of *Brief Encounter*. In her study on women in cinema, Elizabeth Cowie cites the feminist reading of the woman on screen not as a pre-existing category but woman-as-sign, comprising a function and cultural representation of

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<sup>2</sup> It is worth noting that Sir Alec Guinness was a reoccurring figure in Lean’s filmography. Alongside *Doctor Zhivago*, he appeared in *Great Expectations*, *Oliver Twist*, *The Bridge on the River Kwai*, *Lawrence of Arabia* and *A Passage to India*, thus creating a familiar repository of visual memory for the spectator.

masculine power which denies her subjectivity and makes of her a sign (22). Therefore, Lara as sign is the product of the men telling her story and in doing so, imposing their interpretation onto her. The two male narrators' dominant discourse is the woman who is thus doubly coded and decoded in the film, as Constantine Santas writes, "This is the immortal part of him—the poems are titled "Lara"—therefore, she lives on in the memory of men" (78). Lara remains a narrative specter; a visible disembodied spirit or something that haunts or perturbs the mind. Lara is organized around expressive visual codes. According to Pam Cook in *Melodrama and the Woman's Desire*, "codes of lighting and colour cannot be perceived by the characters and are used to provide privileged information to the spectator about them" (254). Her physical appearance is a visual spectacle of blinding luminance. Whenever she enters a scene, the camera is drawn to her face, made up as an already existing closeup shot, framed by the blonde hair. This overabundance of light occupying the spectator's field of vision functions as a pre-organized site of recognition which thus obscures the traces of the occult on the body of the woman. This opulent display has the function of employing Christie's natural quality of attracting the gaze to encode the visual presentation as the primary locus of identification. Lean's choice of Julie Christie as Laura reveals a filmmaking pre-vision on his part to utilise Christie's relative unknownness to make her a site for the devolution of the story of masculine memory in Lara, the phantom. In essence, *Doctor Zhivago* is structured around masculine perception of Lara, but as Christian Metz points out, "the perceived is not really the object, it is its shade, its phantom, its double, its replica in a new kind of mirror" (45). The Zhivago narration is emblematic of the psychoanalytic view of feminine as male-Other under inspection. Lara is the object on display to be looked at by was of the male gaze, what Laura Mulvey terms as Freudian scopophilic drive, "taking other people as objects, subjecting them to a controlling and curious gaze" (835). The Zhivago gaze in the film has the power of words to weave a masculine fantasy of the woman onto the controlled image of Lara.

According to Gene D. Phillips, the rough draft of the *Ryan's Daughter* screen play was titled *Michael's Day* (365). In the film, Michael (John Mills) is the Calibanesque village mute who is privy to all the action taking place and whose own actions are the vehicle for the revelation of Rosy's adulterous affair. His mute gestures speak loudest in the film and, consequently, his gesturing body is the narrator of Rosy's story. Peter Brooks comments on the use of gesture in melodrama, "Gesture is essentially metaphoric, in that it is the token vehicle of a grandiose and sometimes ineffable tenor. It claims to refer to a world behind and beyond the apparent world, to the realm of occult moral forces, forces hidden but also operative, that



must be wrested into language” (110). Consequently, gesture is interpreted as the mechanization of the body in service of the unconscious where movement in the world signifies an appearance of the unarticulated human emotion. Throughout the film, Michael is seen shadowing and observing Rosy. Hence, the true story of Rosy becomes accumulated in Michael’s mute silence. Once Michael learns about Rosy’s affair and finds a war medal that Mayor Doryan had left following a secret meeting with Rosy in a beach cave, he puts on a pantomime in the village, with the locals correctly guessing at him playing Doryan due to the medal, MAUREEN: “It’s the Mayor” (DZ). Michael proceeds to salute Rosy before the crowd when she appears at the village square. By revealing her adulterous affair with Doryan, he exposes her repressed feminine desire. Since his expression is wordless, it is inscribed into the feminine order which dwells beyond the symbolic language of men. His gesture is a bodily performance of the silent articulation. According to Shoshana Felman in *The Scandal of the Speaking Body*, “The act, an enigmatic and problematic production of the speaking body, destroys from its inception the metaphysical dichotomy between the domain of the “mental” and the domain of the “physical,” breaks down the opposition between body and spirit, between matter and language” (64). Michael’s saluting gesture reveals the patterns of reality and fantasy in Rosy’s affair with Doryan. It is on the level of the human act that Michael’s gesture and Rosy’s adultery are aligned. As the film focuses its observation of the woman through Michael, whose subsequent knowledge of Rosy shapes her narrative, he functions as the location of the melodramatic moral occult. His mute pantomime represents the direct infusion of the narrative with the repressed content of the unconscious.

