MILOS FORMAN: THE EVOLUTION OF A FILMMAKER

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1978

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1981

Submitted to the Faculty of the Graduate College
of the Oklahoma State University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Degree of
DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY
May, 1985

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PREFACE

Despite the fact that Milos Forman is one of the most successful filmmakers in the world today, no comprehensive analysis of his work presently exists. The most thorough study conducted thus far (by Leonard Lipton in 1974) does not include any of his last four major films, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), Hair (1979), Ragtime (1980), and Amadeus (1984). Two of these films, Cuckoo's Nest and Amadeus, have won "Oscars" as Best Picture. For his popularity alone, Milos Forman is a director who deserves close attention, but this factor is not the lone reason for his significance.

Through ten films over a twenty-one year period, Milos Forman has maintained a consistent vision of the world and a recognizable pair of themes. He continually shows that man has oppressive tendencies, but also the ability to strive for freedom within social limitations. Individuals, in fact, have a responsibility to work towards their own fulfillment, and perhaps, through enough separate efforts, institutions may eventually become less restrictive. These ideas are constant in Forman's films, but his ability to continually give them new relevance is what makes him one of the most important directors of the present era. This study will reveal Milos Forman's ability to achieve both a consistent vision and steady evolution in his work by examining his life, his creative methods, and his films.

I would like to express my deepest thanks to my major adviser, Dr. Peter C. Rollins, who has guided me through my career at Oklahoma

State and this dissertation. I would also like to thank Dr. Leonard J. Leff for his contributions to my film studies over the last four years and steady help and advice, both solicited and unsolicited. Without these two men, my academic career would not be at the point it is today. I honestly cannot thank them enough.

The successful completion of this study would also have not been possible without the generous cooperation of Milos Forman and his colleagues Arnost Lustig, Josef Skvorecky, and Michael Weller. Each of these individuals were more than willing to answer all questions as fully and honestly as possible. Their completely unself-conscious cooperation proves that they are artists primarily because they seek to enlighten others and share their ideas.

Finally, and most importantly, I must also thank my family. This work is dedicated to the memory of my father, Garrett Slater. He never liked films, but he taught me to work. I hope that this effort pleases him. My mother, Bertha Slater, shares my gratitude. This work is also dedicated to my loving wife, Mary Ann, and my beautiful daughter, Gretchen Anna. This study does not even begin to repay what I owe them.

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CHAPTER ONE

AN OVERVIEW OF FORMAN'S LIFE AND CAREER

Over a twenty-one year period, Milos Forman has built an enviable directorial career. Of his nine features, four have been nominated for major Academy Awards: Loves of a Blonde (1965), The Firemen's Ball (1967), One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), and Amadeus (1984). Each of the last two films captured the Best Director award for him and also won as Best Picture. Forman's success is especially admirable because of the honesty in his work. His films contain some qualities that are not very reassuring. The heroes never succeed and are not even very appealing, social leaders are either corrupt or incompetent, and the conclusion presents no clear resolution or promise for a better future. Yet, Forman is basically an optimist. The endings of his films provide a reason for hope, even though they do not suggest that much will ever change.[1]

These seemingly contradictory ideas both find their basis in Forman's focus on individual rights and responsibilities.[2] Most of his films examine a clash between a solitary person and a restrictive society. In all of his Czech films (Forman was born in Czechoslovakia and lived there until 1967) except for The Firemen's Ball, the main character is a young person seeking to find his or her identity while also attempting to stay within society's limitations. However, the vague and confusing nature of society's rules, geared more towards

preserving order than allowing individual development, is a major problem for each youngster. So, no matter how much the main characters in Competition (1963), Black Peter (1963), and Loves of a Blonde attempt to do what they think is being demanded of them, they are continually frustrated. The rules simply do not make sense. In The Firemen's Ball, Forman shifted his focus to show how the self-centered manipulation of power by those in control affects the elderly as well as the young. Forman's concern for the young and the old in his films demonstrates his compassion for those who lack power in society, whose lives are run by forces beyond their control.[3] Forman even demonstrates sympathy for those who are responsible. Though always foolish, they are also understandably human and fallible.

The main characters in Forman's American films also attempt to express themselves within a highly structured and restrictive society. They too fight a social system more concerned with maintaining order than providing personal freedom. Forman's heroes thus demonstrate his philosophy that social institutions must be made humanitarian in their orientation and reminded of their purpose to serve people rather than the system. In this sense, the heroes are all admirable, but each of them fails because he lacks knowledge about his environment. Forman always emphasizes that freedom and responsibility are inseparable, and those who do not understand their world, for whatever reason, must pay a price. Larry Tyne in Taking Off (1971), Randle Patrick McMurphy in Cuckoo's Nest, George Berger in Hair (1979), Coalhouse Walker, Jr. in Ragtime (1980), and Antonio Salieri and Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart in Amadeus all fail to act responsibly when given the chance. Each has the opportunity to accomplish more than he actually does if he can learn to work within his limitations rather than continually oppose them.

The possibility for freedom within a given set of restrictions is the major theme in Milos Forman's films and represents the optimism of his personal vision. Obtaining that freedom depends upon the person. Individual responsibility is as much a part of Forman's message as the need for institutional humanitarianism. Of Forman's American film heroes, Larry Tyne is the only one to survive because he alone comes to recognize his limits.

Forman repeats these themes in each one of his films, yet his work is also constantly changing to reflect both his own concerns and contemporary social themes. His Czech films show an increasingly negative attitude about the inflexibility of the society, a premonition that was fulfilled by the Russian invasion of August, 1968.[4] The American films also all relate directly to their point in time. Taking Off demonstrates the confusion of a middle-age, middle-class parent in a youth-oriented culture. Cuckoo's Nest comments on the nature of power, an appropriate topic for the post-Watergate era. Hair relates to America's need to heal the wounds left from the Vietnam war. Ragtime presents a powerful statement about individual responsibility, the relationship of technology to power, the role of terrorism in twentieth-century life, and the struggles of minorities to share the resources of wealth and power. Amadeus focuses on the role of the artist in society and the audience's need to recognize the difference between substance and form. Besides these features, Forman also directed a short piece titled The Decathalon for the 1972 film about the summer Olympics, Visions of Eight. For this international event, Forman appropriately selected a universal theme. His film demonstrates the comedy and tragedy of man's struggle to achieve while some dedicate themselves to regulating actions and others merely watch.

This view of society is actually present in each of Forman's films. Milos Forman's consistent vision and the steady evolution of his themes and techniques have made him one of the most important directors of the present era. An examination of his life, his creative methods, and most importantly, his films reveals the origin and the basis for both the steady evolution and the continual relevance of his work. This study will begin by examining Forman's life from 1932-1962 to show how his artistic vision evolved from his personal experiences.[5]

Milos Forman's early years, 1932-1945, were unusually happy ones even though they occurred in the midst of a great historical cataclysm. World War II was especially tragic for the boy from Caslov because his parents were both arrested by the Gestapo when he was eight years old. Forman remembers being called out of school one day and seeing his father standing between two men wearing long raincoats. His father told him that he was being taken to a camp, which the young Milos did not understand because the only kind he knew about were of the summer vacation variety. Forman's father asked him to tell his mother not to worry, but she too was arrested a short time later. Both of them eventually died in the Nazi concentration camps.[6] The loss of his parents did not have an immediately devastating effect on the young Forman. Instead, his guardians felt such sympathy for him that they usually left him with a great amount of freedom to do as he pleased. Forman thus remembers his childhood as a relatively happy one.

Two important qualities in Forman's films stem from these early experiences. One is his compassion for all victims of the drive to achieve and gain control by certain members of society. In his first three films, Forman uses youngsters confused by the conflicting demands of society as

his main characters. In his American films, these innocent victims become the silent bystanders such as the little boy and the grandfather in Ragtime. Forman significantly focuses on them a few times to remind the audience of the lives being affected by the actions of the main characters. His true sympathy is with them because of the way their lives are being tossed about. A second aspect of Forman's films that relates closely to his childhood experiences is his blending of comedy and tragedy.[7] In the Czech films, his young lead characters often act comically foolish, but then evoke sympathy for the undue pain that their actions cause them. The firemen in The Firemen's Ball perform hilarious antics throughout the film, but Forman concludes by focusing on three old men who are the victims of their ridiculousness. Forman's American films contain a similar intertwining of the comic and tragic. Taking Off is a comedy that originated from a true story about the murder of two runaway teenagers. The parents in the film act absurdly while seeking their missing children. McMurphy, Berger, and Mozart are all comic figures who die in the end. Only Ragtime has a completely serious main character, but Forman adds humor to the tragedy of the film through the person of Evelyn Nesbit (Elizabeth McGovern) and the use of silent comedy techniques during the tense climax. When Forman was sixteen years old, his school class saw a documentary film about the concentration camps. Only then did he realize the horrors of his parents' deaths. The experience changed his perspective of his childhood and helped him form a vision of the world that has been the basis of his work. Forman realized then that pleasure and pain are not completely distinct feelings.

As a teenager, Milos Forman became interested in drama. His older brother was a performer with The East Bohemian Repertory Theater, and the young Forman was allowed to wander around backstage at performances.

One night in 1944, the company was performing its final presentation before the Germans closed all the nation's theaters. At one point during the third act, the cast was unable to continue. Everyone on stage suddenly began to cry. Forman says, "Maybe for the first time in my life, I was terribly touched. From that moment I knew that, more than anything else in the world, I wanted to work in the theater. That evening made up my mind for me" (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 4). In high school, Forman began performing in plays and helped organize a drama club, The Musical Comedy Theater, during his senior year. The group was fairly successful. Established Czech stage director E. F. Burian allowed them to use his theater one night a week for rehearsals, and they were once invited to give a guest performance at a regional Communist Party conference in Kolin. Unbeknownst to the Party regulars who attended, Forman's company performed a banned play that was a huge success with the audience. Later in his career, Forman would similarly discover that his films had a relatively easy time with official review boards because the examiners did not consider comedies to have a serious message.[8]

In the Fifties, having been rejected from the Prague Drama School, Forman gained admittance to the Film Faculty of the Academy of the Performing Arts (FAMU) in film dramaturgy. His decision to go there resulted from a desperate desire to do anything to avoid having to serve two years of military duty. At this time, Czech cinema had reached its lowest level ever of quality and quantity. This depression resulted from cultural policies initiated in the socialist world during the 1930s by Soviet leader Josef Stalin and A. A. Zhdanov which dictated that all art must adhere to Communist Party ideology.[9] Forman remembers,

> The situation in Czechoslovakia in the Fifties was that cinematography, which since 1897 was producing twenty, thirty feature films a year, in 1950 produced three feature

> films. And all so dull and boring and pretentious and even when the production of the amount of films increased in the Fifties, still the results were 100% way below what one can call great films, way below. So, there was not even one outstanding film made which you felt will survive the test of time. (Personal interview; all subsequent Forman quotations in this work are also from this source unless otherwise noted.)

FAMU did not teach Forman anything about cameras or directing, but it did allow him to see hundreds of films from all over the world and spend five years of his life thinking and talking about film and art with his fellow students and teachers. The students included people such as Ivan Passer, Forman's life-long friend, co-screenwriter on all his Czech films, and accomplished director, and other future members of the Czech "film miracle" of the Sixties. Some of the excellent professors were the experienced directors Otakar Vavra and Elmar Klos and authors Milan Kundera and Milos Kratochvil.

FAMU provided Forman with a secure and independent position from which to examine Czech film, culture, and society.[10] His experience there began an important decade of personal and artistic growth. Forman says that in the years at film school, he had no strong objections to Stalinist-Zhdanovist philosophy:

> Well, nobody is born too smart, right? So, you develop certain tastes and set for yourself certain criteria through the process of living and working. So when I finished school in the middle Fifties, I was not at all sure that what the great gurus of socialist realism are trying to make us do is wrong. I was not sure about that. I knew that I had difficulties to get emotionally involved with so-called socialist realism. I understood intellectually what they mean. I understood politically what it means. But I was always disturbed that none of this work touched me emotionally at all. It made me think; it made me analyze. It made me aware of certain day-to-day political circumstances. But it never touched my heart. But still, I was not sure that the mistake was not in the authors, in the artists, not to give your heart to it. So I was somehow playing with some ideas of how to conform with what socialist-

> realism is asking us to do, and only through seeing how pathetic results are coming out of this process, I learned that something is wrong in the basic approach of socialist-realism towards art.

While at film school, Forman wrote at least three screenplays: one on the Czech humanist Jan Amos Komensky, one based on the 1930 play The Bath House by Soviet writer Vladimir Mayakovsky, and the final one a simple story about a boy, a girl, and a horse. The nature of each of these projects makes them an outline of Forman's artistic development.

Basing a work on a historical figure or period was a standard method for stretching the barriers of socialist-realism. For example, a film about World War II could incorporate a humanitarian statement by being anti-Fascist. Forman's first screenplay, therefore, follows directly in the accepted path for Czech artists at that time. With his script based on Mayakovsky's works, Forman believed himself to be continuing in that path. The play was a satire on socialist leaders who fight being taken into the perfect communist world of the future in order to maintain their own powers. Despite the irreverent nature of the piece, Mayakovsky was still considered an acceptable artist. The rejection of his work Forman says, began to awaken him to the realities of the artist's position in Czechoslovakian society:

> When I delivered the screenplay, I was surprised. Because, you know, these people, they don't have much time. They have to read so many screenplays that they really don't try to be very clever. What they are telling me as objections, I suddenly realized they are objecting to Mayakovsky, not me. So something must be wrong basically because Mayakovsky is the great voice of socialist realism. So what's wrong?

The final step in Forman's disillusionment with the Czech productions system occurred when he attended a meeting of one of the committees that was to decide whether or not a specific film would be made. Forman remembers,

> These people were people who individually I respected every one of them. They were quite good, prominent, Czech writers, directors, University professors, journalists, publishers, who were sitting on this committee. And individually, I somehow respected more or less each of them. But the verdict they gave birth to as a committee was so stupid, narrow-minded, and superficial, it didn't remind me of any one of them individually. So to me, this was a big lesson that art can't actually and must not be, controlled by committees if your goal is exciting originality and depth of individuality. Art controlled and regulated by committees is comparable to starvation.

Thus, the third story that Forman developed in film school indicates his turning away from great themes and a broad perspective and towards simplicity. The completion of this movement eventually resulted in the creation of his first directorial efforts, Competition and Black Peter, in 1963. Both films relate very simple stories about young people attempting to cope with their society and find self-expression.

In the Fifties, Forman also learned the persistence that a serious artist needs. Experiencing the rejection of his early work, Forman says, actually benefited him when other projects later in his career were also refused:

> I started as a screenwriter and I started writing scripts for other directors, and I went through two or three projects in which I invested all my time and energy and finished the screenplay and then it was turned down. That was in Czechoslovakia. And the films were never made based on these screenplays. So I was somehow used to it.

Another lesson in persistence came when Forman worked as an assistant screenwriter with established director Martin Fric on a film called Leave it to Me (1955). This film, a light-hearted comedy about a man who keeps taking on new work to help other people until he finally exhausts himself, was Forman's first professional job following film school. One day, he attended a screening of some of the unedited footage at which a number of official reviewers were present. This

material was of the standard, unexciting nature, and everyone was very bored except for one man who kept laughing and enjoying himself: Martin Fric. At first, even Forman felt annoyed by Fric, but then he realized that the veteran director was the only one present who really cared about artistic creation. Though political circumstances limited the depth of his expression, Fric created a large number of films in his career and worked on every project he could. Forman says, "I realized that under the circumstances, Fric had done the best he could, and nobody had the right to criticize him" (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 15). During the early Sixties and late Sixties and early Seventies, when, for a variety of reasons, Forman was unable to do projects he had developed or make the ones that he was working on the way that he wanted to, these lessons in perseverance were important to his ability to maintain the level of quality in his work that he desired.

In 1956, Forman worked with director Alfred Radok on the film Grandpa Automobile. Forman says that Radok "was considered the very avante-garde, the very inventive man in the theater." Grandpa Automobile was one of the films that Radok occassionally made, and the experience was very valuable to Forman. For the first time, he learned something about the necessary requirements for directing a film, and he also got the chance to employ his own inventiveness. Forman and Radok would spend time creating ridiculous gadgets to be used in the film like a butterfly-catching machine. Forman also worked with Radok on Laterna Magica, a combination of theater, slides, dance, and film, that formed part of the Czechoslovakian exposition at the 1958 Brussels World's Fair.[11] The main impact of this experience on Forman was negative. After coping with that bewildering variety of art forms and equipment, he was very

happy to return to the simplicity of film's direct expression.

In 1957, in between the two projects with Radok, Forman's own artistic personality quietly began to emerge. His screenplay for Ivo Novak's The Puppies represented an important break with the typical Czech film because it focused on an ordinary situation in contemporary life. In the story, two young people from Prague decide to get married so that the girl can avoid being assigned to work in a remote rural district. Unfortunately, this decision represents only the beginning of their troubles. Their parents do not approve of the marriage and so they have to search for a place to stay, going through a number of comic situations in the process. Although the film has little substance, it represents the beginnings of a fresh look at Czech society that characterizes the work of Forman and the other "New Wave" directors during the Sixties. The Puppies has the virtues of at least being based on an actual situation present in Czech society and showing that all young people are not happy with government control of their lives.

In 1959, Forman was released from his duties with Laterna Magica for political reasons that he was completely unaware of. Feeling free to begin his own directorial career, Forman co-wrote a screenplay with writer Josef Skvorecky of his short story "Eine Kliene Jazzmusick."[12] He had wanted to develop Skvorecky's novel, The Cowards, but it had been heavily criticized by the government at the January 1959 Banska Bystrica cultural conference and so was out of the question. Skvorecky admits that even the screenplay they did write had shaky prospects from the beginning: "we began the project with an idea that it was not quite kosher; we expected difficulties. The main objection, of course, was that to mix anti-Nazi resistance with jazz was--how shall we say it?--not quite proper" (personal letter). The film was all set to begin

production when an announcement that one of Skvorecky's works was to be filmed was made on the radio. President Antonin Novotny heard the item and, assuming that The Cowards was the piece in question, quickly intervened to cancel the project.

Shortly thereafter, Forman found out that because of his firing from Laterna Magica he did not have the proper credentials that would allow him to direct anyway. So, in 1961, he was forced to work as assistant director on a film called Beyond the Forest by Pavel Blumenthal. He thoroughly detested the experience, but he went through it in order to re-establish himself. At the same time, Forman was already beginning to collect the material that would form the basis for his own film. Forman's life up to this point, like anyone else's, had been shaped by his responses to accidental occurrences and practical necessity. His experiences have influenced his films and are evident in his vision of the world as a cruel place in which random incidents control destiny and in his insistence on personal responsibility in spite of that fact. Nevertheless, Milos Forman's early works emphasize that young people must be given the freedom to make mistakes and find their own identities. In Competition and Black Peter, Forman produced examinations of Czech society and teenagers who learn not from doing as they are told but from failing at their own efforts. Forman's success was enhanced by the fact that in his cinematography and his writing, he developed methods for taking an honest look at society and then presenting what he found.

ENDNOTES

[1]Explaining his philosophy, Forman says "you want to be part of this cleansing process of the human soul. We will never beat the stupidity of bureaucracy, and so on, but we must never stop fighting it" (Murphy).

[2]Joseph Skvorecky quotes Forman as saying,

> I think all that which is noble, and which has remained in art and literature since ancient times . . . and which is also significant for strong contemporary works of art, has always concerned itself with injuries and injustices perpetrated against the individual. That is because we always perceive the work of art as individuals. There, at the bottom of all those great works, are the injustices, which no social order will eliminate. Namely, that one is clever and the other is stupid, one is able and the other is incompetent, one is beautiful while the other is ugly, another might be honest, and yet another dishonest, and all of them are in some way ambitious. And it indeed does not matter that we are arriving at eternal themes. (All the Bright, 84)

[3]In Forman's Czech films, he focused his sympathy entirely on the young and those past middle-age because he considered them to be the most powerless. Forman told Peter Cowie that in the prime of life, "we pursue our professions, go after money, after women, after position, and we mercilessly spin the wheel of society which carries both young and old in its whirl, whether they like it or not, because they cannot protect themselves against it--they have neither the sense nor the strength necessary." (50 Major, 90) (Note: Cowie's piece on Forman in International Film Guide, 1969 is exactly the same as this one excepting his comments on Taking Off and The Decathalon.) Forman also discusses his sympathy for young people in Galina Kapanevova's "Two Hours with Milos Forman" (2) and in the article "Spotlight on Prague" (94). With his first American film, Taking Off (1970), Forman altered his view to extend his compassion to people of the middle-age group as well.