#### 4. THE FEMININE ISSUE ON SCREEN

As Cavell puts it in another of his works on cinema, *The World Viewed: Reflections on the Ontology of Film*, “Remarkable directors have existed solely to examine the same woman over and over through film. A woman has become the whole excuse and sole justification for the making and preserving of countless films” (48), this coherent narrative is etched upon the bodies of Laura, Lara and Rosy who spill one into the other, like the tears that they shed, constituting a systematic body of investigative effort into the female subjectivity under threat, including by their own desires.

The central position in the study of melodrama is occupied by the figure of woman who emerges as the site for crisis within the narrative. Jackie Byars comments on the natural amalgamation of melodrama with women, “The feminine also continues to be identified with the domestic, the private, and everyday social reality, and this is the terrain and the matter of

melodrama, with the family and the community crucial” (13). Melodrama works from within the social structure and since the woman is considered as the keeper of the order within the private sphere, it is on her body that the threat is reflected. Therefore, by removing the woman from the social structure her fleshly body comes to bear manifest to the threat of society’s survival. The bodily manifestations in women hold hereditary importance in the Western thought, as traced by Peter Brooks, “The hysterical body is of course typically, from Hippocrates through Freud, a woman's body, and indeed a victimized woman's body, on which desire has inscribed an impossible history, a story of desire in an impasse. Such an impasse will be typical of Hollywood domestic melodrama” (xii); by articulating the historical continuity of interest, Brooks provides form to the argument that melodramas, i.e. “woman’s films or tear-jerkers” (*Contesting Tears* 7) are a natural extension for the examination of physical manifestations of psychological conditions on the woman’s body. Due to the “uncanny origins, at the turn of the nineteenth century into the twentieth, of both the work of psychoanalysis and the work of art of film in the sufferings of and the threats to women” (*Contesting Tears* xiv), Cavell argues for the historical kinship of film and psychoanalysis whose ‘talking cure’ configuration provides the language necessary for the articulation of images on the cinema screen. Stephen Heath comments on the interest of film into probing the unconscious mind of the woman through displaying her image in the article *Cinema and Psychoanalysis. Parallel Histories*,

the film image *par excellence* of the mystery of the unconscious as the mystery of the woman: what is the history of film in cinema's institution but that of ever-renewed versions of the always failed resolution of the sexual relation in her image, she Woman as its idealized and impossible point of attainment, the phallic representation of the Other's enigma (42)

The talking cure of psychoanalysis appears capable of making visible and articulating the point of absence within the film image that in turn mark the emerging unconscious of the woman. Psychoanalysis and cinema both aim to expose the crisis inscribed in the convulsion of the body of woman struggling to tell her own story. The cinema represents the extension of the inherent patriarchal study of the woman in search of knowledge about them, which is presumed to be lodged outside of language as the symbolic order dominated by the man. In the article *The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction*, Walter Benjamin claims that the camera is capable of illuminating a different nature than that perceived by the naked human eye and thus it provides access to the optics of the unconscious in a manner akin to how

psychoanalysis leads into the unconscious impulses (16). This wordless space can then be transfigured into a representation located in the silent image on film. In order to enter the mind while only having visual access to the body, the optics of the camera become operational, due to the capacity of the mechanical equipment to project different aspects of nature than those available to the naked eye. Elizabeth Cowie summarizes the production of reality on film,

Cinema is not simply filmed reality; it frames the world in order to picture it on celluloid, hence it selects and excludes. It is therefore, even without the spoken or written word, an utterance or enunciation, an organised presentation of reality which presupposes an intelligibility of the utterance; it is organised for understanding (26)

The cinematic production of meaning in narrative is neither neutral nor naturally occurring. The mechanical treatment by way of the camera provides the illusion necessary for the spectator to accept the image as truth. In turn, this truth in cinema is produced in the image of the woman. The woman draws the gaze of the camera, which then proceeds to dissect her body in search of knowledge about her. A woman under treatment of the camera becomes the extension of the woman in treatment, as one would refer to a session of psychoanalysis. Laura Mulvey discusses cinema as an advanced representative system which interrogates the way the unconscious structures ways of seeing and pleasure in looking (834). Thus, the woman that appears on screen is in fact always a representation of woman, which is a man-made construct with assigned functions and values. The most successful representation is the one that tricks the spectator into mistaking the cinematic woman as the essence of woman and not as a construct fit for the narrative at hand. This claim can then be extended to the relation of cinema to reality, in which film is a fantasy of reality and not the real world. However, there is always a trace leading back to the real that is present in film and, as such, in the woman as well. This trace of the real then becomes the site of the crisis that the woman on screen goes through in trying to tell her own story with the words provided for her by the man.

#### 4.1. The Masculine Observation

Stephen Heath invokes Slavoj Žižek who claimed that film inherently provides the means for the explication of psychoanalysis (36). Consequentially, the amalgamated psychoanalytic and cinematic telling and showing the mystery of the unknown woman in the three Lean films is naturally organized in her male counterpart. The three male characters share a connection to medicine, wherein the search for knowledge is a prerequisite for the practice of curing. In *Brief*

*Encounter*, Alec Harvey is a medical doctor whose “special pigeon” (BE) is preventive medicine, which he explains to Laura,

ALEC: Preventive medicine isn't anything to do with medicine at all. It's concerned with conditions... living conditions, hygiene and common sense. For instance, my specialty is pneumoconiosis... It's nothing but a slow process of fibrosis of the lung... due to the inhalation of particles of dust. In the hospital here there are splendid opportunities for observing cures, making notes... (BE)

Alec is educating Laura on preventive medicine, which he locates in the study of origins. He investigates conditions that provoke but do not belong to the realm of the actual disease. Consequentially, Alec's work is symbolically aligned with the work of a psychoanalyst who also utilizes the observation of visible symptoms on the body as a trace reading to identify the root cause that is situated in the unconscious mind. Alec's speech is followed by a close-up of Laura's face which is presented in a soft light against a darkened background. Kent Puckett comments on the importance of lighting in the scene, “Because the shot's lighting thus lingers over the minor details of her face, hair, and dress, it says that she is not only ordinary but also *real* (141). The emphasis on the real implies a visual revelation of the woman. It is at this point that the viewer is privy to Laura's unspoken desire emerging from beyond reality and inscribing itself onto Laura's face and thus locating the hidden moral occult on her body. In observing Laura's face, the camera is aligned with Alec, implying that he is the bearer of the gaze, with Laura as its content. The nature of their conversation exemplifies Stanley Cavell's notion of the education of women on screen, “where her education turns out to mean her acknowledgment of her desire, and this in turn will be conceived of as her creation, her emergence, at any rate, as an autonomous human being” (*Pursuits of Happiness* 84). Laura is subject to a re-education of the socially ordered feminine configuration to transfigure into an opening for the realization of repressed desire. The camera between them also acts like a mirror for Laura, which Jackie Byers assimilates with the Lacanian theory of the mirror stage in the ego development where the self is recognized as separate from others, “Lacan argued that this subjectivity is later organized through the intervention of the phallus, enabling entry into the symbolic” (113). Hence, the conversation with Alec, the psychoanalyst per metonymy, enables Laura to use the differentiating image of the camera to make visible her separate self. This moment of emancipation authorizes the subsequent emergence of feminine desire in Laura.