[4]Forman commented about his apprehension for the future of Czech film following the making of The Firemen's Ball in both his own article "Chill Wind on the New Wave," and in an interview with Czech critic and historian Antonin J. Liehm. He told Liehm,

> I don't know why it is, but I am afraid that if we get our hands slapped, then in a few years, when an optimum

> situation starts to form again--and it will happen, that can't be stopped--we won't know how to start all over again either. A subconscious defensive reflex against this outlook urges us to learn quickly to do what they call pure entertainment, clean fun, which is theoretically (but for the most part also practically) independent of the political and social situation. (Closely Watched, 232)

The big slap against the Czech New Wave came, of course, with the Russian invasion. Despite that fact, Forman still hoped in the early Seventies to work in his native country again, but various factors prevented it.

[5]Brief summaries of Forman's life are available in several sources. My own account derives from Forman's in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (3-34) and Lipton's in A Critical Study (127-130, 151-171).

[6]One of Forman's oldest friends, director Ivan Passer, comments, "it must have been a traumatic experience for him. You can see it. At the heart of his pictures is almost always a family or the lack of it, and the parents are inadequate in one way or another" (Buckley, "The Forman Formula," 51).

[7]Lipton discusses how Forman's method of drawing comedy out of real life tragedy is similar to Charlie Chaplin's, citing the origins of Taking Off as a specific example (127-151). The present study also discusses Forman's creation of Taking Off (Chapter Four) as well as his use of unhappy experiences as sources for Loves of a Blonde and The Firemen's Ball (Chapter Three).

[8]In getting approval for Black Peter, Forman states,

> Of course, we had a bit of luck on our side. When we showed the finished film, something happened that made all the difference: people laughed. And in the eyes of the prophets, laughter makes a thing less serious. Those who were viewing it stopped judging the movie as a reflection of reality or as reality itself and took it as a little joke. The authorities who had to give their seal of approval saw it before the intellectual elite and the critics did; so there was still no interpretation of the film, no analysis of it, no word-of-mouth account of what it was all about. They sat there in the projection room: once in a while someone chuckled; for them, this was just some kind of comedy. It's the same all over the world: for the snob (and the narrow-minded Stalinist bureaucrat is, or can be, just as much a snob as the long-haired semi-intellectual in his plaid shirt and corduroy jacket or the lady with the diamond tiara and a million-dollar bank account), a good comedy is always less significant than a stupid melodrama. Thanks to this, my films have always had an easier life than they might otherwise have had. (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 47).

[9]Liehm discusses the origins and early impact of Zhdanovist aesthetics in The Most Important Art (36-55). Stoil covers this

issue in Cinema Beyond the Danube (68-82), and Skvorecky reveals its impact on Czech films in All the Bright Young Men (32-40).

[10]Forman and others discuss the value of their days at FAMU in Langdon Dewey's "The Czechoslovak Cinema" (26-27).

[11]Radok describes his work with Forman on these projects in Liehm's Closely Watched Films (48-51).

[12]Skvorecky's story is printed in Mihailovich's White Stones and Fir Trees (351-64). It is very much like his novel The Cowards.

CHAPTER TWO

COMPETITION AND BLACK PETER--FRESH LOOKS AT CZECH YOUTH AND SOCIETY

At the beginning of the 1960s, several different occurences coalesced to provide a fertile soil in which the Czech New Wave could take root.[1] First, the nation's economy was one of the poorest in Eastern Europe, and the already harsh conditions discouraged Party officials from being unduly severe in cultural matters. Second, the two men placed in control of the national film industry following Banska Bystrica, Alois Polednak and Jan Vesely, were surprisingly sympathetic to filmmakers' desires.[2] At that time, Soviet Premier Nikita Kruschev decided that his national film industry needed a boost, which meant giving support to young filmmakers. The decree had its impact on Czechoslovakia. New directors like Forman, fresh out of FAMU, began to receive support and old production groups were revived. In addition, the union of Czechoslovak Film and Television Artists was able to function as a shield from bureaucratic interference.

These events finally broke the stranglehold of Zhdanovist aesthetics over Czech filmmaking and created an environment in which the new directors could honestly examine their society and restore the national cinema to a healthy condition. The New Wave artists foresaw an era of creative freedom that could exist comfortably within the socialist system. Forman remembers,

> we were all very naive optimists. . . . especially because we did not feel that we are doing anything wrong. We felt that we were doing what an artist in a so-called socialist country should do: be honest and truthful.[3] Because with all the criticism you can find in all these films, you can't deny that there is some kind of loving feeling about people and society in Czechoslovakia. We didn't feel guilty at all of any anti-government or anti-socialist activity. So we were very optimistic because we thought that we were right. We thought that what was happening before was just mistakes which every young society does: overdoing the watchdog role of the government over art. It's just a childhood disease of a new-forming society. So we felt that, remember we overcame that period and so now will come a real paradise for the artists. As is true in socialist societies, you don't feel any commercial pressure, and now we were really excited that we would get rid of the ideological pressure.

Forman's first film was a forty-five minute story called The Audition. It later became the second half of the feature-length Competition, the first half being another short titled Why Do We Need All Those Brass Bands? This film was made during the production of his first feature, Black Peter. In each of these early works, Forman observes Czech youth and society, and argues that young people must be allowed the freedom to follow their natural interests.

The beginning of the Sixties also saw the availability of new lightweight movie cameras. In 1962, Milos Forman saved all the money he had earned writing nightclub stage shows and bought a hand-held sixteen millimeter Pentaflex camera. At that time, documentary filmmakers in America and France were achieving great success with the new equipment by using a style known as cinema-verite. Their films were notable for providing a more direct presentation of reality than what was visible in stylized Hollywood productions. Forman's use of cinema-verite methods, and the new environment in Czechoslovakia, allowed him to create an honest portrait of Czech youth and society in The Audition.

Cinema-verite was an appropriate form for Czech filmmakers, who needed to present fresh interpretations of their society. For The

Audition, Forman used his equipment to shape a story out of his own direct observation. But Forman went beyond cinema-verite's limitations to present a message about the need for self-discovery and the close relationship between fantasy and reality.[4] This message states that individuals must be able to search for their own identity and to make mistakes. In its own simple way, The Audition exactly parallels the situation of the Czech people in 1963.

Once he had his new camera, Forman called his friend Miroslav Ondricek, cinematographer on all of his films except Cuckoo's Nest, to show him how to use it.[5] Together with Ivan Passer, they began shooting on the streets around the Semafor Theater, which was in the forefront of the burgeoning Czech youth culture.[6] Semafor's stars, Jiri Suchy and Jiri Slitr, agreed to hold some mock auditions of girl singers for him to film. The scheme worked perfectly. Hundreds of girls came, and most of them were so serious about performing that they completely ignored the cameras. Forman took his material to Barrandov Studios, who asked him to develop it into a twenty-minute documentary short. Instead, Forman pursued his own ideas about the material and created a forty-five minute story about two girls who go to audition and fail. The result was a film that is both an authentic look at the rock and roll craze sweeping Czechoslovakia in the early Sixties and a realistic depiction of teenage hopes and disappointments, but Forman's meaning goes even further.[7]

Forman's camera technique is firmly in the verite style. He had his cameramen following the performers and crowds of girls waiting for their chances, recording gestures and expressions that gave insights into their personal desires for stardom.[8] But The Audition achieves its meaning primarily through its editing and structure, which are Forman's

chief comic tools.[9] One sequence in the film is a montage of several girls all singing a different line from a song about falling in love with Oliver Twist.[10] All of them strain to put as much meaning into the song as possible, and all of them are terrible. Forman's quick succession of girls allows him to fit several of them in, increase the humor, and also fulfill exactly what the film requires. A full song from each girl would destroy the comic effect, but one line apiece is enough to show how ridiculous each one is. Forman caps the sequence with a shot of Jiri Slitr, one of the judges, sitting with his head between his hands as though he has sat through too much already.

Some Czech commentators attacked Forman for being too cruel to the girls in The Audition, but he sees that harshness as being an inherent quality of the process. At some point, each girl who auditions must confront reality and realize that she has no talent. At the end, one of the featured girls (Marketku Krotkou) has to be told directly that she did not make it. At first, she is very disappointed, but then she quickly adopts her normal role as a teenage fan and asks Jiri Suchy, the other famous judge, for his autograph. Forman, who often works with nonprofessional actors, faces one essential problem every time he does so. He has to remind them that they are not actors. Once they realize that, they can relax, have fun, and make a valuable contribution to the film.[11] The Audition's performers also had to be reminded of this fact. Most of the girls in the film act out their fantasy with obvious seriousness during their turn at the microphone. Forman uses their performances to show both the differences and similarities of fantasy and reality.

Forman communicates his ideas through the structure of the film, juxtaposing the small events that occur. The opening credits are printed over a series of still shots that show Suchy, Slitr, and other members

of the Semafor Theatre during performance. They all have broad smiles, and some playful music adds to the light-hearted nature of the sequence. After a shot of a huge crowd of young people packed into the theater lobby, Forman cuts to Suchy and Slitr rehearsing a routine. First, they argue about a waitress they met, and then Suchy talks about Jonah. The material is basically nonsense, and the performers seem to be just having fun. But then some girls in the auditorium start chattering too loudly. The director stops the rehearsal and then starts the scene over again. The interruption is a reminder that the work taking place is serious. The performers need to have fun while doing it, but for them fantasy is work. Their role is a direct contrast to that of the girls who come to audition. For them, being a star is merely a fantasy. This episode also reinforces the important idea (particularly in Czechoslovakia in 1963) that popular culture, as well as folk, is legitimate and not merely haphazard. At the end of the film, Forman captures Suchy in a freeze-frame and the playful music of the opening credits sequence starts again. This time, however, the audience understands the hard work and talent that support the image of playfulness.[12]

The rehearsal scene in The Audition continues with Suchy performing a song about an ideal girl: "the kind you see on statues." When he sings about beautiful feet with toes ideal for counting, Forman again emphasizes the contrast between fantasy and reality, this time through his editing. He cuts to a shot of Marketku working on a foot at her manicure job. The foot that she has to think about is real and just one of many that she has to encounter on her dreary job. Her workplace is crowded and oppressive, and for her, fantasy is more important than reality. The image of being a popular singer has an obvious appeal for her, and she later creates an elaborate lie about her parents getting a

divorce so that she can get out of work and go to the audition. Suchy presents an image of having fun, but for him the fantasy is reality. He sings about ideal women for a living. His song, which is about the need to mature, reinforces this point.

Forman again re-emphasizes his message through the apparent nonsense of one of the girl's songs. The lyrics state, "But lentils aren't peas/ Thank you isn't please/and bagpipes aren't a moon made of green cheese." The song's point is that being able to tell the difference between two very similar items is necessary for understanding reality. But Forman is not saying that fantasy is entirely negative. The auditioners' songs are all about fantasies such as searching out new country, castles in Spain, and being sung to by a boyfriend. Some of these are unattainable, but all of them indicate an outward-looking perspective. The girls are very positive in their struggles to achieve. Forman also indicates at other places in the film that having fun and using imaginations are important for young people and have a serious purpose.

After introducing Marketku, Forman shows the other girl featured in the film (Vera Kresadlova, who was to become his second wife and mother of his twin sons) rehearsing backstage before a performance with her rock and roll band. The group's leader corrects her after every line, telling her to sing higher, but Vera keeps blaming the disharmony on one of the other girls. On stage, they perform a typical rock and roll song about having fun all the time, but everyone present seems to be very serious. The audience is as full as possible, including many people who are standing, indicating how important this event is to the young people. During the performance, Forman uses mainly tight close-ups of the band members and the audience, which increase the intensity. In this way, Forman's camera work and editing complement the sequence in such a way that the

event has a much greater sense of vitality than the Suchy/Slitr rehearsal, even though these are just amateurs.

Forman's message here is that allowing young people to indulge themselves in the apparent pointlessness of rock and roll does no harm. For the majority who will never become professional performers, reality will some day strike, and self-realization is far better than having limitations imposed. In the meantime, the national culture will be able to expand, incorporating new values to draw from and offering youth a sense of identity. For Vera, self-realization comes when she goes to audition before Suchy and Slitr. She wants to sing an American song, so she goes over to the piano to practice it with Jiri Slitr. He gives her the same criticism that she received earlier: she does not sing high enough. When she steps to the microphone, the reality of her limited talent finally hits her. After several false starts, she apologizes and leaves. The impact of her self-realization is similar to Marketku's. The girls' disappointment is evident, but their lives are far from being shattered.

The Audition has a somewhat ambiguous ending in that neither of the girls indicates that she has given up her dream completely. Vera goes to a band rehearsal and explains that she is late because her mother would not let her out of the house. Marketku returns to work and tells her boss that she was accepted at the audition, but the theater cannot use her until the next year. The point is that neither girl has been crushed by having taken the chance and learning about her lack of ability. Both of them can maintain their dignity by denying that they had ever been confused about the difference between reality and fantasy. At the same time, they can keep their options open and go on dreaming, which is the theme of the song that Marketku performs.

In The Audition, Forman builds on cinema-verite techniques to present a broader sense of reality than he could have with a more documentarian filming and editing style. By doing so, he also reinforces the fact that films are not able to provide any new definition of reality except to point out that it has to be searched for and that people have to be given the time and freedom in which to do so. Critics often attacked cinema-verite by arguing that film could never be completely objective because by the mere act of pointing the camera and turning it on subjectivity, was entering into the process. Proponents of the style answered that this criticism was merely stating an obvious truism that all of the verite directors understood anyhow. Forman's achievement in The Audition was to exploit this knowledge of the director's control by grafting fiction filmmaking techniques onto the basic cinema-verite footage that he started with. His pattern of sequences thus heightened the contrast between the professional and amateur worlds while his use of music and intercutting to overlap scenes showed both the complex interrelationship and subtle differences between fantasy and reality.

Along with the camera and editing techniques in his early films, Forman's method of screenplay writing also contributed to his accurate depiction of Czech society. During 1963, Forman and his co-writers, Jaroslav Papousek and Ivan Passer, would meet to discuss openly, argue about, and criticize each other's ideas for their films. This process worked to eliminate whatever seemed false and allow realistic characters and believable situations to emerge. Forman's use of this method throughout his career has been a major factor in the constant relevance of his films. Rather than shaping the material to fit his own preconceived ideas, Forman strives first to present a good story that contains an honest vision of the world to support whatever meanings emerge.[13]

This screenwriting process was totally opposite to the socialist-realism approach, which is why it produced an examination of Czech society that was critical to the success of the New Wave. Both Competition and Black Peter shattered several myths about socialism, Czech youths, and the nation in general simply because the characters in them are fully believable.

The work of Josef Skvorecky had an important effect on Forman's creation of the young people in his first three films. Forman readily acknowledges the author's influence on his own writing:

> Oh, yeah. I think he and Kundera are the most talented post-war generation writers in Czechoslovakia. Especially, Skvorecky when he comes to characterizations of people through the dialogue and the way they speak. I think especially when you read the dialogue in Czech it's absolutely brilliant.

Forman has used the awkward communication of Skvorecky's youths throughout his career, but it is particularly evident in his earliest films. The young people in Competition hardly say anything at all while Peter (the main character in Black Peter, played by Ladislav Jakim) only makes one strong speech in the entire film, and then he is misinterpreting his girlfriend's intentions. Forman's young people are also like Skvorecky's in that they care mainly about what interests themselves such as music, motorcycle racing, and sex rather than important social issues. That observation may seem like an obvious one, but in 1963, it represented a fresh brand of honesty in Czech films. The main character of Black Peter, for example, has certain similarities with Forman's own youth as well as with Danny Smiricky, the central figure of The Cowards.[14] Peter was not based on Danny, Forman says, but he does acknowledge that the two are very much alike:

> No, that's a pure coincidence, because Black Peter is my only Czech film which is actually based on a book,

> written by Papousek. And it was a sort of autobiographical book of Papousek's which somehow coincided in a certain way with my experience. When I was a child during the war as a ten, eleven, twelve-year-old kid, I lived in a family with my uncle who had a small grocery store. I worked very often in the store as some kind of an apprentice. So that was the base of this character. But, obviously, I must say, . . . there are certain similarities between Danny and this character, but I guess that only shows that this type of life for young people in Czechoslovakia was very common.

Actually, Black Peter was only based very loosely on Papousek's novel, which was set during the war. The Audition had satisfied the Barrandov Studio chiefs enough to earn Forman his first oppotunity to direct a feature. But, when he began rehearsing his young actors in their roles, Forman discovered that they were most effective when they were allowed to act like themselves and relate to their own desires. So, with production already scheduled to begin, Forman and his co-writers almost completely rewrote the entire script. These changes caused the production committee to have second thoughts about approving the project. Only the intervention of Vojtech Jasny, a well-established director, saved the film.[15] Forman's struggle proved worthwhile. The result was an honest story about a shy, contemporary young person beginning his first job as a grocery store apprentice. Amidst the confusion of trying to please both his boss and father and win a girlfriend, he also quietly seeks his own identity.[16]

In planning Black Peter, Forman received confidence and inspiration from the Italian neo-realist film Il Posto (1961), by Emberto Olmi. This film was also about a young man on his first job and used a camera style identifiable as one of "engaged observation."[17] Forman also employs this style to identify Peter as an isolated individual within a crowded urban environment. In Peter's first appearance, showing his arrival at work, Forman views him from inside the store as he awkwardly

crosses the street. In this shot, both the camera placement and the nature of Peter's walk provide insights into his personality as an outsider who lacks self-confidence. A large X formed by two bars across the window also identifies the store as a restrictive environment. Peter pauses before entering, and Forman views two old men out on the sidewalk talking. Forman then undercuts normal expectations when the door opens and Peter does not come in. Instead, a little old lady enters and starts to do her shopping. The camera seems curious and follows her for a moment, but then Forman cuts to Peter receiving instructions from his new boss. Forman's camera thus supports the film's function as an honest examination of Czech society by establishing itself as a neutral observer that relays important information about characters and setting.[18]

By continuing to use his camera as a casual but attentive observer, Forman reveals the nature of Peter's relationships with all the people around him. Peter's job is to watch the customers to prevent shoplifting. He feels comfortable with his work until the manager tells him to take off his coat and try to look inconspicuous so he can catch people. The task thus becomes hypocritical and alienating. The idea is not to encourage people to be honest, but to tempt them into becoming thieves. Forman shows how Peter, being naturally shy anyhow, now becomes isolated from the customers even though he is supposed to blend in with them. He lurks around behind aisles or peers out from in back of a post at a suspected thief. Rather than being able to help people, he must now watch them all with caution. What were formerly the innocent motions of all the shoppers now seem suspicious. Forman shows people's hands as they turn an item over, hesitate, and then drop it into their shopping basket. The shots emphasize that Peter is no longer considering them as complete individuals, but only as potential thieves. Each movement

becomes filled with tension: this person may try to steal the item instead of buying it.

Forman easily transforms this awkward tension into comedy by appropriately incorporating a popular technique of American silent comedy, the chase scene, to show the absurdity of Peter's situation. Forman makes excellent use of the device by employing it not only for humor, but also to further the narrative and develop Peter's character while still maintaining his camera's function as an observer. Peter's boss never tells him what to do if he ever does catch someone stealing. Peter is therefore no more effective than a Keystone Kop at enforcing the law. He follows his suspect through the streets at a very indiscreet distance. Every time the man turns around to look at him, Peter stares up at the sky. Both are too embarrassed to talk to each other, and so the chase continues all the way across town. Peter's actions show how his moral instincts are pulling him in opposite directions. He feels obligated to perform his duty, but he has no desire to accuse the man unless he is absolutely sure he has reason to. As the chase goes on, the camera becomes increasingly disinterested, observing the pair from even greater distances until Forman finally cuts to Peter at home. Forman employs another silent comedy technique, the topper (i.e., a series of jokes with one large joke at the end), to place a final conclusion on this situation much later in the film. Peter points out the suspect to the store manager when he comes back and the two turn out to be good friends.