Yuri Zhivago is also a medical doctor. In an early scene, Yuri is shown at university in conversation with a professor which informs the viewer of his aspirations, “MEDICAL PROFESSOR: What will you do next year, Zhivago? YURI: I thought of doing general practice. MEDICAL PROFESSOR: Think about doing pure research. It's exciting, important, tender, beautiful. YURI: General practice. MEDICAL PROFESSOR: Life. He wants to see life. Well...You'll find that pretty creatures do ugly things to people” (DZ). Yuri is aligned with Alec in his expressive desire to observe. In the cited scene, he is seen bending over a microscope, observing a research sample. This image of Yuri is a cinematic pre-vision of what is to come, with Yuri researching life through observing Lara as the sample. Hence, Lara is the transformative site between medical optics and poetry, as the optics of the written word.

The medicinal link in *Ryan's Daughter* is in the film's origin, Flaubert's *Madame Bovary*, wherein Charles Bovary is a country doctor in so much as Charles Shaughnessy is the village schoolteacher. Charles thus pre-assumes the role of educator for Rosy, a masculine organization for which an audience of Lean's films is already cognisant by way of Alec Harvey in *Brief Encounter*. However, unlike Alec, Charles is rendered impotent to fulfil the role of Rosy's educator from the start, since the knowledge she desires from him is already pre-established in her imaginary phantom Charles that remains locked in her unconscious. Lean communicates Rosy's fantasy of Charles at the beginning of the film, when the viewer is privy to a view of Rosy placing her feet into the footprints in the sand left by Charles following their encounter. According to Pam Cook, the woman in position of the subject of desire is presented as a problem of a lack of knowledge and understanding of the forces that control her (253). Consequentially, within the Charles/Rosy couple constellation, Rosy is the inheritor of the observatory gaze, but it is implicitly faulty. The scene shows Rosy focused on the trace of Charles, rather than his figure in the distant horizon, which is symptomatic of what Jules de Gaultier refers to as the *Bovarysme* condition, wherein the woman creates within herself an imaginary being made up of her dreams (24). Rosy is aligned with Yuri Zhivago in the act of misrecognition, but unlike him she has no access to the order of the word and thus her fault is delegated to the rejection of reality and the feeding of the imaginary. Charles is presented as the object of Rosy's gaze wherein his image is misconstrued, “CHARLES: Don't you see, Rose? I only taught you about... Byron and Beethoven and Captain Blood. I'm not one of them fellows myself” (RD). Charles puts her ability to see into question, indicating her disconnect from reality and the world of fantasy that she had constructed for herself. His realization of Rosy's crisis in knowledge and his incapacity to fix reintegrates Charles into the masculine

medical narrative, but as its object. Father Hugh, the village priest, diagnoses Charles's love for Rosy as sore on two occasions in the film, FATHER HUGH: 'Your husband would say anything you wanted, pretty well... because he loves you sorely, doesn't he?'... 'You love her sorely, don't you, Charles?' (RD). Trevor Howard, who played Father Hugh, is already emblematic of medicine in Lean filmography due to his role as Dr Alec Harvey. His engagement in preventive medicine spills over into *Ryan's Daughter* and works toward the restoration of the couple. Notably, they are the only couple out of the three imbued with the possibility of a reconciliation. However, this cannot be achieved in the vicinity of the cinematic spillage of the Laura/Alec couple, which is why the film ends with Charles and Rosy parting for Dublin.

## 5. MELODRAMATIC METAMORPHOSIS

Stanley Cavell proposes metamorphosis as a procedure performed on the woman within the melodramatic narrative, "a woman achieves existence (or fails to) or established her right to existence in the form of metamorphosis (or fails to) apart from or beyond satisfaction by marriage (of a certain kind)" (*Contesting Tears* 88). According to Cavell, even in its failure, the idea of metamorphosis is enough to formulate a crisis point within the social structure at hand. As stated before, in the three Lean films under consideration it is the woman that constitutes the crisis in narrative. According to her own confession, Laura is a happily married mother of two when she meets Alec Harvey, a doctor whose train stops at the same station as hers. It is in the refreshment room at the Milford Junction railway station that Laura is first subjected to a transformation by way of "something in my eye" (BE) which consists of a small piece of grit that became lodged in her eye, rendering her temporarily blinded. Alec helps remove it, and this supplies the opportunity for their first conversation. J. E. Smyth writes in his review of the film for the *Cinéaste* magazine, "We watch as she falls in love, half-listening to him describing different kinds of dust— stone, gold, coal—much like the cinder from the train platform that first lodged in her eye like pixie dust and started their affair" (54). Grit, as residue from the passing train, metonymically representing their mundane everyday lives, becomes imbued with the power of transformation. While Alec restores her vision, and with a new light illuminating the world around her, it is a different image that she sees before her. From this point onwards, Laura morphs into a woman on the brink of change, like those that she had witnessed on her weekly haunts to the Milford cinema. Suddenly she becomes the star of a real-life melodrama, caught between the quiet contentment of her familial role and the promise of happiness in excess. The vocabulary employed to describe Laura's immediate

situation in terms of cinema plays into the argument that she had undergone a transformation from ordinary to extraordinary by way of melodrama, as sustained by Christine Gledhill's observation, "If the excessive moment in melodrama infuses ordinary characters and relationships with excitement and significance, stars represent ordinary people whose ordinary joys and sorrows become extraordinary in the intensity stardom imparts to them" ("Signs of Melodrama" 219). Laura is the star in the cinema of the real and therefore it is no wonder that her love affair with Alec finds an opening for its continuation at the Milford Palladium film theatre. It is there that Laura's reality can be subject to reorganization, since her identity can now be aligned with that of the woman on screen. This lived-in fantasy allows for the introduction of adultery into her character's constellation, as she disassociates from her ordained role of mother and wife to put on the act of the love affair. Laura substitutes herself for a presence, transposing herself into imaginary scenarios,

LAURA: I stared out of that railway carriage window into the dark... and watched the dim trees and the telegraph posts slipping by, and through them, I saw Alec and me... I saw us in Paris, in a box at the opera. The orchestra was tuning up. Then we were in Venice, drifting along the Grand Canal in a gondola... with the sound of mandolins coming to us over the water. I saw us traveling far away together, all the places I've always longed to go" (BE)

The train window transforms into a screen reflecting the content of Laura's unconscious desires. It marks the place of visible absence within the organization of the screen, for the devolution of Laura's unspoken desires. Stanley Cavell writes of the film screen in *The World Viewed*, "A screen is a barrier. What does the silver screen screen? It screens me from the world it holds—that is, makes me invisible. And it screens that world from me—that is, screens its existence from me. That the projected world does not exist (now) is its only difference from reality" (24). The window screen displaces Laura into a performance of reality that mirrors everything but her body, whose absence is the trace of reality in the wakeful fantasy. This absence marks the disembodiment of the screened Laura who is organized as the imaginary imagery of the real Laura's unconscious contained within the window pane. The fantasy is thus successfully imprinted onto the star personae, rather than Laura the person. Elizabeth Cowie comments on the exploration of fantasy on film, "Film has long been considered a domain of wishfulfilment and fantasy; what has been argued here, however, is that this is not a retreat to unreality ... Fantasy is first and foremost not a wish for X, but a scenario, a structure of positions and relationships for the subject" (164). The screened fantasy scenario thus fulfils Laura's

unspoken desire in a safely structured way, outside of the ordered reality that she corporeally inhabits. However, the crisis occurs once Laura aligns herself with her star persona, a transgression that the fantasy cannot sustain since it neutralizes the barrier represented by the window pane. In *Brief Encounter*, this crisis of fantasy merging with reality occurs in the scene following the collapse of the Laura/Alec couple. In the wake of Alec's final parting, Laura contemplates commit suicide by throwing herself onto the train tracks. The scene plays out fast; Laura hears the piercing sound of the train whistle, she dashes out of the refreshment room and onto the train platform, stopping in front of the moving train. Kent Puckett elaborates on how Lean organized the suicide crisis scene,

the sequence suggests that the relationship's end leads nearly to a breakdown, a fact that appears to infect the camera, which responds with an odd, crazy tilt; finally, as Laura runs out to the platform's edge, the film's first whistle returns as a high-pitched externalization of the hysteria that once again nearly overtakes both Laura and *Brief Encounter* (156)