Forman reveals the narrative value of the chase in the next scene when Peter's father (Jan Vostrcil) confronts him for leaving his job early. Here, Forman holds Peter in a lengthy medium shot to explain his relationship to his parent. In the first of several lectures that he gives, Peter's father tells him that he should have had the man stopped

and searched by the police. Not only does Peter consider this advice immoral, but it would probably just get him in deeper trouble with his boss. The camera watches as he sits quietly stirring his soup. The shot contains no other action, but actually, Peter is silently rebelling. He does not disobey or disagree, but he does not accept his father's reasoning either. In this very simple shot, Forman gives his character a sense of dignity to balance his awkwardness and confusion. The shot also establishes the basis of Peter's nonassertiveness. He has learned not to express himself too openly even though he may disagree with something strongly.

Unfortunately, Peter's shyness also influences his relationship with Pavla (Pavla Martinkova), the girl he likes. Forman again uses primarily visual means to contrast Pavla's casual maturity with Peter's adolescent uneasiness. Their first scene together takes place at a beach. While Peter is in a dressing compartment, he bends down to try to look through a hole at Pavla, who is changing in the next booth. When Pavla asks if he is still there, Peter nervously rushes out of the compartment and down to the water. Forman communicates Peter's relationship to Pavla by accentuating her breasts throughout the beach sequence. The first shot is of Pavla taking off her shirt inside the changing stall. In the next scene, she lies across the end of a boat, relaxing and tanning herself while Peter rows. Pavla, of course, is completely casual and unself-conscious. She lies there on display for Peter, but tells him, "I can't stand girls who show themselves off." Peter, meanwhile, cannot admit to her what he is thinking about. Later, while still in their swimsuits, the two of them are lying together in the grass. Peter rolls over to where he has a clear view down the top of Pavla's bathing suit, and all he can think of is to compare her to a cow. Still, he manages to

ask her to a dance, whereupon Forman cuts to a crowd of people, all staring at the camera.

The shot is confusing until the band starts playing and the people all begin to dance, but it is an excellent example of the effectiveness that Forman achieves with simple techniques. This quick cut from two teenagers lying in an open field to a room full of people creates an immediate sense of mystery and gets the viewer involved in the scene.[19] Throughout the dance, Forman's camera continues to act like a natural observer, moving around the floor and stopping to gaze at anything interesting. By doing so, it reveals the complexity of the youthful world, showing the apparent evening of fun to contain all the social problems and varieties of behavior that adult life has. Forman proves in this scene that teenagers do not require absolute guidance from socialist ideals, the government, or parents. Free time for youth is not wasted time, but is actually spent learning valuable lessons about life. Young people do not need to have their lives defined for them. What they need are honest answers to their questions.

As Forman's camera moves through the crowd at the dance, it observes an interesting variety of action. Some people dance, some build a huge stack of paper cups and then smash them, and one boy sleeps in his chair. Another group of young people are sitting at a table where a boy and girl are having an argument. The boy gets angry and slaps her. Later, Forman again shows the table while the girl is being consoled by her friend. The boy quite forcibly tries to give her a kiss of apology and then turns to beat the table in tune to the music as if everything was settled. In these shots, without using any dialogue, Forman shows the complexity of the youthful world. The constant rock-and-roll gives one impression to the casual observer, but a close look

reveals a social atmosphere that is as full of cruelty, uncertainty, awkwardness, and depression as the adult world.

Forman receives excellent performances from his young actors in this long scene, particularly Ladislav Jakim and Vladimir Pucholt, who plays an apprentice bricklayer named Cenda. Both of them regularly alternate between being very assertive and very awkward, thus demonstrating one of Forman's major themes: that reality is often very different from appearances. Peter often appears mature while at the dance, looking particularly in control of himself while wearing his suit and smoking a cigarette. But neither he nor Cenda has much luck with girls. Peter is too concerned with making the right impression to enjoy himself. He spends most of his time away from Pavla, drinking to gain confidence and practicing his dancing. On the dance floor, he stands almost still and swings his arms awkwardly about. Pavla laughs at him, but she does not care about how well he dances. She has already turned away Peter's rival, a tall boy named Mara, to wait for him. Forman shows Mara to be a good dancer, which Pavla probably knew. Her trouble is that Peter cannot enjoy himself enough for her to have a good time with him. Peter's dancing reveals him to be not as in tune with the latest trends as he pretends, but he is too self-conscious to just relax and have a good time.

Forman also shatters a major socialist myth in this scene by showing that being content with a job is not the sole requirement for finding a secure identity. Peter and Pavla had met Cenda and his friend Zdenku earlier at the beach. During the dance, Cenda tries to harrass and bully Peter and act tough, but he actually completely lacks self-confidence. At the beginning of the dance, he spies a girl sitting alone. Cenda goes over to her table and sits down, but is too nervous to say

anything. After a short time, he says good-bye and goes back to his own table. Throughout the evening, the same girl keeps waiting for him to ask her to dance, but he still avoids her. By the time he is finally drunk enough to ask her, she has gone off with someone else, and he claims that he was never really interested anyhow. Several times, Pucholt must switch from being supremely confident to having no nerve at all, and he does so with natural ease.

Zdenku idolizes his friend, seemingly because of his proficiency at his job. Both of them are apprentice bricklayers, and Zdenku tells Pavla, "Sometimes the boss lets him do corners." Pavla is not impressed at all. She replies, "A wall. Big Deal." Her response certifies that being a good worker does not guarantee happiness, though it does provide a refuge that Peter lacks. What the young people need is someone who will listen to their problems, and Cenda is lucky to have that. At the end of the dance, he is able to find reassurance from his boss even though he has behaved poorly. Zdenku, the most shy of the boys, proves to be an excellent dancer and has the best time of anyone. Of the others, Cenda passes out, Peter walks home alone, and Pavla crys the next morning over her rejection of Mara.

Jan Vostrcil's performance also subtly undercuts his superficial authority and establishes the basis for Forman's conclusion. When he stands up to lecture, the camera moves behind Peter as if in resignation. Vostrcil paces back and forth with his hands over his breasts, making him look more ridiculous than authoritative. Forman and his co-writers have also given the father dialogue throughout the film that has no meaning except to demonstrate the woeful lack of communication within Peter's family. During his first lecture, he tells Peter to work hard so that maybe one day he can be a store manager. But then he says, "Just

pray there isn't another war." With this sort of advice, Peter still has no reason for learning his job well when external events could make all his efforts meaningless at any time. After the dance, Peter's father tries to initiate a serious conversation by giving him a book to read. Peter looks at the title and sees that it is a book about sex. He replies, "I read that long ago," and leaves his father to stand there looking foolish. When Peter leaves the room, Forman moves to a close-up of his father, who has no idea of what to do next. Rather than talk about his distance from his son, he turns on mother. "What are you doing?," he asks. To which mother replies, "Cutting noodles." A crisis with their son comes and goes, and they react to it by retreating to their old familiar patterns.

At work, Forman again uses camera placement and dialogue to show how Peter is also cut off from the adult world there. The boss asks him to assume new responsibilities, but then treats him as if he were incapable of doing so. In one scene, Peter comes into the storeroom with a batch of art prints that the manager is going to be giving away as part of a contest. The manager and another old man are taking inventory. Forman separates them from Peter at the beginning of the scene by showing a shelf full of bottles between them. Peter shows his boss the art prints, which the old men pay little attention to until one of a nude woman appears. They stop to inspect this one carefully and make suggestive remarks about the woman. Peter's boss puts one hand to his eye and looks at the picture as if through a telescope. Peter stands next to him and does the same thing. For a moment, the separation between them has been bridged and Peter seems to have finally found a basis for communicating with adults. But his boss is hypocritical. He ridicules Peter for

doing exactly what he does, and then suggests that any boy who comes to work in a grocery store cannot be worth much anyway: "No boy wants to work in a store today. They all want to be something else: astronauts, cosmonauts, radio mechanics. When you do get a boy, you can be sure he is a misfit." Peter is obviously damned if he does have a lot of ambition, and also damned if he does not. As if expressing Peter's frustration for him, the framed print falls from its perch and the glass breaks on the floor.

Being around old people who constantly treat him as either an adult or a child instead of what he is, a confused adolescent, leaves Peter with no guidelines for how to handle himself in society. His troubles are evident in his attitudes towards women and his relationship with Pavla. In one early scene, Peter is sitting in a cafe with his friend Lada (Pavel Sedlacek), drinking beer. Lada talks about wanting to be a fireman so that when a house was burning at night, he could go in and carry the girls out of their beds. He says, "Think of the flames licking at Pavla." Peter replies, "Lucky flames." Both of them are obviously intimidated by women and possess stereotypically sexist ideas. Peter says, "Any woman who goes around with breasts like this," indicating a large size with his hands, "is just asking for it." Society has taught Peter to feel both above women and inferior to them at the same time. He sees them mainly in terms of forbidden sexuality that he both desires and fears. Consequently, when Peter does have a chance to express himself openly and impress Pavla he is so involved with his own problems that he completely misses his opportunity. He and Pavla are standing at her front door, and Peter tells her about how his mother and father mistrust him and ask him dumb questions. He complains that his mother is always challenging him by claiming that he likes someone else more than

her. Pavla interestedly asks, "Who?," expecting to hear her own name. But Peter tells her, "My boyfriend Lada, for instance." Pavla then says that she has to go inside and gives no promise that she will see him the next day. Peter walks away alone and dejected again.

Peter's sorrow represents the frustration of all young people who are restrained too much by their well-meaning parents so that all their repressed emotions tend to come out at inappropriate times. This theme is universal, but it has particular significance for Czechoslovakia in 1963 where youths had to fight the dominant political ideology as well as their parents in order to freely express themselves. Peter's worst problem is that his boss and father take no concern for his own desires. Unless he knows precisely what he wants to do, he is not presumed to have the right to wait until he finds out. Youth, as Forman shows, is a time that should be spent exploring the world and defining natural interests. Yet, Peter's elder's want him to act like an adult, regardless of his personal identity. Forman characterizes the adult world through soundtrack music that makes Peter's revulsion from it understandable. The film opens with circus music to symbolize the crazy nature of life and then uses "March of the Wooden Soldiers" to show what kind of people society finds useful.

The soundtrack thus reflects the nonsense nature of society as both orderly and chaotic at the same time. By contrast, Forman associates young people with rock, jazz, and blues. The opening song by Jiri Slitr expresses the varying emotions of youth in their attempts to cope with the adult world. The lyrics tell of a young man shaving for the first time and wanting it to be a private affair. His family bursts in and he gets mad. The song concludes, "I raised my fist/But then I just laughed and started to twist." The message here is that youth should be allowed

to escape from their problems and just have fun. The freedom to do nothing or to merely enjoy themselves is a valuable resource for them. Within their own environment, they can learn social codes of behavior and hopefully not worry about serious consequences. Forman shows during the dance sequence, for example, how the world of young people has its own standards and is as full of comedy and cruelty as the adult world. Peter's problem is that although he is trying hard to enter adulthood, he is in many ways not ready to. Rather than being told exactly what to do, he needs time to solve his problems on his own.

Peter understandably responds to his confusion by retreating from his responsibilities. He finally spots an old lady stuffing a number of packages into her purse, but does nothing to stop her. As he stares out the store window watching her leave, the "March of the Wooden Soldiers" begins to play again, accompanied by the melancholy notes of a single bell. Peter rejects the conformity that he thinks is required of him, but he also feels alone and adrift.

As usual, Peter's father provides no help for him. He actually believes that he has all the answers, but his morality turns out to be just more hypocrisy. He tells Peter that since no one actually saw him, everything is all right. He has watched Peter work, and he proudly tells mother that their boy looked just fine. Peter shatters his illusion by saying that nothing is all right. He is attempting to let his father know about his isolation. Peter's father only responds by blaming him. Contradicting what he has just said, he tells Peter, "Well, what do you expect if you stand there like a scarecrow?" Cenda's sudden entrance to return some money that he borrowed from Peter brings the film to its conclusion. Peter's father tries to use Cenda as a positive example of a good worker. He is again attempting to explain life to

Peter when Zdenku enters and asks Cenda to leave. Cenda calls Zdenku an ass, and says he wants to stay because it is interesting. Peter's father angrily responds, "Interesting? Do you have any idea what it's all about? It's . . . ." On that word, Peter raises his head as if he is finally going to receive an answer, but Forman ends the film by showing his father in a freeze-frame, looking bewildered about what to say next. Forman's ending challenges the viewer to supply his own definitive answer. Failing that, the only proper response is that young people must have the freedom to find ones for themselves.

Gaining freedom of expression, of course, was not merely a problem for Czech youths. Forman himself had to fight against the restrictiveness of the Czech film production system to save his first two films. While planning Black Peter, Forman was searching for an idea for the other forty-five minute film that Barrandov Studios was requiring of him to accompany The Audition. He was also looking for actors to fill the roles of the mother and father in his feature, because he had no plans for using the professionals that the studio wanted him to. His experiences with The Audition and conditions in the Czech film industry encouraged him to use amateurs. At that time, all Czech professional actors had to work mainly in the theater to earn their livings. This requirement meant that they had very little time to devote to films and severely hampered a director's schedule. Most of them were also used to the broad theatrics necessary for the stage but completely unsuitable for the screen. Forman therefore found that nonprofessional actors brought a certain freshness and spontaneity to his films that he could not capture otherwise. For this reason, he has always favored using at least some nonactors in each film and would rather use little known ones instead of stars. He does not want the audience to think of the character as just

a familiar performer going through another role. When he does use famous actors (Jack Nicholson in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, James Cagney, Pat O'Brien, and Donald O'Connor in Ragtime), he always creates characters for them that undercut their popular image.[20]

Finding the actor to play Peter's father was especially important to Forman because his whole career at that point came to hinge on pleasing both the person he wanted and Barrandov Studios at the same time. Forman and his crew were in the town of Kolin to film Black Peter near the time of the beginning of the annual brass band festival. Ivan Passer found a man, Jan Vostrcil, who he thought would be perfect as Peter's father. Vostrcil was a fire chief and leader of the brigade's brass band. When Forman and Passer went to ask him to play the role, Vostrcil could only talk about his concern that young people did not want to play in the brass bands anymore. Forman and Passer got the idea that their other forty-five minute film could be about that subject, and Vostrcil agreed to be in Black Peter if the brass band film was also going to be made. Forman and his co-writers wrote a script and then waited nervously for two weeks until they finally received the studio's approval to go ahead with it. They filmed Why Do We Need All Those Brass Bands? on weekends while they were making Black Peter.

In Brass Bands, Forman again presents the idea that young people should be allowed to develop their own identities and interests, but he also adds the theme that the national culture must be built on diversity or it will be in danger of dying. The brass bands can only survive if they get new members, but those young people will never come if they are forced to choose between that and their own natural interests. Forman shows in the opening scene that the culture is already diverse and to pretend that traditional Czech music is its mainstay is absurd. The

film opens with a shot of a peaceful countryside, but the Kolin skyline and some electrical power wires are clearly visible in the background. Modern technology has already invaded the serenity of the Czech landscape. The sour notes of a tuba playing scales accompanies the opening titles, sounding like music that is out of tune with the times. The opening sequence that follows demonstrates how Forman communicates his theme in Brass Bands almost totally through editing, though Jan Vostrcil's performance is also an important aspect.

Shortly afterwards, the roar of a motorcycle engine breaks the peacefulness of the atmosphere. A group of young people are out in the field holding a race. Two of the riders are Vladimir Pucholt and Vaclav Blumenthal. The film's story is that each of them plays in a brass band scheduled to perform in the upcoming festival, but on the day of the competition they both decide to attend a professional motorcycle race instead. The conductors of the bands both fire the boys, but the young men find an easy solution for continuing their musical careers. They simply join each other's former bands. Forman thus demonstrates that traditional and youth cultures can exist together if the older generation does not attempt to place too many restrictions on the young. In the opening scenes, Forman blends motorcycle racing and brass band music to show how they are actually very much alike in some ways. Blumenthal and Pucholt each have their own style of riding, and each is accompanied by a brass band tune that matches his pace. Blumenthal rides fast and is accompanied by a lively number, while Pucholt plods along to the rhythm of a slow relaxing melody. Forman adds a "tortoise and hare" ending to the scene as Blumenthal crashes and Pucholt passes him, proving simply that outcomes cannot be predicted by appearances.

Forman then shifts his attention to the bands of Jan Vostrcil and Frantisek Zeman as they rehearse for the festival. He reveals that the music also has more than one style. While Vostrcil emphasizes tradition and old tunes, the music director of Zeman's band tells the players that they do not fit in with the established style. Therefore, he argues, they will have to play loud in order to compete with the traditional bands. The racers and the conductors are also similar in the seriousness of their interests. The amateur contest out in the field has all the trappings of a professional race including an official starter and spectators. The conductors make their bands practice a particular passage over and over. Vostrcil is especially vehement in stating his belief that "Music is the most beautiful of all hobbies." He tells his band, "Remember, we have a tradition to keep up. We're real Czech males." An important difference between these people is that the racers also have fun with their hobby. They joke with each other before the race begins and play with the starting flag. The fun they have naturally attracts Blumenthal and Pucholt to the professional race on the day of the festival. By contrast, the conductors are completely serious and expect their band members to be also. Vostrcil has to discipline one player during the rehearsal, and he gives strict orders as to where and when the band members are to arrive for the festival.

Vostrcil's energy is admirable. He tries to instill youth and vitality into the music even when his band is playing a dirge, but he is defeating his own hopes to keep the music alive by looking to the past instead of the future. He expects his band to abide by the standard of former times and takes no account of the pressures and new interests of the modern age. After firing Pucholt, he even warns the older members to be careful or they will end up the same way. To follow his path would

eventually lead to destroying the very music that he is trying to preserve. A speaker at the festival also talks about moving into the future by preserving the past, as if that were possible.

The struggle to establish the predominance of traditional culture had an important role to play in Czechoslovakia in the early Sixties. Forman states that "the noble crusade to save the tradition of brass bands fit in perfectly with the desire of bureaucrats to attack rock and roll, which they hated with vigor and guts" (Personal letter). The regime of Antonin Novotny was not at all happy with new ideas entering the society through the areas of popular culture and the arts. The economic need for increased trade with the West made it impossible to stop the flow of new creative expressions, so promoting traditional culture provided the government with one means of combating the growth of fresh ideas. Brass Bands gives an answer to the regime's position by arguing that the culture can easily incorporate a variety of interests, and that it in fact must if it is to remain healthy and vital.

The scene in which Blumenthal and Pucholt attend the professional race while the band competition is also taking place clearly demonstrates Forman's theme. The riders and the bands are each contesting among themselves, but the major competition taking place is between the two events. Forman cuts back and forth between them as the sounds of engines and music do battle on the soundtrack. In close-ups of conductors and race fans, Forman shows the partisans of each side with tense faces as they urge the performers on. At the end, the winner of the race and Jan Vostrcil share the same applause, showing that each event is an equally worthy aspect of Czech culture.

Forman ends Brass Bands on an upbeat note. Zeman's band plays at a private party where the guests range in age from the young to the very

old, and almost everybody, musicians included, is getting drunk. The picture is one of both diversity and unity. As Forman pans across the bandstand in the final shot, he adds the sound of a jazz saxaphone at the very end. A performer who is lifting his instrument away from his lips appears to be playing the music, which contrasts sharply with the opening tuba scales. The jazz is energetic and represents a lively new cultural influence. The ending also expresses Forman's personal optimism in 1963. That attitude diminished in his two remaining Czech films, which both satirize the actions of a government that attempts to regulate people without really understanding them. All of Forman's Czech films share the common theme that the society can only avoid tragedy by remaining open to the people and to new ideas, but in Loves of a Blonde and The Firemen's Ball, he sees that development increasingly unlikely.