The barrier between the person and the persona is dissolved since there is no screen for Laura to project herself onto, and her body becomes the performative site. She fails to perform her part and the crisis narrative is purged through the externalization of hysteria, as suggested by Puckett. The pronounced insistence on the close-up of Laura Jessen's face is in accordance with Christine Gledhill's comments on the functioning of close-up as the window to the soul which has the capacity to speak more candidly and without restraint since the language of the face speaks instinctively and subconsciously (214). The suggestion is that the repressed emotion is released from the unconscious by way of the look of terror in her eyes and transposed through the shrilling sound of the train into the camera gaze where it can be absorbed and neutralized. The suicide scene functions to exorcise the crisis of the feminine position. The melodramatic cleansing of crisis through the shrilling sound of the train and the mechanical gaze of the camera thus allows for the restoration of social order "LAURA: I stood there trembling right on the edge, but I couldn't. I wasn't brave enough" (*Brief Encounter*). Only upon realizing that she cannot inhabit the fantasy world of the persona can Laura be allowed to return to the family home and re-establish the socially sanctioned performative role of wife and mother.

As stated before, Lara Antipova represents the masculine failure at acquiring knowledge, since the male characters consistently misrecognize her throughout the narrative. In *Doctor*



*Zhivago*, the emblematic points that denounce her illusiveness are Lara's first and last encounter with Yuri, which Lean organizes around a streetcar. The first encounter occurs at the beginning of the film, where they both are presented to the spectator in a single frame, but they are not made aware of each other since Lara is seated in front of Yuri with her face obscured by a black scarf, revealing only her piercing blue eyes. As they each stand to get off the car, they brush past one another and go their separate ways, thus failing to acknowledge, i.e. recognize the existence of each other. The final encounter occurs at the end of the film, with Yuri observing a woman resembling Lara walking down the street, away from the moving tram. The camera tracks her from behind, allowing a few brief glimpses of her face, which may or may not be hers, as it appears obscured by the greyness of her clothes and headscarf. Yuri exits the street car in pursuit of her but collapses from a heart attack and dies in the street leaving the identity of the woman unknown. The unknownness of her faith, whether she had perished in the labour camps, as stated by Yevgraf, or not is Lean's final commentary on the character of Lara who functions around traces that open within the narrative but never quite yield knowledge. The streetcar bringing Lara and taking her away appears as the phantom representation of the train in *Brief Encounter* whose grit residue lodged in Laura's eye instigates the love affair with Alec. In the same manner, the streetcar brings in what Stephen Heath refers to as "the residue of signifying traces taken up as unconscious material" (27). This residue is the doomed love story that spills from Laura and Alec onto Lara and Yuri. It also allows for direct insight into Lara's psyche as through residue, confirming that it reveals itself only as a phantom, preserving her unknownness.

In *Ryan's Daughter*, Father Hugh reproaches Rosy for "mooning about all day", a state dislocated from wakefulness and symptomatically aligned with *le Bovarysme*, a condition presenting hysterical conditions under restriction according to Jules de Gaultier. Without physical manifestations of hysteria, Rosy's *Bovarysme* is dominated by unconscious hysterical acts, which Gaultier traces in gripping crises stemming from the imaginary playing onto the senses. He argues that nerves are in service of the images of the real which are thus rebuffed and reshaped by internal suggestions (28). Consequentially, Rosy the Bovarist mooner, is hostile to reality as it would render her powerless. Following Gaultier, she breathes fiction as the acceptable sensations are organized by herself, manufacturing a world of her own convenience. Rosy the fantasist is thus emblematic of a deceit in the consciousness, marking her as the embodiment of social threat which can only be exorcised by a violent intrusion of reality.

## 6. SCANDAL OF THE BODY

For Lean, the interest in the image of woman in turmoil can be traced back to his childhood, as argued by his biographer Gene D. Phillips, “According to Lean, his mother never recovered from the failure of her marriage, and it left a heavy cloud over her household for the rest of her days...He later referred dourly to the tyranny of her tears” (14). The early association of violence with femininity legitimizes Lean’s interest in the exploration of how the woman’s afflicted body could be read as a place of reading her own story. All three female characters in this paper suffer physical turmoil as consequence of emotional distress which they are incapable of working through in language.

In *Brief Encounter*, the manifestation of the woman’s body in grips of hysteria are fainting spells and tears. In the article *More! From Melodrama to Magnitude*, Joan Copjec defines a woman’s tears as a symptom of the logic of the general compulsion to speak the whole truth (255). Tears act as a purge for what Peter Brooks referred to as the moral occult mentioned before, or the fundamental operative desires that lie inaccessible to everyday consciousness. They act as psychosomatic reference to the woman’s unconscious to the camera. Laura tells Fred about a fainting spell she had at the refreshment room, normalizing it by saying she must be that type of woman (BE), the conversation occurs before the spectator learns about the history of the love story between Laura and Alec. According to Pam Cook, the physical illness is the result of the symptomatic female desire, wherein the hysterical body becomes an enigma slipping away from male control as the man fails to cure it (254). In the case of Laura Jessen, the emotional repression connected with the failure of the love affair is manifested through bodily fits. This inevitable repercussion was announced in Laura’s description of falling in love, “I didn’t think such violent things could happen to ordinary people” (BE). The employment of violence in describing Laura’s emotional state announces the onset of a threat accumulated in feminine desire. The obscured wishes and desires located in her unconscious thus transfigure into fainting spells as a point of entry into visibility on the plane of the world and yet remain inaccessible to the realm of language and thus unknowable to men. Thus, the body is appropriated as a revelatory symptom of the essence of the woman for the viewer.

In *Doctor Zhivago*, Lean again shows the female character grasping with physical turmoil. At seventeen years old, Lara, still known as Larissa Antipova, is sexually assaulted by Victor Komarovskiy (Rod Steiger). In the film, he embodies the compromised legitimacy of the revolutionary principles of social change which stood at the heart of the Russian Revolution, since he successfully negotiates political survival and a power transfer from the old social order

into the new one. Thus, Komarovsky's sexual assault of Larissa could be read as the acting out of female subjugation to the patriarchal order through victimization. Komarovsky represents the melodramatic villain as described by Thomas Elsaesser, "The villains (often of noble birth) demonstrate their superior political and economic power invariably by sexual aggression and attempted rape" (70). He deprives Larissa of voicing her own story by imposing his own words onto her, "VICTOR: There are two kinds of women and you, as we well know, are not the first kind. You, my dear, are a slut. LARA: I am not! VICTOR: We'll see. And, don't delude yourself that this was rape. That would flatter us both" (DZ). In his desire to control her through knowledge, Victor creates a stand-in identity for Larissa by casting her into the socially ostracized role of the scarlet woman, a fact underscored by the visual organization of a subsequent encounter between Larissa and Komarovsky, wherein she embodies an opulent sight of visual decadence in a blood red dress with black lace trimming. Larissa then coincides with Joan Copjec's description of the melodramatic heroine as making her body the mute testimony to all of society's failures (266). Her body is identified and subjugated by the patriarchal order in the guise of Komarovsky. Thus, the subsequent metamorphosis of her name is not accidental. Cavell writes that the appropriation of names may give them the power to fix identity and through it a relation to truth (*Contesting Tears* 142). Lara is symbolic of a transfiguration executed on the body that opens a space for the woman to actively tell her own story. Jackie Byars describes figures of women in melodrama as battling sites (9) and this definition is acted out on the body which metamorphoses from Larissa, the scarlet woman, to Lara, who is a nurse, assisting Yuri in surgery on a wounded soldier, thus saving lives on the battle field. In the film, this shift in her character marks her as a site of uncertainty, since she never quite appears settled. This is due to her character being afforded a more active role, through having a profession, than Laura or Rosy, who are both fixed in the marital home as their site of concern. Consequentially, Lara is able to take control of her own narrative, which escapes the language of men as they continuously fail to read her and thus bestow a fixed symbolic identity upon her. Lara's story is thus revealed to be that of illusiveness in metamorphosis.