ENDNOTES

[1]Several histories of Czech filmmaking and the birth of the New Wave are available. Antonin J. Liehm gives a brief account of the political factors causing a lifting of restrictions in the introduction to his Forman interview in Closely Watched Films (222-23) and in his essay "Some Observations." In The Most Important Art, he covers the history of all Eastern European cinema with his wife Mira. In "The Birth and Death," Josef Skvorecky outlines the factors that produced the New Wave: a good school, adequate production facilities, and a lifting of restrictions coinciding with the graduation of the new young directors.

Langdon Dewey provides a brief history of Czech film in "The Czechoslovak Cinema." Better accounts are in Leonard Lipton's A Critical Study (22-46) and Forman's "Chill Wind." These pieces, along with Liehm's "Success on the Screen" and Jaroslav Broz' "Grass Roots," emphasize the continuity in Czech cinema and the New Wave's roots in national cultural traditions, even though, as Liehm points out, the new films could not have been made without being able to incorporate international influences as well. Essentially, the New Wave represented the delayed fulfillment of the national cinema's potential, which had been interrupted by the Nazi occupation during the Forties and Stalinist control in the Fifties. Broz also relates the historical development of Czech film in The Path of Fame, arguing that the new young filmmakers look forward to continued growth under the freedom of socialism. Jaroslav Bocek provides a much briefer but more analytical history, explaining the success of the New Wave directors as resulting from their improved understanding of history and man (Modern Czechoslovak Film).

[2]Liehm provides some interesting facts about Polednak and Vesely in The Milos Forman Stories (167-72). Polednak, as Liehm states, "a man incomparably more cultivated than his former associates--that is, than the people who had appointed him to his new film job--turned out to be receptive to cultural and artistic impulses. His close contacts with Czech and Slovak artistic intelligentsia gradually and quite literally transformed him" (168-69). He defended the New Wave directors and fought for democratic processes within the country through 1969. In 1970, he was arrested on espionage charges and the following year denounced his Sixties' allies on national television.

Vesely, who Liehm describes as "a decent, understanding man," was arrested in the mid-Sixties for having been a Gestapo informer during the war, even though he had done so under orders from the Communist Party. After serving time in prison, he returned to work for Czechoslovak State Films in the mid-1970s at a lower-level position.

[3]Robin Bates' "The Ideological Foundations of the Czech New Wave," confirms Forman's statement that the Sixties' artists (for the renaissance occurred in all the arts and not just film) were working

to strengthen Socialism by making it contemporary and were not attacking it. Liehm and Skvorecky's philosophies as stated in Politics and Culture (41-92, 152-80) also concur on this point.

[4]Forman's method, though inspired by cinema-verite, is actually much different because he very definitely shapes his raw footage according to his own vision of reality through editing. In his interview with Galina Kopanevova, Forman discloses that his originality results from his lack of knowledge about directing when he first begain (1-2). He started with no preconceptions, and so was forced to develop his own style.

[5]Forman's account of the origins of The Audition is in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (33-38). Forman needed help from his friends "because, despite my FAMU diploma, I didn't know how to use a movie camera" (33). Skvorecky details Competition's creation in All the Bright Young Men (75-79).

[6]Liehm assesses the Semafor's importance to the Sixties' cultural renaissance in "Some Observations" (140).

[7]Because Competition was not seen in the United States until 1968, very little has been written about it. Leonard Lipton discusses it in terms of its realism, editing, and use of non-actors (173-79, 181-86, 246-49, 272-76). In the winter of 1966-67, a Sight and Sound writer excitedly summarized the plots for his readers ("Film Clips," 49). Upon its American release, Variety praised it as representing "the essence of Forman's cinematic art," noting in particular how Brass Bands subtly reveals the flow of history and life as the cause of its characters' problems. Gideon Bachmann comments in "Is There a New Wave?" that Competition proves Forman's primary concern is with the individual and not society. Only in Black Peter does Forman show interest about his characters' entrance into society.

[8]Leonard Lipton's discussion of The Audition reveals how Forman's work with nonprofessional actors in the film led to the development of his camera style (173-79). To put his performers at ease, Forman allowed them great freedom of movement and then followed them with his camera. He has employed this method ever since. Forman says,

> For me, an actor is a part of nature. First, I make a rehearsal. You know, you are sitting here and I need you to go to the telephone to talk to someone. First, I ask you to do it. Then I make a composition. I am always looking in the camera and choosing the composition. But the camera must serve the actor and not vice-versa. I am always creating and seeing compositions. But it's in me. Just as I don't move the skyscrapers, so I don't move the actors merely because of composition. I look for the composition respecting what the reality is that I'm filming, including the actors (Gelmis, 131).

See also Michael Weller's comments on the filming of the dance sequences in Hair in Chapter Six of this dissertation.

[9]For a detailed discussion of Forman's editing techniques in some representative scenes, see Lipton (237-68). Further examples will be discussed in this study.

[10]Interpretations of all song lyrics and dialogue in Forman's Czech films were gained from subtitles.

[11]See Lipton, p. 208. Also Blue and de Bosio, p. 53.

[12]Years later, Forman opened and closed Ragtime with an image of two people waltzing. At the end of the film, the shot again had a deeper meaning than it did at the beginning.

[13]Forman presents his account of the origins of his screenwriting method in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (39-40) and in his interview with Kopanevova (4-5). Lipton discusses Forman's method as a process that attempts to capture reality (194-205), and Michael Weller reveals what it is like to write with Forman in Chapter Seven of this study.

[14]Skvorecky's novel focuses on the actions of a group of teenage boys in a small Czech town at the close of World War II. It was written in the late Forties and published in America by Grove Press in 1970. The novel reveals the hypocrisy of the town's leaders and the self-interest of the boys, who are mainly concerned with music and girls. It also explodes the myth of a utopian Socialist state.

[15]Forman tells about the updating of Black Peter in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (41-43).

[16]Critics were almost universal in their praise of Black Peter. Liehm felt that it proved what Czech filmmakers could do when given the chance (The Milos Forman Stories, 51-58). The London Times gives an excellent brief analysis of the film, recognizing Forman's observation of his characters as affectionate, but avoiding sentiment. The reviewer also notices that Peter's family relationships are based on love and gives the film high praise as a unique work ("Good Modern Film"). Other reviewers also thought of Black Peter as very unique. Gordon Gow ("Red Youth"), who includes Loves of a Blonde in his comments, describes Forman's method of achieving a natural look through a combination of tight control and improvisation. Gow also praises Forman for successfully meeting the challenge of focusing on quiet and ordinary youngsters in normal settings, which is far more difficult than presenting openly rebellious teenagers in unusual circumstances because the drama is less apparent. Forman comments that he thought his films would be too slow for Western audiences to appreciate.

Andre Techine analyzes Forman's undercutting of narration, progression, and standard resolutions, creating instead a comedy of observation. By depicting the present, Techine argues, Forman refuses to distort the past. Richard Roud praises Forman's style as "controlled improvisation," and admits finding difficulty in describing a film that he likes which has neither a strong plot nor a flashy style. Roud feels that Forman is honest and not at all condescending. Lindsay Anderson ("Nothing Illusory") praises Black Peter as a fresh, personal film of graphic elegance, and Variety ("Cerny Petr") commends Forman's handling of the actors and the pacing and his basic understanding. Joseph Morganstern, in a retrospective article about the New Wave, cites Black Peter as the first indication to the West of the great work to come out of Czechoslovakia in the Sixties. He, however, states

that the film was not particularly revolutionary except in comparison to the Czech films of the Fifties.

[17]Lipton discusses Il Posto's influence on Forman (179-81) and Robert Kolker also gives a good brief description of Olmi's film (101-02).

[18]Forman, as this study will be describing, always establishes the legitimacy of his camera's function in the opening shots of his films. Forman says, "It's important that the film be edited from the beginning. One must start with Shot One, and then its like reading a poem or a novel. All the cutting after that is influenced by the cuts that went before" (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 145). See also Lipton (237-46).

[19]In Loves of a Blonde, Forman makes one cut from a country road to a shot of an empty dance floor. Again, the picture is confusing until a few people race on and begin dancing to the music on the soundtrack. The reversal is simple, but still very effective at catching the viewer's interest.

[20]Forman tells about getting Vostrcil for the role of Peter's father in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (43-44) and about his rules for casting and working with actors (137-40). Forman uses nonactors because he finds that they help verify a scene's accuracy. A good actor will be able to overcome a poorly written script, but an amateur will balk at saying false lines. By using nonprofessionals, Forman insures that his scenes are strong and not just his actors.

Forman's avoidance of well-known performers represents another way in which he attempts to strengthen the authenticity of his work. He wants the audience to catch his message and not be completely conscious of the actor as an off-screen personality. When that is unavoidable, such as with Nicholson or Cagney, Forman therefore works to undercut the audience's impression. In his piece entitled "Closer to Things," Forman states,

> for example, the cineaste of 8½, played by Marcello Mastroianni, represents not a cinema director, but indeed Marcello Mastroianni made up so as to have the appearance of a cinema director. And that in spite of the fact that in the film a table is a table, the sky, sky, and the earth, earth. Marcello Mastroianni is a cinema director; in sum, the essence of photography rests in the malicious disclosure of these little contradictions. That irritates me; for when I see a table, the sky, or the earth, I want also to believe that I am seeing a cinema director. I want to believe it, even if I cannot verify it (57).

For Forman, casting thus becomes very important. In his interview with Larry Sturhahn, Forman explains how he saw over nine hundred actors in casting One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (28-29). He believes that audiences remember characters by their faces more than by their dialogue, and so he attempts to find actors whose looks will communicate the character's personality most accurately. In striving for authenticity, Forman has often cast people from among his friends, people off the street, or workers who perform their same real-life job in the film.

In Langdon Dewey's article, Forman and Ivan Passer both give their reasons for using non-actors, a common element of the New Wave films (27-28). Leonard Lipton also discusses Forman's emphasis on casting and his balancing of non-actors with professionals (205-10). Forman has found that the skilled actor helps the amateurs achieve a satisfactory rhythm and timing. Josef Skvorecky is able to report first-hand on how Forman discovered this principle. In casting three soldiers for Loves of a Blonde, Forman rejected his friend in favor of the professional Vladimir Mensik (All the Bright Young Men, 81-83).

CHAPTER THREE

LOVES OF A BLONDE AND THE FIREMEN'S BALL-- EVOLUTION IN CONTENT AND TECHNIQUE

In the mid-Sixties, Czech society reached a peak of conflict that had its most visible fulfillment in the struggle of President Antonin Novotny to control the country's artists. Novotny had good reasons to fear the impact of Czech culture during those years. The "new ideas" presented in the art, literature, music, and film of the decade revealed national reality and acted as an impetus to public pressure, abetting the dischord already fomenting within the regime.[1] During these years, Milos Forman directed two films: Loves of a Blonde (1965) and The Firemen's Ball (1967). Their success represents an interesting contrast with Novotny's eventual failure. Forman's films demonstrate a degree of knowledge about actual conditions in the country that the President was never able to grasp. He created Loves of a Blonde, for example, from a conversation with a girl who was walking along a Prague street late one night with a suitcase in her hand. She had come looking for a boy with whom she had had a romantic encounter, but he gave her a false address and now she was alone in the big city.[2] Similarly, a visit with Ivan Passer and Jaroslav Papousek to an actual firemen's ball produced the idea for Forman's last Czech film. Forman and Novotny thus had directly opposite degrees of involvement in everyday Czech life. As Forman freely responded to his environment, Novotny, entrapped by his own ideology and

an entrenched bureaucracy that resisted progressive reforms, became increasingly isolated from the people.[3] Their contrasting fates exemplifies one of Forman's major themes: people who do not understand reality will suffer. By the end of 1967, Antonin Novotny had been forced out of power in humiliation while Milos Forman had produced two more feature films that accurately portrayed the tragi-comic nature of Czech society in both their content and style.

Czechoslovakia's Stalinist regimes were expert at creating the groundwork to undermine their own intentions. The "shock worker" model in the early Fifties and the installation of Alois Poledňak and Karel Vesely as the heads of the national film industry following the Banska Bystrica conference are primary examples of the Party acting to defeat its own purpose.[4] Similarly, Antonin Novotny, if remembered for any reason at all, will be known for his ability to create enemies and form policies that had the exact opposite result from what he intended.[5] Novotny was thoroughly Stalinist and never gave up his faith in that ideology even though the nature of events should have logically pushed him in another direction. His own reliance on ideological rather than professional management brought economic disaster to the country by the early 1960s. In addition to the harsh conditions, the total discrediting of Stalinist repression both at home and abroad indicated that a liberalization was necessary. In 1962, Novotny made a concession to the political unrest in the country by appointing a commission to examine the Party's purge trials of the early Fifties. The commission, headed by Party regular Drahoumil Kolder, was expected to find that the guilty had in fact been guilty. But instead it revealed that the trials had indeed been a frame-up. These findings added further impetus to the groundswell of anti-Stalinism already produced by Nikita Kruschev's revelations at the

Soviet Party's twentieth congress in 1956. Novotny's only response was to provide cosmetic changes such as removing the world's largest statue of Stalin, which he had ordered built eight years earlier. Throughout the remainder of his years in power, Novotny fought against any substantive de-Stalinization.

His greatest opposition from 1963-67 came from artists, students, and intellectuals. The 1963 Czechoslovak Writers' Union Conference called for greater freedom within the Communist system. Students, who were spurred on by the influx of styles and ideas from America, joined them. Novotny's regime was encouraging tourism and trade with the West and could not stop the flow of cultural trends accompanying the visiting Americans. The push for artistic freedom resulted in the official "rehabilitation" of banned writers, including Franz Kafka and Karel Capek, the greatest Czech authors of the twentieth century. This movement also transformed art and literature into a political weapon. Nineteen-sixty-three saw the production of several successful plays and novels satirizing Stalinism. A poetry reading in Prague's Petrin Park became the center of a large student demonstration in May of 1964. In 1967, Ludvik Vaculik published The Axe, a novel that bitterly examined human transformation in Czechoslovakia under Communism. These events, along with the developments in film, were all part of the Czech artistic renaissance in the decade, supported by international influences, that posed a constant threat to the security of the insulated Novotny regime.

The President responded to the free flow of ideas and information by attacking the writers and intellectuals. In 1962, Novotny argued that the Party had a right to direct cultural activity. In 1963, both he and Alexandre Dubcek, Slavic Party chief and his eventual replacement, claimed that the writers should not discuss issues still under considera-

tion by the Central Committee. The following year, Novotny barred all political dissent. At this point, both the deposing of Kruschev and an upturn in the economy helped strengthen his actions. By 1966, he had battled the progressive forces to a standoff and once again felt confident of his control. This optimism was the beginning of his downfall. Agricultural production was still poor and Prague housewives typically had to wait in long lines for food. Novotny's official response to the continuing problems was to place Ota Sik in charge of creating a new economic plan. Sik performed his duty, but Novotny's regime never implemented the plan because of the entrenched bureaucrats who fought against de-centralization. Novotny was powerless to act because he lacked the trust of the people that he needed in order to overcome their resistance and produce economic reforms.

Caught between the need for change and the inability to affect it, Novotny made a characteristic response: he attacked the intellectuals. In 1967, he condemned all "literature, films, and visual arts which in individual works makes poetry out of the hopelessness and absurdity of people estranged from social progress" (Szulc, 211). He installed Karel Hoffman as the new Culture Minister and armed him with a new set of censorship laws.[6] Hoffman banned both Vera Chytilova's The Daisies and Jan Nemec's A Report on the Party and the Guests.[7] The National Assembly also considered a law banning all progressive film directors, but the regime was afraid to go that far. These actions were futile on Novotny's part and simply served as an example of his refusal to acknowledge actual conditions, which finally led to his ouster.

Novotny's distance from the attitudes of the people resulted in one major blunder that substantially increased his disfavor with the public. In his official response to the Arab-Israeli war of 1967, Novotny

ignorantly followed the Soviet Party line of condemning Israel and its allies. Czech citizens, however, identified with the plight of a small country surrounded by hostile enemies. Their own oppression by the Nazis during WWII also produced a strong link of sympathy with the Jews. Czech writers, in particular, reacted strongly against Novotny's pronouncements. Having completely lost touch with the people, Novotny sealed his fate by creating deep divisions within the regime. Dubcek and other Slavs turned against him when the lack of de-centralization produced an insufficient amount of investment funds in Slovakia. In December of 1967, Novotny was finally forced out of office.

Milos Forman did not intend to directly address the political situation of the times in either Loves of a Blonde or The Firemen's Ball. But as examinations of Czech society, these films could not keep from having important social and political implications. Such was the nature of Czech film and popular culture in the mid-Sixties that many entertaining works were automatically raised to a level of serious social comment.[8] In Loves of a Blonde, for example, Forman's depiction of two state workers, the control of personal lives through public policy, and personal relationships all reflect a society based upon dishonesty and foolishness. In The Firemen's Ball, the presentation of a group of likable but self-centered firemen attempting to control the distribution of a few rewards creates an apt analogy for a bumbling regime that is out of touch with its people. In both cases, Forman heightens the absurdity by adopting techniques increasingly removed from the documentary realism of Competition and Black Peter. Yet, the appropriateness of these techniques to the film's contents actually increases the accuracy of Forman's depiction of society in Loves of a Blonde and The Firemen's Ball.[9]

At the beginning of Loves, for example, Forman uses two consecutive still shots to introduce the main characters. These are Hana Brejchova (sister of his first wife) as Andula, and Vladimir Pucholt as Mila Vilesta. The shots appear to be a standard introduction of the characters such as occurred in many Hollywood films during the Thirties and Forties. But they demonstrate Forman's deceptive simplicity and his ability to add deep meaning to the most common film techniques. Forman uses this presentation only in Loves, and he does not do so casually. The emphasis on the characters as actors who are merely playing roles re-enforces his theme. At the end of the opening song, he again emphasizes his ability to manipulate reality. The film begins with a girl singing and playing a guitar. The camera leaves her during the opening credits to focus on some wallpaper while the song continues. As the credits end, with the song still playing, the camera pans down to show the guitar lying on a table. At the conclusion, Forman significantly reverses this pattern. A guitar is playing "Ave Maria" while someone hums and Andula lies in bed talking with her bunk mate. After looking round the room, the camera returns to Andula's bunk to show that a girl is playing the music on her guitar. Forman reverses the situation once more as the music continues over the final shot of Andula working at her job in a shoe factory.[10]

By admitting his ability to manipulate at the very beginning, Forman frees his camera from the restrictive realism of Black Peter and also creates a world parallel to the nature of the one that he is telling about. In other words, Forman is saying that both his film and society are full of deception, a fact that increases the importance of individual responsibility. In order to mature and cease being a victim, Andula must get out into the world and learn what people and love are really all about. The fact that she has done so lends a sense of optimism to Forman's

somber conclusion. The camera still acts as an observer throughout but it also has the ability to be in several places at once within a single scene. For example, when a soldier loses his wedding ring at one point during a long dance sequence, the camera is always right on top of it as it gets kicked around the floor. As he starts to crawl under a table where some girls are seated, the camera first takes his point of view to show the girls moving their legs together and then to show them looking down at him in a demeaning manner. But in the next shot, it is facing him as he looks about under the table. At other times, the camera moves freely from outside an upper-story window to ground level and from one room to another within the same scene.

Forman also uses music in a deceptive manner, though so subtly that it is barely noticeable. Black Peter, Loves of a Blonde, and The Firemen's Ball all contain dance scenes in which the music being played by the band goes practically nonstop from beginning to end. But it usually corresponds very little with the nature of the action. The music tends to be upbeat while the action, though often comic, is full of frustration, depression, and even cruelty. The comedy derives from people making fools of themselves. Forman's point is that a style of music often provides a false general impression of the people who listen to it. Young people, for example, often have very different concerns from the carefree "have-a-good-time" attitudes expressed by much of rock and roll.

Loves of a Blonde contains at least two other specific incidents of deceptive uses of music. At the end of the dance scene, three middle-age soldiers are sitting at a table drinking wine with Andula and her friends, Jana and Marie. The orchestra has stopped playing except for Mila, the pianist. He and Andula have already eyed each other earlier in the evening. Finally, he quits and begins to leave. Vladimir Mensik,

who plays one of the soldiers, asks him to keep playing, but Mila waves him off. As he leaves the room, he looks back and catches Andula's eye, thus revealing the real reason he has kept playing. A few minutes later, when the girls retreat to the restroom to discuss their situation, Mila begins a conversation with Andula on the stairway. Eventually, they spend the night together and make love in his room. In a later scene, Andula has begun hitchhiking to Prague to visit Mila. As she climbs into a truck, a solo clarinet plays the first notes of "Feel Like I've Gotta Travel On." The scene then shifts to a dance where the song continues and the camera eventually again shows Mila at the piano. In terms of action, the song appears to apply to Andula, but in actuality Mila is the restless one, sleeping with as many girls as he can. Andula, by comparison, is leaving for Prague in search of a permanent relationship.

Another item commonly used for deceptive purposes by Forman's characters is high art. For example, in Loves Mila tells Andula that her body is angular. This statement does not occur on camera, but after they have made love, Andula asks Mila what he meant. Mila's remark was so casual that he can barely remember it, but he tells her that while some girls look like a regular guitar, she looks like a guitar by Picasso. The statement is absolutely meaningless, if not insulting, but it satisfies Andula's curiosity.

The three middle-age soldiers who spend all their time at the dance with Andula and her friends are also characters who will do anything necessary in order to have their way. Their efforts to seduce the much younger girls constitutes the main action of the long sequence. They begin by sending over a bottle of wine, but the waiter mistakenly takes it to three plain-looking girls sitting at the table next to Andula's. Vladimir Mensik corrects the waiter, and, just as a girl is about to

pour the wine, he removes the bottle from her hand and places it on Andula's table. As usual, Forman notices both the comedy and the sorrow in this situation. After Andula and her friends receive the bottle, he shows the girl who has had it yanked out of her hand fighting to hold back her tears.

The irony in this situation is that the old reservists probably could have had a much better time with the homely girls than they do with Andula and her friends, who like the attention they receive but have no intention of gratifying the soldiers. By contrast, the other girls are happy to receive the bottle and smile gratefully when the waiter places it on their table. At the end of the evening, the factory supervisor, who has been acting as a host throughout the dance, brings Mensik and the heartbroken girl together anyway, and they eventually spend the night with each other. In the meantime, the soldiers endure a long, frustrating evening attempting to impress Andula, Jana, and Marie, mainly because they are trying to fulfill their own egos by seeking to appeal to girls who have no interest in them. In other words, they are being deceptive towards both the girls and themselves. They therefore create their own failure.

Forman emphasizes the ridiculousness of their situation by focusing mainly on the one married soldier, who does not at all feel like pursuing the girls. But he is powerless to speak out against his two friends. Even more than the other soldiers present, he feels trapped in a role for which he is totally unsuited. In the married soldier's attempts to maintain his composure, he continually makes a fool out of himself. As he waits for the girls and his two friends to arrive at the table, he rubs his finger in an attempt to remove the impression made by his wedding ring. But the action makes him look like he is secretly masturbating and comically emphasizes the soldiers' lustful intentions. Then, when he

stands up to greet Andula, his ring falls out of his pocket and rolls across the dance floor and under the table of the homely girls. As he searches for it, Forman shows them discreetly closing their legs in unison. In this sequence, Forman again reveals his American silent comedy influences by building a series of jokes out of the natural context of the action. The final gag occurs when, after the soldier finds his ring, he tips the table while standing up, spilling a glass of beer down his back. In the manner of Chaplin, he tries not to let this accident faze him. Instead, he bows politely to the girls before walking away, while they all laugh.

Forman places the final twist on this whole situation when he shows that the married soldier has actually correctly assessed their situation and could have saved the three men from all their embarrassment. When the waiter takes the bottle to the wrong girls, the hapless married soldier keeps smiling at them until his friend insists that he quit. Later, while awkwardly dancing with Jana, he stares longingly at the heartbroken girl as she goes for consolation from the factory supervisor. At the end of the evening, he is the only one with sense enough to realize that they do not have much chance with Andula and her friends. Mensik mutters, "We're acting like prize idiots," ironically not realizing that his own pretentious sophistication has set in motion the events that have wasted their whole evening. The smart one is really the fool and vice-versa. The characters of the soldiers thus support one of Forman's themes, which is that appearances cannot be trusted.

Forman's picture of society indicates that properly responding to it requires taking its true nature into account. The people who cause all the trouble in the film are the ones who hold honest but overly-idealistic values. The value of Andula's experiences is that they cause

her to stop approaching life on this basis. Loves of a Blonde thus reiterates Forman's theme that young people must have the freedom to make mistakes and learn on their own. At the beginning, Andula is telling her bed-mate about her boyfriend Tonda (Antonin Blazejovsky) and showing a ring that he gave her. Right from the start, Andula demonstrates that she knows practically nothing about men, that she is seeking a sense of permanence in her life, and that she is very vulnerable to men who say the right words but are only interested in sex. Although neither she nor her girlfriend has seen a diamond before, both of them are willing to believe Tonda's assertion that the one in the ring is real. In return, Andula leaves a tie, a symbol of her desire for attachment, hanging around a tree in the forest as a gift for Tonda. When he fails to come and get it, she goes off with a forest ranger. She later tells her friend in bed that she is not sure whether or not she will go steady with him since he is married. But Tonda's single failure is enough to make Andula forget her proclaimed love for him and consider someone else.

Tonda is another example of a person who holds overly idealistic values. He is the only person to treat her honestly and yet she rejects him. His mistake is in not realizing Andula's immaturity and thinking that a ring will be enough to keep her. Andula explains to her sleeping companion how the forest ranger told her all about how animals do not live together like people do but only get together once a year for mating purposes. His story is obviously meant to support his own intentions, but it has a much different impact on Andula. After she has spent the night with Mila, Tonda returns and demands to see her wearing his ring. He bursts into her dorm room, ordering her to show it to him. Andula cries back, "Don't touch me! You disgust me! You're an animal!" She

does not want someone who only appears at mating time. Tonda cannot understand her reference, her attitude, or her actions. Perhaps he had a legitimate reason for being away, but now he has no right to be possessive. Andula cries because she wants a strong attachment, but is unsure of it with Tonda.

The most blatantly over-idealistic character, the one who causes the most trouble, is the factory girls' housemother. In the scene immediately following Andula's rejection of Tonda, this woman is lecturing the girls about the preciousness of their honor. She tells them,

> If you don't respect yourself, don't be surprised when boys don't. If you keep changing boyfriends, they'll tell each other about you. You want to have a full and happy life. You all want to get married to someone who will love you all your life. But you have to deserve it. Think about it. And think of doing something about it.

Andula, who has had four male admirers in the film already and spent the night with one of them, takes her word to heart. The speech prompts her trip to Prague to find Mila. She arrives at his apartment with her suitcase, only to find just his parents at home. The mother is immediately suspicious about her morality. The irony is, of course, that Andula is there seeking a stable relationship while Mila is out trying to seduce yet another girl.

The harm in the housemother's speech is not that she is teaching inappropriate values, but that they are misapplied. It is wrong to teach girls honesty when they do not know about the world's dishonesty and people who get what they want by being deceitful. The contrast between the soldier who chases Jana and Marie back to their dorm, only to be frustrated, and Mila, who tricks Andula into spending the night with him, symbolizes the difference between a direct and indirect approach to a goal. After getting her up to his room, Mila slowly gets Andula to remove her guard, and her clothes, while pretending that he is teaching her how to defend herself.

Andula can also not be thought of as being entirely honest, either to herself or to Mila. After she gets into his room, she tells him, "I only came up here so that you wouldn't think I don't trust you." The statement is ridiculous since if she did trust him she would not have to make it, and if she did not she would not be there. Mila is successful because Andula wants him to be. But Andula still deserves sympathy. While Mila is talking to her on the staircase, she tells him about her suicide attempt. She tried to kill herself because her parents are divorced. Her father does not want her, and she cannot get along with her mother. She failed because she could not find the artery to cut in her wrist. She became desperate and slashed away madly, leaving blood everywhere. Andula has had very little love in her life, and she is looking anywhere she can to find what is real.

Characteristically, Forman turns this gruesome tale into humor through Mila's attempt to manuever her upstairs. When she tells him about her parents, he replies, "My parents are divorced too. Come up to my room and we'll talk about it." When she finishes telling about her suicide attempt, he says, "Come up to the room and I'll show you my scar." Andula keeps insisting that she does not trust him, only changing her mind after they have started to make love. Then she cries out, "I do trust you. Like I have never trusted anyone before." The two are playing out the difference between love and sex although Andula does not really know what love is. Her actions are comical, but she is clearly being used. The audience must decide whether what is happening is innocent or not. Through concentrating solely on Andula's problems, Forman's film achieves a level of social relevance and poses some important questions to society: why is the world so organized that this girl can learn about life only by being hurt, and what justifies her isolation and ignorance?

Forman's distancing techniques in the opening sequence have allowed him to tell the story in an effective tragi-comic manner. The audience cannot laugh at Andula as she writhes about underneath Mila, but it also cannot forget the humor of the events immediately before or after that shot. It is forced to consider both the comedy and the tragedy and to look objectively at Andula's isolation.

Forman skillfully uses humor to demonstrate the cruelty of the world and how it affects both the innocent and the experienced. The love scene, for example, has none of the beauty of the stereotypical Hollywood variety. Instead, the pacing is awkward, matching the typical problems of a pair of young, inexperienced lovers. Mila attempts to respect Andula's wishes by pulling down the window shade, but every time he does so it goes right back up. On the third try, the whole rod falls down. He finally gets it set with the shade down. In total darkness, he returns to bed. There is silence for a few moments, and then he says, "Where are you?" He turns on the light to find Andula sitting up and still saying that she does not trust him. The viewer is humorously brought back to the fact of Andula's isolation. She has no basis for handling the situation she is in.

Forman's primary focus in Loves of a Blonde is on the personal struggles of a few individuals. Their failures are their own. But he does not ignore the effect that public policy has on their lives. Policy has created the isolation that sets the events of the film in motion. Forman emphasizes that it, and not the individuals, is to blame through his depiction of two government workers. Josef Kolb plays the supervisor of the shoe factory in the town of Zruc where Andula and her friends work.[11] The girls in the town outnumber the boys sixteen to one, and Kolb realizes that they require male companionship. So he visits some Army officials to see about the possibility of getting a troop

stationed in Zruc. Kolb therefore represents a resourceful worker who takes his job seriously and helps provide for the happiness of others. During the long scene at the dance for the army reservists and the girls, Kolb helps bring couples together and soothes the hurt feelings of the heartbroken girl by matching her with Vladimir Mensik. During the scenes at the factory, he walks through the aisles, talking with various girls and trying to give them encouragement.

The Army officer that Kolb makes his plea to is played by Jan Vostrcil. Although this officer is fairly ignorant, he is by no means stern or unrelenting. He stands with a bemused look on his face as Kolb describes his problem and even adds a humorous note to the discussion:

> Kolb: These girls need what we all need.
> Vostrcil: In our youth.
> Kolb: That's right. In our youth.

Vostrcil first attempts to avoid making any decision. He says that all he can do is pass along the request to his superior. But Kolb challenges him, and the next shot shows the train station at Zruc, where the town's band and the girls are waiting to welcome the coming troops. Vostrcil's character tries at first to shirk his duty, but he does respond to the problem in a somewhat appropriate manner. The only trouble is that the nature of his response is not exactly adequate.

These characters symbolize a warning by Forman against the over-zealousness of some of the reform- and revolution-minded students and liberal intellectuals. Forman had been, through no action of his own, a victim of the pro-Stalinist backlash of the late-Fifties and he knew what too strong of an attack on the Establishment could produce. He feared a loss of freedom that might come for any unknown reason and return the film industry to the meaningless days of Zhdanovist aesthetics.[12] He also was happy with the status of the Czech film

industry, free from both political and economic pressures. Kolb and Vostrcil are characters much like Vesely and Polednak, the supervisors of film production: Party regulars who were doing a good job. Loves of a Blonde is, therefore, a film that agrees with the goal of the artists and liberal intellectuals to achieve freedom within communism.

The film's first plot complication is directly representative of a situation that existed in Czechoslovakia at the time. A group of aging reservists, hardly suitable to the needs of the girls, arrives in Zruc. In the early Sixties, the Novotny regime had helped create dislocation and resentment through the reassignment of men who were "politically expendable." Forman thus shows the trouble resulting from the system and not from the efforts of men such as the characters played by Kolb and Vostrcil. The old reservists are definitely expendable, and their placement in Zruc causes some of the same effects as Novotny's policy. After the men get off the train and march into town, Andula remarks to Marie, "All that excitement for nothing." The disappointment on many of the girls' faces is apparent throughout the dance, and the soldiers also feel frustrated. The one who chases Andula's friends back to their dormitory provides a good example. All these mishaps are set in motion by the harsh policy regarding the politically useless, but their actual cause, which is the personal needs of the various characters, demonstrates that Forman's main focus is on human nature and not on political conditions.

Isolation is a common theme in Black Peter and Loves of a Blonde. Loves shows it as a part of life in both the country town and the big city. When Andula first stops at Mila's apartment, she leaves her suitcase with his father and goes off to find him. Her unexpected arrival immediately sets off a number of associations in the mind of Mila's mother (Milada Jezkova). The old lady, for whom life has become an endless round of

"sewing all day, TV all night," decides that Mila is in trouble and will probably have to marry the girl. After a few years, they will probably be divorced and then the children will suffer. Forman's point is that Mila's parents live in such isolation from the world that a simple knock on the door becomes transformed into a tragic event. Their simultaneous desire for excitement in their lives and fear of the outside world has them trapped.

Their only stimulus comes from the television set, and even it provides no satisfaction. Mother feels bored and father falls asleep. The program that they watch symbolizes their situation. In it, a clown stands outside a store window watching a number of mannequins dance. He frantically tries to get in with them. Similarly, Mila's mother and father (Josef Sebanek) are watching performers who are not real people, but only images. Yet, the events played out on television seem more like life than their own listless existence. Mother expresses a desire to begin experiencing life again, but her fear dominates her perception of the world. When Andula returns to the apartment because the exit is locked, Mila's mother drags her inside for questioning. But later, she wants to send Andula away for fear of what the neighbors will think if they let her stay.

What this isolation produces, in addition to fear, is a lack of communication. The desire to communicate is still present, but the ability to do so is gone. Mila and his parents life in different worlds and all of them are separated from Andula. Throughout the evening, Mila's parents make disparaging remarks about her morality while practically ignoring her presence. Forman emphasizes this point when he cuts from a scene of Mila trying to enter another girl's apartment to a close-up of his mother talking about the kind of woman he needs as a wife.

She makes it clear that she does not think Andula would be able to take care of Mila well enough so that he would not have to work as hard as his father. The camera pulls back to show the father and Andula sound asleep in their chairs. The final scene at the apartment also emphasizes the isolation of Mila and his parents even when they are very close physically. To keep him away from Andula, Mila's mother forces him to sleep in the same bed with her and his father. Even there, the three of them are unable to communicate. Mother wants to keep arguing and make Mila feel guilty, Father just wants to go to sleep, and Mila wants to get away.

Isolation also causes people to stop relating to each other honestly. None of the characters in Loves of a Blonde communicate well, but several of them do attempt to manipulate other people. Mila, his parents, and the soldiers at the dance all attempt to manipulate others through the use of either deception or threats. The relationships among Mila, the soldiers, and the girls they meet are all on a haphazard basis in which everyone is trying to get what he or she wants immediately. In these circumstances, individuals who put their trust in someone else become very vulnerable, and a primary weapon for the manipulating person is the question, "Don't you trust me?" Mila asks Andula if she trusts him when he first gets her into his room. Later, a girl he is with while Andula is at his apartment asks Mila the same question.

In this scene, Forman again uses a chase based on American silent comedy techniques to emphasize his point. The girl promises to let Mila into her room by opening a first-floor window after she has gotten in past her father. He reluctantly trusts her, but, shortly afterwards, the girl pokes her head out of a fourth-floor window to see what he does. Mila waits for a while and then climbs into a room, waking the middle-aged couple sleeping there. He jumps back out just as a pair of

policemen appear at the end of the street. First, he tries to act calm, but then he begins to run. The policemen give chase, followed by the man from the bedroom, who jumps out the window in his nightshirt. Mila should be wise enough to not let the girl trick him, but he makes his mistake by assuming that she shares his intentions. Andula's problems stem from the same cause, and each of them can only correct their errors by taking the true nature of reality into account. But since Andula is not as knowledgeable as Mila to begin with, she has to suffer more while doing her learning.

The chase scene is comic because Mila has nothing to lose by placing his trust in a girl one time and getting fooled. He is only seeking a brief encounter, and he will not be hurt by not getting it. His life will continue unchanged. By contrast, Andula seeks a permanent relationship. The presence in her suitcase of the tie that she originally tried to give Tonda symbolizes her desire. Mila's mother, dishonestly looking at Andula's belongings rather than asking about her intentions directly, finds it there. When Andula learns that she has misplaced her trust, she is deeply hurt. She listens outside the bedroom door as Mila argues with his parents and finds out that none of them care anything about her. She cries at her discovery.

This climax to the action produces conflicting emotions in the viewer. Andula has lost her innocence, but she has also lost her isolation. The last scene demonstrates that she has learned from her painful introduction to the ways of the world. She tells her bed-mate that she had a great time in Prague and that Mila's father is a wonderful man. The scene contrasts with her display of innocence at the beginning of the film. Andula knows the difference now between fantasy and reality. She will be able to continue her life and approach future relationships on a

mature basis. In that sense, the conclusion is hopeful, and the lie she tells adds some humor. But the guitar playing "Ave Maria" during the scene sounds mournful. The nature of the reality that Andula now understands cannot make anyone too happy that she has left her isolation behind. She has entered a world in which relationships are still based on deceit. She has gained maturity, but has lost a vision of beauty. She has merely become another capable member of a cold and impersonal environment.

The follow-up to Loves of a Blonde was originally intended to again focus on the problem of isolation in Czech society, with the emphasis shifted to the character of a lonely soldier. To write the script, Forman, Papousek, and Passer secluded themselves in a mountain hideaway. Milos Forman remembers their original idea as

> the story of a soldier who gets two days leave in Prague. He goes to a big dance in a ballroom with girls, and he suddenly feels so unhappy, missing this life. Because instead of being around girls and eating and drinking and dancing, and feeling young and free, he's confined to the barracks doing this drudgery of military service. So he decides to AWOL. He stays and hides in the cellar, in this whole labyrinth of corriders. And we tried to develop a story based on this situation. But somehow we were not inspired or something was wrong basically with the idea. And one evening, just to relax and forget about our misery, we went to the local firemen's ball. And it was such a wonderful life experience.

Re-encountering Czech life released the pent-up creative energies of the trio, and their screenplay took a totally new form:

> When we sat down again, instead of working on that script, we found ourselves talking about what we had seen the last night. Ideas were springing out of everybody. It was so exciting, we just started talking about it. And slowly, we discovered that we were much more excited about the possibility of building a story on what we saw the other night than the other story. So we shifted gears and wrote The Firemen's Ball.

In one evening of observation, Forman and his colleagues found the

ideas for their next film that had eluded them through a long period of struggling in seclusion. The story of this film's creation proves that the life's blood of Forman's success in the Sixties was his ability to draw his material directly from Czech society.[13]

Milos Forman has explicitly denied that The Firemen's Ball contains any political symbolism. For the film's release in the United States, Forman added an introduction in which he personally appears on screen to explain the strange events that occurred in Czechoslovakia when The Firemen's Ball was first shown there. Forty thousand firemen resigned in protest, and Forman was forced to go on a tour to tell them that the film is not actually about firemen, but about the whole society. This explanation satisfied the fire fighters. But, Forman says, the silly truth is that the film is about firemen, and the only reason he made it was for the audience to enjoy themselves. He therefore asks that nobody look for any symbols or double meanings.[14]

Forman's speech contains a limited amount of truth. His assertion about the film's primary purpose is easily acceptable because it does entertain. But The Firemen's Ball also paints an accurate picture of Czech society by focusing on a group of leaders who are so concerned with their own image that they are totally out of touch with the people. The film opens with a close-up of an axe that the firemen plan on giving to their retired eighty-six-year-old honorary chief. The axe is symbolic of the chief's many years of service and also of the firemen's self-image of being the granters of valuable rewards. The firemen pass the axe around so that each one can admire it and congratulate themselves for the gesture they are making. Forman's speech is also symbolic. He has actually indicated that the film can be understood in more than one way. His speech is thus representative of the dual-nature of film.