In *Ryan's Daughter*, the scandal accumulated in Rosy is that of female desire. According to Phillips, Lean understood Rosy's story as that of a young girl whose fantasies of an ideal mate are not fulfilled in the older man she marries, and she becomes infatuated by a handsome stranger. Phillips also cites Lean's summarizing thought, "We are dealing with primitive emotions" (366). The implication is that the film is pre-organized around the issue of the

expression of desire for women. As much as Lara has been the object of desire in *Doctor Zhivago*, Rosy is now its subject. However, her subjectivity is destined for failure, since she is unable to successfully perform the role of the wife (as Laura has) and also fails at translating the nursing capacity metonymically emblematic of Lara's successful transformation on the battle site of the body. Randolph, Rosy's lover, is a British soldier who commits suicide. Cavell comments on the role of the military man: "The military man represents man in uniform, which is to say, men doing the work of the world ... This figure asserts the myth of community, the idea that society is man's natural state" (*The World Viewed* 47). Hence, his death represents the failure of society which Lean symptomatically organizes in filmic terms through the interruption of the scene of domestic exchange between Rosy and Charles in which the viewer is informed of the failure of the couple, "CHARLES: I don't think either of us can stay in this village any longer... It's time I moved on anyway. And you were never worse suited here" (RD), by an outburst of violence committed by the village mob against Rosy, mistakenly identifying her as the informer to blame for the failed attempt by the Irish Republican band to arm themselves against the British, aided by the villagers, with German weaponry. Rosy is victimized due to the isolation of her social position. The villagers cut her hair and brutalise her body so as to exorcise the dislodged social structure to restoration. The public humiliation for her transgression is the revenge of reality, thus exploiting her body for the purging of psychological symptoms of hysteria and Bovarysme. This act, allows for the reassertion of ordered society, legitimized by the expulsion of the Rosy/Charles couple from the community. The exile to Dublin provides the ground for the re-construction of marriage in line with Cavell's argument, "without the separation or divorce, the marriage would not be lawful ... Marriage is always divorce, always entails rupture from something; and since divorce is never final, marriage is always a transgression" (*Pursuits of Happiness* 103). It is the breakdown of the socially arranged marriage, conditioned by the filmed dislocated image of society by way of the village mob, that allows for Rosy and Charles to consent to the literal and metaphorical road to Dublin as the location beyond the filmic frame, for the re-establishment of the home and subsequently social order.

Lean presents the final exit without music, stirring complete focus onto the image. Rosy is dressed in the same white costume she wore upon first entering her marital home, thus tying the marital history with the social framework. Their walk through the village is organized as a spectacle for the faces behind the window curtains representing the social barrier on whose outside the couple had found themselves. The continuity of the couple's march is interrupted

by Rosy staggering on the cobbled road, however; her falling is thwarted by Charles giving her his arm. Lean stages this image of the couple coming together so as to invoke and counteract the previously discussed post-wedding bedroom scene where the two were placed with distinct separation. Hence, this gesture indicates the sole occasion in the three films where a narrative future is permitted in which the couple could be reunited.

## 7. CONCLUSION

David Lean's three melodramas prove the capacity of cinema to inscribe itself in the artistic tradition of representation in function of explaining human society to itself. The three films provide insight into the struggle of the individual within the social structure. The stories of Laura, Lara and Rosy explore the hidden history of femininity which is lodged outside the symbolic realm of male dominated language. Their actions reveal the crisis points in the ordained social order. Lean's minute approach to imagery illuminates these narrative crises as trace sites for the unspoken immergence of the unconscious on the cinema screen. Lean utilizes the camera as the optical tool for the observation of the obscured aspects of human nature etched upon the bodies of the women on screen. The articulation of hidden psychological truths in the cinematic imagery by way of the female body is organized in the manner akin to the treatment of women in psychoanalysis. *Brief Encounter*, *Doctor Zhivago* and *Ryan's Daughter* show women going through a metamorphosis acted out upon their bodies, which the gaze of the camera captures, and the melodramatic form translate. For the viewer, Lean's exploration of the obscured essential knowledge about the woman is made readable by way of the melodrama as the cinematic tool for the transfiguration of the silent feminine image into the revelatory site of obscured psychological wishes and desires that dwell beyond the surface of reality.

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