It not only functions as mere entertainment, but also within the context of being an image of society. The significance of film is that it does perform both functions simultaneously, and the intelligent director is one who is able to manipulate the aspects of a film's entertainment to produce a meaningful story.

The Firemen's Ball presents a picture of a society in which incompetence is added to deceit. In Loves of a Blonde, the arrival of the middle-aged reservists as companions for teenage girls demonstrated the incompetence of official decision-makers. In that incident, at least, all parties had agreed upon the goal. The mistake merely resulted from choosing the wrong means of reaching it. In The Firemen's Ball, mishaps occur because the firemen decide on goals and the means to achieve them without telling anyone else what their plans are. They do everything for the sole purpose of enhancing their own image and completely disregard the wishes of the people. Also, once they have decided on a goal, they never give up striving for it, no matter how self-evident their incompetence must seem or what bizarre means they have to take to achieve it.

The immediate goal of the firemen is very simple. They want to present the commemorative hatchet to their honorary chief for his fifty years of service. The entire story of the film is actually based on their attempt to make this simple presentation, at which they eventually fail. They do so because they try to liven up this special event at their annual ball by also staging a beauty contest and a raffle. Both, predictably enough, turn into disasters. These results occur because the firemen refuse to be practical, choosing instead to follow some invisible guidelines towards an uncertain, but idealistic, goal. Forman repeatedly makes comedy out of the fact that the firemen and the people

completely ignore each other. While the firemen are totally concerned with keeping events in order and preserving their own image, the people simply have a good time, take what they want, and go home.

A magazine picture of some beauty pageant contestants provides the inspiration for the "Miss Fireman Contest." The contest's purpose is to select a girl to present the hatchet to the honorary chief. Right from the beginning, the firemen demonstrate their complete ineptitude. They cannot decide on how many girls should be in the contest or on what basis to choose them: faces, legs, or busts. In some cases, other people, such as wives and boy friends, eventually make the choices for them. The entire contest parallels the insanity of a blind adherence to socialist ideology by attempting to apply some arbitrary common standard to a group of unequal individuals and reveals the firemen's basic desire to control events.[15] After Fire Chief Jan Vostrcil welcomes the six selected girls to the contest, another fireman (Josef Sebanek) is told to show them how they are to march up to the podium. Suddenly, a seventh contestant rushes in wearing a bathing suit, and the firemen get really confused. They stand her next to another girl, and the two are so different in appearance that no one can decide on a basis for judgement. Sebanek finally gets the girls practicing their march, and the firemen really begin to enjoy themselves. The girls are all solemn, but the firemen feel like a group of troop commanders. They clap to the beat, dance, and demonstrate how to throw kisses to the crowd until a knock on the door interrupts them. When the intruder turns out to be just another fireman, the others berate him for spoiling all their enjoyment.

The contest ends in chaos because the firemen are unable to account for human nature in their plans. They never consider that the girls

they select might not perform exactly the way they are told. When the contest begins, the orchestra starts playing a march. The girls gradually begin to come forward, but when one of them gets embarrassed and rushes off to the upstairs ladie's room, a second contestant also breaks for the stairs and disorder prevails. The firemen try to get the girls out of the bathroom, while downstairs the crowd unleashes its animal instincts. They carry, pull, and drag various women towards the front of the auditorium, making a mockery of the whole event. As the firemen plead with the "official" contestants, the crowd selects its own queen: a fat, middle-aged woman who blows kisses to them. The sequence ends when a fire alarm goes off. Pleasure fills Jan Vostrcil's face as he listens to the familiar sound and thinks about the opportunity that the firemen now have to demonstrate their competence.

The raffle also turns into a disaster because of the firemen's inability to control human nature. Forman shows a large table loaded with prizes at the beginning, but one-by-one, the items slowly disappear as the evening progresses. When the firemen return from the fire, they find that almost all the prizes have been stolen. The people will simply not wait for the firemen to make their own distribution. They take what they want. Even the wife of the man assigned to guard the gifts (Milada Jezkova) grabs a headcheese. The firemen try to retrieve the gifts by turning out the lights so that those who have taken something may return it in the dark with no questions asked. When the lights come on again, the crowd finds the table guardian (Josef Kolb) in the embarrassing position of trying to return the stolen cheese. He tosses it on the table, turns around, and faints.

The other firemen hustle him into the back room where a hot debate immediately ensues. Some defend his honesty, while others blame him

for dishonoring the brigade. The situation exactly parallels the government's after the Kolder commission had completed its finding. In both cases, those in control were implicated in the crimes that took place. The firemen respond in exactly the same way as the Novotny regime. Rather than using the situation as an opportunity to begin a new period of honest relationships with the people, they quickly forget about their own guilt and turn their suspicion upon the crowd. In each case, those who are vulnerable, such as the gift table guardian, take the blame, and the other members of the committee in charge seek ways in which to protect their own image.

The relationship of the headcheese incident in The Firemen's Ball to the Kolder Commission findings might seem tenuous if the film were void of any other social symbolism. But Forman does relate the fire brigade to the Novotny regime in other places as well. Two examples of symbolic dialogue are particularly significant. Both symbolize the death of the socialist dream of a unified egalitarian society. After the firemen pass the axe around at the beginning of the film, one of them remarks that they should have given it to the old chief the previous year. Now he has cancer, and they will look like they are merely trying to give it to him before he dies. The old chief's affliction is symbolic of the condition of the Novotny regime, which was suffering from its own isolation. Rather than cooperating with the people, it mistrusted them and lost touch with traditional socialist dreams of gaining a well-ordered society through cooperation. The firemen face an immediate question. Some feel that the old chief might not know about his illness yet, so they decide not to tell him. As with the Novotny regime, those in charge carefully guard the truth so that they can maintain the image of business proceeding as usual. While acting solely in their

own self-interest, they still pretend to uphold socialist ideas.

Later in the film, Forman again uses dialogue to indicate the fading of the socialist dream and the struggle to maintain the illusion that it is still possible. The fire that occurs burns down an old man's house, so the victim is brought into the auditorium in his underwear. Before being given some compensation for his loss, the man making the presentation speaks about the gesture as representing a certain quality among the people that he cannot think of the word for. People in the crowd shout out suggestions such as "generosity" and "benevolence," which do not quite fit what he has in mind. Finally, the word comes to him. It is "solidarity." This incident represents the faded nature of socialist idealism. A group of young boys at a table emphasize the outmoded nature of this idea. One of them whispers, "'Comrades' is what he's looking for." Another one waves his hand annoyingly. Whatever quality the people are expressing, the gift that they give to the old man reflects its value. They present him with the raffle tickets, which he complains are worthless to him. Since the people have already stolen most of the prizes at this point, the tickets are even more valueless than he suspects. The fact that the crowd members have then donated all their worthless tickets to help a fellow citizen shows that "selfish individualism" more accurately characterizes them than does "solidarity."

Two important visual symbols also represent the relationship of the Novotny regime to the people. When the guardian of the raffle table first discovers a prize missing, he begins arguing with another fireman who is also in the auditorium. Unfortunately, this man is holding a ladder for someone else who is decorating an overhead poster by burning its edges. As the two firemen fight, the ladder falls. The worker screams

for help as he hangs onto the wire and the poster bursts into flames. The two firemen, and the old chief, run and get a fire extinguisher and helplessly try to get it to work. They ignore the worker, who is yelling, "I can't hold on any longer. I'm falling." The situation is similar to the relationship between the Novotny regime and the people. The government produced chaos and disasters, leaving the people to hang helplessly. Forman follows this scene with the opening credits, which are run over a number of still photos of old fire brigades. These, again, are idealistic images from the past that are being lost in the present.

The most important visual symbol is the burning house that interrupts the chaotic climax to the beauty pageant. The old man who lives there keeps wanting to go back into the crumbling structure to get his belongings. In one night, the fire is destroying everything that has taken him years to accumulate and all his dreams for the future. Most of the crowd from the ball goes to watch. Forman identifies them with the old man by showing close-ups of solemn faces as some sad music plays on the soundtrack. The people are feeling a sense of loss also, both those in the crowd and Czech citizens as a whole at that time. The reactionary measures and general ineptitude of the Novotny regime were threatening the dreams that had built up during the Sixties. The firemen at the scene represent the inadequate response of the government to the mounting chaos in the land. Their truck gets stuck in the snow, so the underequipped firemen have nothing to battle the huge blaze with except for snow shovels. The house is completely destroyed.

Once again, the strength of the symbol comes from its originating in Forman's own actual experience. Forman reached far into his past to produce this scene of despair that was as relevant to 1967 as to the pre-war years:

> That scene was based on something which I saw as a six-year-old child. In my neighborhood, in the little town I lived in, in Caslov, in the next street, one day, I saw smoke and I saw people running. So, of course, as a six-year-old child, I went out too. And I saw that there was a carpenter there who lived on the corner and he had a small shack with his workshop and a small house. And he built it all himself. We knew him because he was sometimes working doing things for my parents. You know, I was there and I remember it was like a shock for me as a six-year-old child seeing everybody, a crowd of people, standing around, unable to do anything but watch somebody losing everything. So that was the origin of this scene. And it was not that the metaphor gave birth to this scene, but that this scene, in life, suddenly became a metaphor in the context of the rest of the film.

Forman leads up to the fire with a series of small jokes. The bartender gets thrown into a snowbank. The firetruck gets stuck. The people go loping through the deep drifts towards the blaze. The old man gets moved back and forth by the crowd: first they do not want him to watch, then they move him close to keep warm. Finally, the bartender borrows the old man's table so that he can keep doing business. He goes through the crowd checking people's breath and charging them according to how much they have drunk. The crowd's actions are completely ridiculous, but the humor ends suddenly. The fire serves as a reminder that at the heart of this film and Czech history is the experience of loss. Forman easily reached into his own past to find a symbol for this idea. The poignancy of this scene derives from its exact representation of the way that people actually do react to a tragic loss. Forman quietly depicts the communal impact of any such tragedy, creating the metaphor through his audience's shared feelings.

Some of Forman's film techniques in The Firemen's Ball also support the ability to interpret it as an allegory. He ignores the logical limitations of space and time more in this film than in any of his previous works. When the ladder gets knocked out from under the worker in the opening scene, Forman uses a shot from the ceiling to show the

firemen trying to work the extinguisher, and the viewpoint is not that of the hanging man. A natural observer would not be very likely to have this high-angle view, and so the shot is like very few others from Forman's previous films. It also establishes the freedom to employ drastic camera movements and overcome other natural limitations as well.

For example, Forman ignores natural spatial restrictions in the scene of a father bribing the beauty contest selection committee. The three firemen receive shots of liquor from a waitress, which they immediately drink. Upon discovering that none of them ordered the drinks, one asks, "Who did?" From quite a distance away through the crowd, a middle-age man pokes his head out from behind a post and immediately responds, "I did." The firemen realize what has happened and try to reject the bribe, but the man keeps bothering them until his girl has been entered in the pageant. When the firemen are waiting for the beauty contestants to enter the back room, Forman uses sound to do away with natural limitations of time. Most of the girls have come, but the firemen must still wait for a few others. As the contestants already present stand against the wall, a single small chime begins to sound. Forman cuts to a shot of Vostrcil slumped over in his chair, tiredly tapping the chime. The sound and Vostrcil's posture indicate that a lot more time has passed than the amount that the scene has actually run.

Forman's most creative and effective use of a film technique that ignores natural physical limitations is his camera movement. During the scene of the beauty pageant breakdown, Forman's camera shifts rapidly and widely from place to place. As the girls run up the steps to the ladies' room, the camera is at the top of the staircase. Other times, it is at floor level or ceiling level to watch the women who are being dragged to the front. Sometimes the viewpoint is from the stage and

other times from the middle of the crowd. Forman continues this camera movement all the way through the fire sequence. As the crowd rushes out the door to go view the fire, the bartender attempts to get people to pay their bills before leaving. Forman first shoots from inside the doorway as he gets pushed out, then makes a 180 degree turn and watches from the outside as the crowd dumps the bartender into a snowbank. As the fire continues to blaze and people rush about, the camera continues to move freely through the crowd.

Forman employs this free camera style very effectively in the final scene. He shoots from a very high angle as the old man walks out of the ashes of his ruined home and across the snow over to his bed and the other few possessions that he has left. He sits down and removes his slippers, just as if he were in his own bedroom, and pulls back the covers. An old fireman, who has been left all night to guard the items, is already sleeping there. The old man gets in with him and, after the camera moves up further, snow begins to fall on the pair. In some ways, this scene could be interpreted as having an optimistic message: the old man does rise up from the ashes of his ruined home and climb into bed with a member of the brigade, possibly symbolizing a unified basis for building a new future. But several other factors give the scene an unrealistic quality and encourage a pessimistic interpretation. First, the camera is distanced from the action by its high angle position. Second, the action of the old man sitting down and removing his slippers just as if he were still in his house appears somewhat bizarre. Third, the setting and the action of the scene itself: the furniture set up in the middle of a snowfield and the two men going to bed together in this unusual place create a sense of absurdity. Fourth, the age of the two men suggests a limited future. The snow falling, which will

probably not even allow them to rest peacefully, is the final symbol.

Milos Forman shifts his sympathy in The Firemen's Ball from the young to the old. The film's victims are all old men. The primary victim is the man who loses his house. The old chief is another. Not only does he have cancer, but he also has to suffer through the whole evening. He asks to go to the bathroom at one point, but one of the firemen prevents him, saying that the pageant is about to start. When it finally does, he twice comes forward to receive his award only to be held back by the firemen, who do not want him to interfere with the procession. Finally, he never does receive his axe. After all the guests have left, the firemen rush up to give it to him, only to discover that it too has been stolen. The look on the old chief's face is a sad and simple condemnation of the brigade's folly.

The oldest fireman is also taken advantage of throughout the evening. First, the others send him out to dance with one of the contestant's mothers, who has insisted on staying in the back room and watching what happens. When he comes back, he interrupts their fun in marching the girls around and is berated for being a kill-joy. Then, after the fire, they leave him out all night to guard the old man's possessions. Although he tells the women who leave him there to remember to send someone to replace him, the last scene clearly shows that he was forgotten. The women who dress him for the night even force him to defend his masculinity. They wrap a scarf around his head, which he claims will make him look like "an old grandma." They tell him that it does not matter because he is an old grandpa anyway. He replies, "There's still a difference, you know." When interpreted in this fashion, the conclusion of The Firemen's Ball shows sympathy for the powerless old people who are left out in the cold by a self-centered and aggressive society. The

final three shots of the film emphasize the three old men who are victimized during the story.

The distancing effect produced by the high angle camera in the final scene and the unusual nature of the action reinforce the allegorical nature of The Firemen's Ball. Forman's primary purpose in the film was to entertain and his emphasis on the three old men as victims demonstrates his compassionate nature. The parallels that can be drawn between the action that takes place in The Firemen's Ball and the problems of the Novotny regime prove Forman's ability to present social situations in personal terms.

With his thoughts centered on the work for his American project, Forman's mind slipped away from events in Czechoslovakia. During the 1968 Dubcek regime, Forman says, "I was not involved . . . because before Dubcek came to power I had my eyes already set on Hollywood." Forman's American career began similar to his Czech one. He went to Greenwich Village to observe American youth and developed a story about runaways and their parents based on what he saw. In story, theme, and technique, Taking Off builds on The Audition, but it shifts the focus from young people to adults. Forman's problems with the studios and his experiences in the Village led him to sympathize with other people his age.[16] Unfortunately, an adult who learns about the world's complexity does not have the same options as a teenager. When applied in this context, Forman's theme had negative implications that audiences would not accept, and Taking Off stood still at the box office.

ENDNOTES

[1]Antonin J. Liehm writes, "If someone had asked former President of Czechoslovakia Antonin Novotny what literature can do, he would have answered: 'Depose me!'" (Politics and Culture, 41). Tad Szulc (184-235) and Time magazine ("Czechoslovakia: Into Unexplored Terrain," 33-34) both describe the crucial role of writers and artists in creating a climate for change.

[2]Forman recounts the origins of Loves of a Blonde in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (59-62), Howard Thompson's "The Nude Boy," and Joseph Gelmis's The Film Director (733-34).

[3]Weisskopf gives a concise description of Novotny's isolation (163-68).

[4]Forman comments about Party guidance for Fifties youth,

> I'm convinced that if there had been a different kind of system in our country, half of the people who shared in creating this miracle would have excelled in different jobs--in business, for example, or in the professions; or maybe they would have operated fine prosperous hotels. But in Czechoslovakia there was nothing like the 'ideal physician' on the order of Albert Schweitzer, or an 'ideal businessman' like Ford, or a lawyer like Darrow, or a politician of the Masaryk type. Nothing. The Ideal came in three models: Stalin, Chapayev, and the Artist. Perhaps the Athlete, too. There was a fairly wide choice in the last two categories. And that's why, in the cultural sphere, there was such a tremendous building of talent, such a backlog of gifted people, so that, finally, something simply had to happen. From my own experience as somebody who grew up in this period, I know for a fact that the model the system was trying to create--the 'shockworkers,' and so on--hadn't the slightest appeal among the young intelligentsia. (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 34).

(Note: Thomas Garrigue Masaryk was instrumental in convincing the victors of World War I to establish an independent Czechoslovak state. Chapayev, a Red Army leader assassinated by the Whites during the Russian civil war, was the hero of both an officially and popularly successful biographical film by the Soviets Georgi N. and Sergei D. Vasiliev in 1934 as a model of Zhdanovist aesthetics. See Stoil, 8-70, 74-78.)

[5]The following account of Novotny's demise is drawn from Tad Syllic's Czechoslovakia Since World War II (179-258).

[6]The Economist reported that Hoffmann's probable actions would be to try to make the arts directly serve Party interests ("Will They Listen?").

[7]Alex Madsen discusses the feelings of forboding among the New Wave filmmakers upon the government's refusal to aid Nemec and Chytilova's projects. In relation to Forman, director Evald Schorm mentions that The Firemen's Ball will have more social sarcasm than Loves of a Blonde. But others acknowledge that Forman is endured by the government because his films bring in money. The article also mentions rumors of Forman projects with Claude Lelouch and Jerry Lewis, but asserts that he has no plans for an international career.

[8]See Liehm, "Some Observations" (140). Also, Time's reviewer saw The Firemen's Ball as having a different meaning in relation to each of the three regimes before, during, and after Dubcek, and thought that the film worked well in each context. Unfortunately, the writer overlooked Forman's basic concern with human nature. By contrast, David Wilson ("The Firemen's Ball") describes the film as a very human story with its political overtones only an afterthought. Wilson finds the ending saved from despair by Forman's compassion. Roger Ebert is not sure whether the film is an allegory or not, but finds the humor unforced and Forman's presentation of how the best intentions often go awry to be very realistic.

[9]Other writers such as Bruce Williamson ("The Loves") and Leonard Lipton comment about the actual complexity behind Forman's apparent simplicity. Lipton makes especially detailed analysis of a few shots from the dance hall sequence in Loves of a Blonde (215-37).

[10]Jean Collet uses these scenes to explain the entire film as taking place within Andula's dream since the film begins with her going to sleep and returns to the dorm at the end with the light just coming in through the windows. The viewer looks on with mounting embarrassment and curiosity, which creates the humor. Collet thus finds that Loves fulfills the essence of cinema: to reveal secrets and dreams. The multiple examples in the film of individuals discovering other people's secrets supports this analysis, which complements my own. The freedom of Forman's camera and his open admission within the film to creating a fictional world both lend themselves to the idea that the audience is experiencing Andula's dream. They also share the responsibility that she must finally acknowledge. The indication that Andula "wakes up" at the end implies that she has learned something. Some reviewers did not think so.

Phillip J. Hartung, who did not admire the film as much as Ivan Passer's Intimate Lighting, and Newsweek, which rates it with the work of Griffith, Vigo, and Renoir, both felt that Andula learned nothing from her experiences. Most other reviewers, such as Arthur Knight, Brendan Gill, Moira Walsh, John Peter Dyer, Robert Kottowitz, and Bosley Crowther ("Film Festival," "Screen: Czech Charmer") also praised the film. The dissenters are Kirk Bond, who argues that Loves of a Blonde is just an ordinery film that gives no indication of what the Czechs are really doing, and Robert Hatch ("Films," 14 Nov. 1966). Hatch finds the film endearing, but artless and ill-constructed. He sees no relationship between the ballroom scene and the one at Mila's house and does not believe the ending. Hatch also makes no attempt to find Forman's theme.

[11]Kolb was the actual factory manager in Zruc. Forman says that while looking to fill this role, they asked to meet him, and "When Mr. Kolb showed up, he was terrific. I still don't understand it. But whenever I watch a couple of his scenes, even today, I realize what a genius this man was" (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 65-66). Kolb also plays the prize table guardian in The Firemen's Ball.

[12]Forman writes of the progressive Czech directors in the Fifties, "they committed the mistake of adopting a 'holier than thou' attitude at a time--seven years after the death of Stalin and three years after the 20th Congress of the Soviet Communist Party--when it was perhaps still possible but no longer entirely wise" ("Chill Wind," 11).

[13]Forman also discusses the origins of The Firemen's Ball in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (82-91) and Joseph Gelmis's The Film Director (134-37). The film was co-produced with Barrandov Studios by the Italian Carlo Ponti, who put Forman in a precarious situation when he refused to accept the final version and demanded the money back that he had invested in it. The state held Forman accountable for losing $80,000, and he was forced to quickly find new financing or face a jail sentence. Fortunately, French directors Francois Trauffaut and Claude Berri had just formed a company to help independent directors maintain control of their own films, and they came to Forman's rescue. Forman also worked on a script for Ponti called The Americans Are Coming about an Amerian who pays a lot of money for the privilege of hunting the last bear in Czechoslovakia. But the project collapsed because the two were diametrically opposed about how the movie should be made. Forman told Harriet R. Polt that the project failed simply because he and Ponti misunderstood each other ("Getting the Great," 61). Forman also talks briefly about his refusal to bend to Ponti's pressure to change The Firemen's Ball in Liehm's Closely Watched Films (224-26), and Alan Levy also provides an insightful account of the two men's blustery relationship.

[14]Marion Armstrong takes Forman at his word and does no more in her review than recount the film's events, not always accurately. Harriet R. Polt ("The Firemen's Ball") feels that Forman should have shortened some of the sequences, but basically admires the film for revealing most of mankind's weaknesses and the disasters they produce at a ball where everyone still manages to have a good time anyway. Playboy praises some of the film's hilarious sequences, but laments its lack of focus on a specific character. The reviewer feels that Forman's theme is the effects of a faulty bureaucracy and finds the humor less subtle than in Loves of a Blonde. Nevertheless, the review closes by stating that Forman may single-handedly revive the golden age of screen comedy. Renata Adler ("Film Festival") agrees with that opinion, mentions several incidents from the film, and notes Forman's ability to escalate both comedy and sadness at the same time. Liehm comments on the film by comparing Forman to Gogol as a master satirist with intimations that he will probably be equally misunderstood and attacked by his countrymen for showing the average citizen to be just as calous and capable of doing harm as social and political leaders. (The Milos Forman Stories, 92-101).

[15]This situation was also relevant to Czech filmmaking. Leonard J. Berry comments that under the socialist system,

> in good times or bad, the state-owned company receives all profits, domestic and foreign, from a film. Forman and most other directors receive 2500 crowns ($50 on the black market, about $180 at official exchange) a month while not working--'enough to live on'--and 60,000 crowns for each film. Adds Forman, 'It is possible for one person to earn more than another. The theory that we all have the same stomach is very beautiful but it is not just if someone is lazy or lousy to get the same money as someone who is very good and works very hard. (36)

[16]Following Loves of a Blonde, Forman felt optimistic about the future of Czech filmmaking. Mary Hooper mentions that Forman considered the industry to be at an important transitional stage, moving away from political concerns but not yet dominated by commercial ones (34). Two years later, Forman's feeling changed because the government had decided to judge all films on the basis of commercialism. The decision was hypocritical because the whole industry was nationalized to avoid that very problem. Moreover, the best Czech films did poorly inside the country, but brought in a lot of foreign currency. Forman expresses his reaction to this move against the New Wave in "Chill Wind" (41). Liehm also discusses the situation in Closely Watched Films (224). The New Wave's end came, of course, with the Soviet invasion in 1968. Renata Adler tells about the Czech filmmakers in Paris shortly after the Russian invasion and the efforts of French producer-directors such as Claude Berri to help them in "Where Will They Work?"

CHAPTER FOUR

TAKING OFF--AN ATTEMPT TO INTERPRET AMERICA

Milos Forman's first four films combined simple stories with entertaining comedy to reveal the complexity of Czech daily life. In 1967, Paramount Pictures was hoping that Forman could repeat his success in America. After seeing his script, the studio quickly decided that he could not, but Forman has since proved them wrong. Milos Forman's American films have continued to be primarily entertaining works, often confounding critics with their subtle complexity. Most importantly, Forman's films have always addressed some of the most important issues of their times, revealing the problems and urging the audience to search for solutions. During the late Sixties, Forman was greatly concerned with remaining both contemporary and consistent, gradually evolving so that his work maintained both a high quality and also constant social relevance.[1] Each of Forman's films since then prove that he has achieved his goal. Taking Off, for example, though somewhat disappointing in its conclusion, accurately portrays the journey of an American middle-class adult male towards self-identity in a world dominated by youth culture.[2] Forman had to struggle to make Taking Off the way he wanted to, but even though it was a commercial failure, the film proved that his comedy and major themes were universally relevant.

In Forman's first attempt to make Taking Off, Paramount rejected

his scripts, released him from his contract, and demanded $140,000 for the money it had invested in his project. Universal eventually provided funding, but slashed his budget to a paltry $810,000.[3] Still, they gave Forman his most important requirement: complete artistic control. The amount of the budget, Forman claims, makes no difference to him:

> If they give me ten thousand dollars, I'll do a film for it. It will be eight millimeter, no sound, and with my friends only. If they give me one hundred thousand, it will be sixteen, with some sound, and my friends. If they give me one million, probably thirty-five, with some color, still with my friends. If they give me ten million, it will be in color, probably CinemaScope, with professional actors. If they give me a hundred million, I'll do it for a hundred million. I don't care. Here is the script. How much money will you give me? I'll do it for you. And if I find out that I will be compromising too much, then I will not do the film.

Nevertheless, Forman does not see small budgets as having any inherent value. His desire is to have the amount of money he needs to make the best film that he can. Forman says, "When I was doing Loves of a Blonde, I wanted much more money, but they wouldn't give it to me, so I made it for less money." Despite the seemingly contradictory nature of Forman's attitudes about his films' budgets (being willing to accept less, but wanting more), his statements indicate a strong degree of artistic integrity. Forman's dedication is to his project first, and then to his budget and his earnings.[4]

Forman learned quickly how to fight for his own artistic integrity because, as he states,

> You can't blame the businessman for not being artistic enough to give money as generously as artists would want to. On the other hand, you have to fight to obtain money for what you believe is right and not to compromise with what some amateurs in art, even though they are the most skillful and professional businessmen, think will make money and should be done as art. So you have to fight for your own vision. And you have to fight people whose vision is often very limited because they are not artists. And it doesn't make any difference if it's an emperor or if it's a state-run theatre or if it's a president of a major studio in Hollywood.

Forman discovered that the freedom of a filmmaker in America is, in a sense, an illusion. The American director does not face the same pressures of censorship as a Czech, but his freedom is based on working within the limitations of how much the studio is willing to risk on him and how well the public responds.

Forman found out that his proven skill provided him with very little capital towards his first American project. He learned that his prior accomplishments did not automatically entitled him to Hollywood's bountiful resources. Forman worked hard for what he got and learned to be satisfied within the limitations of his lowly Hollywood status while maintaining his self-esteem. Possibly as a result, his first American film focused on a man of the same age learning a similar lesson. In Taking Off, Forman sympathizes with the desires and frustrations of a man in his mid-thirties and skillfully juxtaposes the illusory freedom of youth with the harsh limitations of adult responsibilities. As in The Audition, Forman once again effectively presents young people within the context of a try-out session for female singers. The setting allowed him to incorporate many aspects of the youth counterculture that was dominating national attention at the time. Yet, Taking Off failed at the box-office because its ending is cautious and conservative.[5] Where Forman's Czech teenagers were moving out into the world, his American adult was retreating from it, and audiences were not excited by the outcome.

Forman's limited knowledge of America and the English language forced him to work on Taking Off from within a very restricted world. But, he remembers, his own limitations actually gave him confidence and a sense of freedom:

> I didn't have many problems with Taking Off because I still had energy and arrogance to do it the way I understand it and I see it, take it or leave it, like it or not. In a certain way, ironically, that period, when I knew I don't

> speak the language, was much more easy for me. Because I relied on translations, I checked everything, I double checked, I looked in the vocabulary. I asked my friends, 'Do I understand well, don't I understand well?' It slowed me down a little bit, but I felt comfortable because I knew my reality.

By contrast, Larry Tyne (the main character, played by Buck Henry) becomes dissatisfied with his life and ignores his natural limits. Taking Off is the story of Larry coming to realize that he will be happiest by living within the restrictions that he is attempting to reject.

Forman's inspiration for presenting the tragedy and comedy in American generational conflicts came from a newspaper report about the murders of a runaway girl named Linda Fitzpatrick and her boyfriend. The story received a lot of coverage, and the father stated that the whole tragedy had occurred simply because he and his daughter had never been able to communicate.[6] As Forman came to realize, adults in their late thirties are not always secure about their lives. Forman had previously focused his sympathy on either the young or the old because he considered them to be the most helpless. But here was a man who obviously felt out of touch with the world. In the film, he became Larry Tyne, a man who continually expresses dissatisfaction with his life and tries to do something about it, but is always frustrated and bewildered by a world that he does not understand. Forman was probably influenced in shifting his focus to the parents in the story by his own situation at that time. Like Larry Tyne, Forman had neither the privilege of the wealthy nor the freedom of the young, and both seemed to lack control over their lives. At the end of Taking Off, both Larry Tyne and Milos Forman had reached a state of equilibrium and were looking forward to an uncertain future.

The principal reason behind Forman's shift of focus was that he simply found the adults more interesting than the young people. For most

teen-agers, running away was rebellious enough. Once away from home, they would simply find a place to stay, sit back, and maybe smoke some marijuana. Among their friends in Greenwich Village in the late Sixties, they obviously felt very much at home and very confident about their world.[7] The adults were the people seeking to find themselves and understand what was going on. Forman's own attempts to write the screenplay in 1968 reflect the confusion of the world at that time and the problems for an artist or anybody who was trying to understand it. Working with French writer Jean-Claude Carriere in the United States, Forman's concentration was broken by the assassination of Martin Luther King. The pair went to Paris where, in May, the student demonstrations broke out. Being again unable to work, they moved on to Prague where the Russians invaded in August, and finally finished the script after a few more moves.[8] Actual events were constantly outstriping Forman's ability to create a story more interesting than reality.

The inability of adults, in particular, to understand the social changes of the times is evident in Taking Off. From the very beginning, Forman establishes a world dominated by youth culture. The film opens with two young girls singing about a bird attempting to fly away. In Taking Off Jeannie Tyne (Linnea Heacock) runs away. But Larry, her father, is really the person who attempts to "take off." Larry is frustrated because he cannot have as much fun as he would like to and also because he does not feel in control of his life. He has a home and family, but not the freedom or the security that he would like. So he seeks to break out of his restrictive environment. The little girls' song thus reflects his aspirations. The girls wear dresses with an American flag pattern on them and sing in a soft acappella. They present a picture of innocence and give the impression that what is to follow will be an amusing and lighthearted story.

But Larry's struggle is not going to be gentle. If he were able to proceed at his own pace, Larry would perhaps be able to succeed in changing his life. But he finds that the world is moving too fast for him. As a result, he is rebuffed in his attempts to take off and his journey becomes a circular one. The opening credits sequence indicates the difficulty Larry will face. After the youngsters leave the screen, a few electric guitar notes blast out and the title Taking Off floats around like a psychedelic art piece. The music and the picture incorporate two of the major influences on popular culture and art at the time, both emerging from the youth counterculture movement. In the late Sixties, these forms of expression were associated with potentially liberating ideas of mind-expansion and freedom that came to have a powerful impact on culture throughout the world.[9] Forman's opening does not deny these qualities, but it also indicates that "hard" rock and psychedelic art have a negative side as well. They tend to drown out gentler expressions of personal aspiration. His first minute thus demonstrates what he learned while researching Taking Off: concern with the problems and attitudes of young people was overshadowing the legitimate needs and frustrations of adults.

The song lyrics of the title sequence present a plea for fairness and compassion. The singer repeatedly asks, "Why don't people believe in love?," implying that the world is cruel and based on money, formal relationships, and materialism rather than on honest and caring emotions. Her song insists in its loudness and pace that "love" should be the basis for people's lives. Larry Tyne, in his haphazard attempts to cut loose from his restrictions, eventually discovers that love itself has to be based on tangible relationships. His problem is that he is drawn towards an elusive goal by a philosophy and aesthetic that deny the value of

everything his life has been. Therefore, although the song sounds positive and appealing, its message is rather too forceful and capable of a negative impact. Without a basis for love, people are often set adrift. Thus, Larry Tyne wanders through Taking Off, encountering a world of youthful attitudes that continually bewilders him.

Through the setting of the talent competition, Forman presents several aspects of the Sixties youth counterculture. The appearance of the opening title makes use of psychedelic art. The auditioners' songs, which were almost all written by the performers, demonstrate the influence of the folk-rock movement; the clothing and hair styles of most of the girls identify them as members of the hippie movement. Some of them are probably runaways like Jeannie Tyne, seeking to find themselves, and believing that somehow they have enough natural talent to be selected for the show. The hippie philosophy of everybody being beautiful in some way seems to have captured these young girls' minds, and each one hopes to impress the judges with the way that she personally is blessed. For young people in the late Sixties, when personal expression was considered particularly important, the chance to be in a play would have been especially appealing. These girls, like Larry Tyne, are seeking to expand themselves beyond the limited restrictions of their lives, and they are equally inept. Only Jeannie, who is unable to perform when she finally gets her chance at the microphone, realizes her lack of talent. By backing away, she indicates that she is really seeking something other than a part in a play. For Jeannie, the audition represents not an escape from reality but an attempt to take on new responsibilities and find a basis for her life. She desires the same limitations that her father is trying to run away from.

Others who feel inadequate reassure themselves through the use of drugs. Both here, and also later in the film, Forman shows that drugs do provide a temporary sense of release. One girl confesses to Jeannie that she has no talent, but, she says, "When I take some Mighty Quinn. Oh, then I sing so beautiful." For a while, the girl deludes herself into believing that she is not actually talentless. But before she ever gets a chance to audition, she comes crashing back to reality. Some of the others carry her away screaming. At the end of the film, Larry and Lynn Tyne (Lynn Carlin) also experience the euphoria of getting high, only to be reminded of their proper role when Jeannie discovers them.[10] At the audition, Carly Simon explicitly states Forman's point about drugs. Simon sings, "Long term physical effects are not yet known/So I think I'll have another drag and just get stoned/Short term physical effects are so groovy." Forman shows that the long-term effects force the drug user to pay the price for his temporary pleasure.

In Taking Off, the world is constantly bringing people back to reality. The girls at the audition all have their dreams ended by a stern-looking panel of judges who never say much more than "next." Jeannie Tyne pleads with them to let her come back later to try again, but their reply dashes her hopes. Similarly, Larry's parental responsibilities keep interfering with his attempts to have fun. When Jeannie goes to the audition, Lynn forces him to look for her. Larry and his neighbor Tony (Tony Harvey) go to a bar instead and get drunk. When he arrives back home and Jeannie is there, Larry's only response is to slap her. She then runs away again. Later, Larry meets Ann Lockston (Audra Lindley), the mother of another runaway girl. While sharing lunch with her, he begins to think about the possibility of seduction. He first makes a phone call to Lynn, who shatters his dreams by saying

that Jeannie has been found in upstate New York. They go to get her only to find another girl, who has given the police Jeannie's name to try to escape her own parents.

Jeannie later comes back home while the Tynes have gone to a meeting for the parents of runaways where they get high for the first time. They return home with Ann and Ben Lookston (Paul Benedict) and begin a game of strip poker. Lynn gets drunk and Larry gets naked. He has finally lost all of his inhibitions and has done so with the approval of his wife and friends. He is standing on top of the table, naked, singing an aria from La Traviata, when Jeannie comes out of her room and sees him from the top of the stairs. Being discovered by his daughter brings Larry literally crashing back to earth. He falls off the table and quickly hides himself. Just when he had finally taken off, Larry is forced back into his father role.

In Taking Off, just about everything has a dualistic nature. The major division is the one between the worlds of adults and young people. Forman emphasizes this dichotomy by placing each group in a specific location. Young people are mainly at the audition while the action for the adults centers in the Tynes' house. The worlds are further separated by the concept of time related to each. The action of the film takes place over a period of a few weeks, during which Larry and Lynn look for Jeannie. The audition, however, takes place in the timeless world of youth. Forman intercuts the adults' story with scenes from the audition to emphasize the differences between them. For example, when Larry and Ann are having lunch, Forman shows a nude cellist playing at the audition. Larry and Ann talk about the problems of dealing with runaway children, while the music sets a pleasant mood. But by showing that the cellist is nude, Forman emphasizes Larry's ulterior motives. In separating the

adult world of family concerns from the youthful world of the audition, Forman thus incorporates two other prominent and topical aspects of popular culture. The offbeat structure confuses the normal concept of time, paralleling the effect of drugs, and allows Forman to use the young people's music in the way that it was largely intended in the early Seventies: as a comment on the hypocrisies of the adult world. Similiarly, while the Tynes play strip poker, a girl at the audition starts singing "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." The song makes clear that the Tynes are not really breaking free of their restrictions. Traditional social ethics will never allow them to. Lynn's wardrobe at the end of the poker game demonstrates her entrapment between the youthful and adult worlds. She is naked from the waist up while still wearing her modest full-length skirt.

Forman is not so naive as to make one environment purely youthful and the other strictly adult. He clearly intermingles the two, showing each group being continually frustrated by the other within its own world. At the audition, the judges are the voice of authority. There are only four of them, and they are not very much older than the girls. But they impose their own guidelines in the manner of parents or adults. Similarly, young people repeatedly frustrate Larry in what is supposed to be the world of adults. Forman uses two distinct methods of film comedy to demonstrate Larry's helplessness in a world that has become unfamiliar to him. At the very beginning of the film, Larry learns a method to stop smoking by closing his eyes, raising his fist, and repeating a series of statements in order to fight back the urge. Forman uses a long build-up to a single gag to show Larry's gesture being misinterpreted and causing him embarrassment when he attempts to employ it out in the world. The scene starts when the Tynes and their neighbors discover that

Jeannie has run away. They walk out into the street to look for her as the low rumbling of Dvorak's "Stabat Mater" begin playing on the soundtrack. Forman cuts to Larry in Manhattan, searching for Jeannie. He continues to look throughout the day, going on to Greenwich Village. The music continues building as he sits down on a park bench to practice his non-smoking technique. With his eyes closed, Larry does not notice a young black man staring at him curiously. The music reashes a crescendo as Larry raises his fist and opens his eyes to see the black man returning a power salute to him.

In the next scene, Forman utilizes the silent comedy technique of building a series of gags to demonstrate how Larry's honest intentions are again mocked. He goes into a Village coffee shop and gives the lady there a picture of Jeannie with his phone number on the back. Larry then looks through a number of other pictures and happens to find one of a girl who is in the restaurant with a group of Hell's Angels.[11] Larry calls the girl's mother and sits down to wait until she arrives, but in the meantime, the girl and her companions decide to leave. Larry trys stalling and shows them the picture, which one of the Hell's Angels takes from him, telling him to mind his own business. He follows them out the door at what seems to be a safe distance, but when they turn around, he begins to run. A Keystone Kops style of chase thus begins, which Forman once again uses for both narrative and thematic purposes. A cab pulls up and Ann Lockston jumps out to run after her daughter, who takes off in the other direction. The cab driver chases after Ann to try to get paid. The Hell's Angels continue to intimidate Larry, and he runs around the block where he confronts Ann's daughter, who dashes into a building. Larry and Ann meet, quickly exchange greetings, and go after her. The cab driver finally gives up and turns around, only to

see the Hell's Angels driving away in his taxi. Forman has thus advanced the story and accurately presented the confusing nature of modern life.

When the Tynes go to a resort to have some fun after their futile trip to upstate New York, Larry is again frustrated. At a nightclub, Larry just watches, fatigued, as Lynn gets drunk. On stage, Tina Turner voices the Tynes' attitude as she sings "Good-bye baby, you're driving me crazy." The Tynes just want to forget about their problems for a while; these youthful attitudes turn Lynn young and playful, but leave Larry bewildered. Grabbing his knee under the table, Lynn attempts to seduce him but Larry goes off to bed, leaving her alone. A single man mistakenly thinks that she wants some company for the night. He follows her back to the room and enters while Lynn is washing. Larry switches on the light to find him standing by the door, with his pants down to his ankles. After he runs out, Lynn emerges from the bathroom and continues trying to seduce Larry by dancing around and singing "The Camptown Ladies." Larry stares at her in total confusion.

The Tynes' antics and their daughter's actions demonstrate another difference between them. Both are attempting to cross over into each other's world. The frustrations that each receives from members of the other generation help make the opposing world look appealing because of its very inaccessibility. Each group feels that the other has more freedom. But while the adults look foolish when acting like children, they must realize that Jeannie's acquiring of mature habits is only natural. Larry's getting drunk at a bar and eating a hard-boiled egg, with the shell, his attempt to seduce Ann Lockston, and Lynn's escapades at the resort all exemplify how silly adults can look when they get too playful. But the small group of parents trying marijuana for the first time is Forman's best example of adult foolishness.

The group's guest speaker, a psychiatrist, claims that getting high will help them understand the appeal of drugs, and thus their children. He turns the meeting over to one of his ex-patients (Vincent Schiavelli), who has donned a suit and tie for his lecture. His strong nasal tone accentuates his false solemnity as he explains how to get high. He tells the parents how to hold a joint, which end to light, how much air to take in with the smoke, and how to hold the smoke down. He even explains smoking etiquette: "Do not, repeat, do not hold onto the joint. This is called bogarting and it's very rude. Pass the joint to your neighbor." The end of his presentation makes clear that the psychiatrist's treatments have not done anything to change him: "When you get down to the end of the joint, you will be left with just a small part. Do not throw this away. These are called roaches, and I will collect them when we're finished." Far from being finished with marijuana, the speaker uses the opportunity to add to his own private supply.

The parents, of course, act even more foolish than the lecturer. One woman studiously takes notes. Some of them ask questions: "Several of us have had a few drinks. Alcohol and pot, do they mix?" The response: "Oh, they mix very well." Once they have started smoking, they all feel the effects in different ways. One man claims not to feel a thing. He asks a woman if she does. She shakes her head no while staring blankly off into space. He puts his hand on her breast and repeats the question, and she repeats her answer. The lecturer plays a record and tells them just to go along with whatever they feel. One woman approaches him seductively and he backs away in intimidation. But when she gets very close to him, she begins singing along with the record and dancing. The group leader and the psychiatrist sit on a couch with two joints. To be polite, they pass them to each other.

Several other people wave their arms about, imitating the feeling of floating. The reaction of the man who was not affected at all indicates that their actions may be all fake, but it all still seems very innocent. Nevertheless, Forman sometimes cuts to the stern portraits of an older generation looking down accusingly from the wall, reminding them of their responsibilities. Jeannie's discovery of her parents a short time later finally brings them back to a full recognition of their roles.

Jeannie, as an adolescent, is naturally in the process of moving from the world of childhood to that of adults. Her bedroom symbolizes the world she is leaving. While the Tynes worry about where she is, Tony asks if they have looked in her bedroom. When they go do so, the camera pulls back, showing them entering a completely alien world. The scene demonstrates how little Larry and Lynn know about Jeannie. The room's decorations and knick-knacks indicate a little girl's tastes, but Jeannie has already begun to change. The Tynes show a lack of awareness of their daughter's changing needs and desires that would prompt her to go out into the world on her own. Jeannie may still be their little girl, but Lynn has never considered that she may have reached the age where she needs a diaphragm. Tony looks up from under the bed to ask if Jeannie smokes. Larry replies, "No, she doesn't." Tony asks, "Does she smoke much?" Larry again responds, "No, she doesn't smoke at all." Tony then shows them some cigarettes.

Jeannie does not run away to gain freedom from restrictions or to rebel, but to begin taking on responsibility. While away from home, she auditions for a show and goes to stay with a musician whom she meets there. Both of these actions reveal her desire to find her own place in the world. The inexperience of the young people in the film is both their advantage and their problem. They benefit from it because they do

not recognize their own limitations. On the other hand, they suffer from it because, like the adults, they tend to look foolish when they get into situations that they are unable to control. Forman reveals this fact in a montage sequence of several girls singing the same song that exactly repeats a similar scene in The Audtion. This scene provided a major source of inspiration for Forman when he decided to make Taking Off:

> When I was doing Competition, you know, Konkurs, I just loved that sequence and I was suffering, not having a real professional means to do it the way I wanted to do it because I was shooting it with a 16 mm camera which was not synchronized with the tape recorder. So I had a lot of things out of synch, and I had to cut in a way I didn't want to because of that. So when I realized that I could more or less repeat the same idea in Taking Off and do it well, and professionally, so that I could see really on the screen what I was planning to do in Competition and never succeeded, I just did it.

The girls sing a song called, "Let's Get a Little Sentimental," about finding romance and making plans for the future. It expresses their dreams and also the lack of romance in their lives. Forman ends the song by showing a little girl, who symbolizes the innocence, vulnerability, and inability of all those who preceeded her.

In Taking Off, Milos Forman shows that almost everything has a dualistic nature. The acid and marijuana have pleasant short-term effects but produce horrible results. The girls at the audition are not all terrible. Forman, in fact, was amazed at the number of talented performers he found, all with original material. One girl sings a song called "Ode to the Screw," that illustrates his point in general. The lyrics keep repeating the phrase, "You can fuck . . ." and then state the object or person such as lilies, roses, queens, and kings. The final line is "But first you must fuck me." Forman cuts immediately to Lynn Tyne, who is crying because of her worry about Jeannie. The cut implies that Lynn wants and needs intimacy. Her later dance for Larry

in the hotel room is an attempt to perk up her own sex life. Though the song is crude, the girl sings very beautifully. Her performance exemplifies its meaning, which is that the word "fuck" itself has a dualistic nature as both a curse and a reference to something beautiful.

Similarly, Larry Tyne does love his daughter even though he does not show it very well. Larry and Lynn both uphold middle-class morality, but they very willingly take their chances to indulge in sexual promiscuity in an effort to replace the lack of intimacy in their lives. Jeannie Tyne does not necessarily want a lack of restrictions even though she runs away from home. Forman's dualistic focus in Taking Off on youth and adults and his emphasis of the dichotomous nature of people and things reveals the same quality in American itself. The freedom to go anywhere and do anything (which Larry strongly desires) conflicts with the desire for a stable home and family (which he also wants). Larry's dilemma comes from his feeling of deserving both. In the end, though the world is still very confusing to him, he realizes that his happiness must be based in his love for his wife and daughter. The closing song "Feeling Kind of Nice, Though the World is Spinning," expresses his condition exactly.

Forman makes the world's illogical nature apparent throughout the film. The psychiatrist who counsels Larry on how to quit smoking is a strange looking bald-headed man with a bow tie. Tony is a skinny man with awkward looking glasses, but his wife Margot (Georgia Engel) describes him as "an animal" who wants to have sex almost twice a day. A picture on the Tynes' wall symbolizes the world's almost indefinable nature. When looked at from one angle, it is some flowers, but when viewed from the opposite side, it is a ship. "That," says Ben, "is what I call art." Forman's revelation that people in their mid-

thirties are often very confused and helpless is evident in his film. Larry does not understand his daughter, and New York City overwhelms him. Forman first shows him on his search for Jeannie with buildings towering over him. Later, the policeman with whom the Tynes deal with at the end of their frustrating trip to upstate New York stands above them on a stairway, again emphasizing their subordinate position. In an empty gesture, he stupidly offers them a cup of coffee before they leave.

Several of Larry's actions, such as when he comes home drunk and slaps Jeannie after Lynn has reassured her about how much they both love her, contradict his and Lynn's previous ones. His constant frustrations reach a climax when he meets Jeannie's boyfriend. She brings him home for dinner, and he is the complete opposite of the Tynes. A long-haired musician who writes protest songs, he obviously does not think much about traditional ideas of hard work and social formalities. He does not shake hands with Larry when he enters. The musician (David Gittler) understands the irony of writing songs objecting to actions of the government, which collects taxes off of his productions to support the very things he protests. He says that he has learned to accept contradictions, but he is saving his money to buy a thermo-nuclear missile because he wants to alter the balance of power. These contradictions bewilder Larry, but the world finally becomes too much for him when the musician states his income as $290,000 a year. Larry reacts by reaching for a cigarette, which shocks Lynn, but also indicates his decision to accept himself and start acting normally.

Twice, Forman shows where Larry feels most natural. When he talks with Jeannie after the strip poker game, Forman narrows the frame by filming from behind an open door. Later, when Jeannie's boyfriend arrives, Larry finds Lynn huddled in the pantry closet, crying in fear. He

comforts her there, showing the only scene of intimacy between the two in the entire film. Larry feels comfortable in these restricted areas. The world overwhelms him, but in these places he can feel at home. His identity is secure. He ends the story by singing "Stranger in Paradise." Forman thus demonstrates the irony of freedom: many people enjoy it most when they have a knowledge of their limitations. America offers variety, excitement, and boundless opportunities for pleasure. But a person who tries to take advantage of these often finds confusion, chaos, and unforeseen restrictions. Such was the experience of both Milos Forman when he first came to America and Larry Tyne in Taking Off.

The problems of making a film in a new country plagued Milos Forman in Taking Off, which gained critical acclaim (winning a Special Jury Prize at the Cannes Film Festival, 1972 and the Best Picture Award at the Belgrade Film Festival, 1973) but was a commercial failure. Forman was in tune with the tastes of Czech audiences because, as he says,

> I grew up in that country. So I knew these people. I knew their problems, I knew their quirks, I knew the details that distinguish them from people in America. The way of life and attitudes which is all related with place and history and culture and everything. So I had this life experience in Czechoslovakia to work from.

When he came to the United States, Forman learned directly about the family relations he presents in Taking Off, and he already knew American film. He did not know American audiences. Larry Tyne's final turning inward and narrowing expectations is perhaps artistically and psychologically accurate, but it reflects Forman's European sensibility and hesitancy. Audiences do not want to hear that people should be satisfied with limited goals. Forman's conclusion is also disappointing because it varies from his successful productions in two significant

aspects. First, Larry admits defeat, which is something that none of Forman's other heroes ever do. Second, Larry retreats from the world while Forman's other heroes are ready to encounter it. Taking Off accurately captures the spirit of the times and the situation of its director, but the failure of its hero alienated audiences.

As someone who had learned much of what he knew from American films, Forman had always wanted to work in Hollywood. He came to the United States fully expecting to have the same amount of creative freedom that he had in Czechoslovakia, but he was quickly disappointed. Taking Off parallels Forman's initial disenchantment and the importance of maintaining personal values while searching for new opportunities. One of the auditioners sings a beautiful song called, "Even the Horsies Had Wings," telling of a lost imaginary world where living a harmonious existence was still a real possibility. The final line states, "But I'm afraid I have forgotten to do something . . . Horsies?" Forman intercuts the girl's performance with scenes of the Tynes looking through Jeannie's room with all its childish knick-knacks. They also try to recapture that world of lost innocence and illusive possibilities, though Larry generally heads in the wrong direction. For a while, he feels frustrated because he cannot take advantage of the rewards that he thinks he deserves. In going after those rewards, he loses sight of those simple but fulfilling dreams that are available to him. At the end, he takes the first step back towards recovering them, but Jeannie is not ready to embrace him. She barely responds to him, which lets Larry know that he still has to prove himself to her.

Forman's next three American features all present characters who have simple dreams and try to put a human face on an impersonal system

(be it administrative, government, or social). In this manner, Forman's dominant theme always remains constant. His main characters always seek to transcend the limitations of their existence. These concerns are exactly the same as those of the Czech New Wave. Forman has worked and suffered to achieve consistency in his career, one of his most important goals. The film industry does not make it easy for a commercially unproven director to do only the work that he wants. Taking Off's failure at the box office forced Forman to wait for two years until he was again offered a feature film that he considered worth making.[12] Forman's persistence attests to his artistic integrity and his ability to maintain his values.

ENDNOTES

[1]Forman has always viewed consistency as an inherent quality of filmmaking. During the shooting of The Firemen's Ball, he remarked, "The critics expect . . . that a new work is totally new. That's impossible. Throughout his life a man retells the same story over and over again" (Skvorecky, All the Bright Young Men, 68). At the same time, he also seeks to grow with each film. As Forman describes it, consistency is only a means of maintaining artistic integrity while changing:

> Here is a question for somebody: Is a person capable of seeing to it that the unrepeatable, the unique, does not repeat itself? Can a person avoid allowing the unique to be transformed into constant repetition? Because, in the end, both the artist and--with a certain delay--the audience cease to be amused. It would be ideal if a person could evolve smoothly and progressively from one stage of his work to the next stage, as 'unrepeatable' as the last. But perhaps only Chaplin had conditions like that. In our own situation, the way things stand, it definitely isn't possible. (Liehm, Closely Watched Films, 228.)

Forman's own gradual evolution marks one of his most important achievements.

[2]Not only was the Sixties' youth counterculture bewildering to adults, by 1971 it was also falling apart as a result of commercial absorption, fragmentation into various causes and styles, and too many incidents of young people falling prey to dope dealers and other exploiters. Forman captures the ugly and unappealing aspects of youth in the film's audition sequence. The girls' desperateness and lack of touch with reality are just one of the film's accurate portraits of the time. For a complete discussion of the counterculture's collapse, see David Pichaske (153-227) and William L. O'Neill (233-74).

[3]Forman discusses his dealings with the studios prior to Taking Off in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (102-09). The story is retold in several other sources as well: Norman Kagen (67-68). Gordon Gow ("A Czech in New York," 20), Leonard J. Berry (31-32), and "The Czechs in Exile" (70). Forman found his experience ironic because American studios were giving him the same criticism as Czech officials: he was too cruel to the "common man."

Antonin J. Liehm's review of Taking Off explains why an Eastern European director, who has no high standard of living to lose, stands a better chance of maintaining his artistic integrity in America than his Weatern European counterpart. Liehm also reveals how Forman's method in Taking Off remained consistent, and he attacks American critics who,

like Communistones, prefer ideology to realism (The Milos Forman Stories, 114-24).

[4]Josef Skvorecky comments,

> Reminiscing about Milos, one of his characteristics comes to my mind: he knew how to preserve his integrity even in situations where he risked everything. Rather than assist on films with which he disagreed artistically, he left his safe job and freelanced. In a socialist society this is a complicated ploy. Rather than begin a film with an incomplete screenplay, he ignored the possibility that the producer might wish to find a readier man. Rather than giving in to the taste of a famous foreign moneybag, he gambled that he might somehow repay him eighty thousand dollars, which, for a citizen of a socialist country, is a task about as simple as walking around the world on the meridian. Rather than accede to the dramaturgical ideas of a large American corporation, he risked an even greater dollar debt situation which for him, as a Czech, was extremely uncertain. (All the Bright Young Men, 91-92)

[5]Forman admits to Todd McCarthy "the problem of the film was . . . the ending. The film built bigger expectations than the ending delivered" (18). The film's detractors generally ignore Forman's themes, attacking him instead for belittling his characters. Benjamin DeMott, for example, criticizes Forman's parents as people who have no sustained concern for their children and sees his vision of suburban domesticity as unrelentingly cruel. DeMott's argument totally ignores Larry Tyne's journey towards self-discovery, the function of the audition sequences, the contradictory signals that Jeannie gets from her parents, and Larry's confusion about the world.

In fact, many of Taking Off's attackers charge Forman with cruelty for showing adults who act ridiculous when they should be caring. Yet, they ignore the fact that the film begins with Larry Tyne trying to gain control over his life, and they are unwilling to allow him the freedom to do so. Jeannie's running away happens to be one event that occurs during Larry's personal struggle. DeMott also accuses Forman of showing the Tyne house as full of empty material goods and decorations. He neglects to mention that such artifacts can only have meaning when people provide them with one. The Tynes are not capable of doing so until the end of the film. DeMott correctly asserts that Forman presents Larry as a fool, but he never bothers to ask why.

George N. Boyd basically echoes DeMott's criticism of Forman's lack of continuity. He finds no explanation for Jeannie Tyne's running away and no evidence of self-revelation at the end. Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. ("Lovers") sees Forman as exploiting youth, tacking on an arbitrary ending, and trying to explain all of America's problems. Westerbeck never suggests what the theme might be or notices that Larry's search for his daughter is really for himself. Robert Hatch ("Films," 19 April 1971) believes that Forman is paternalistic and treats everything too much as a joke, but admires him for reducing the generation gap problem down to its actual size. Jay Cocks also sees Forman as exploiting young people and stating only that parents are self-centered hypocrites. Stanley Kauffmann (24 April 1971) congratulates Forman on not trying to

"say" anything about the generation gap, but is mainly critical. He finds all of Forman's films heavy on atmosphere, but light on theatricality, and his vision of America as reflecting the social structure of Eastern Europe.

John Simon (Reverse Angle) was the most caustic critic, expressing only pure disgust for Forman and his film, which he perceives as a mere example of the director showing his superiority to the rest of mankind. Simon's determination to criticize causes him to entirely miss Forman's point that his characters are alright and merely need to find themselves. A more balanced notice comes from David Brudnoy, who admires the film, but registers some understandable complaints about Forman over-caricaturing, such as when the adults smoke dope and play strip poker. Paul D. Zimmerman generally likes the film, focusing his comments on Forman's effective use of the auditions and examination of the parents. But he also finds Lynn and Larry Tyne's reunion as lacking motivation.

Richard Schickel ("Parents and Kids") and David Wilson ("Taking Off") give the film its highest praise. Schickel shows rare perception by placing the film directly within its time period as an explanation of national problems that cites mere human frailty instead of a corrupt system as the basic cause. Schickel admires Forman's depiction of both youth and adults as foolish but deserving compassion and the American tendency to respond to a problem by forming an organization. The film is not as flawless as Schickel states, but he presents an excellent concise sociological analysis. Wilson begins by attacking the film's critics and then illustrates Forman's skillful timing, beauty, realism, and comic style. He accurately notes Forman's optimistic view of human frailty and depiction of the inadequacy of communication, chronicling the differences between "what is said, what is meant, and what is understood." Penelope Gilliat, Vincent Canby ("The Screen: 'Taking Off,'" "A Man in Pursuit"), Charles Champlin, Sandra Hochman, Hollis Alpert, Molly Haskell ("Downfall Parents"), Susan Rice, and Variety ("Taking Off") also give Taking Off positive reviews.

I. C. Jarvie cites Taking Off's similarity with a number of other films of its time in depicting the lost sexual basis of marriage, accompanied by a guilty search for pleasure outside of it. Adults are restless and bored, which inspires their children to run away. These comments, as well as his observation that Larry Tyne is still a decent and harmless man, are all accurate (73).

[6]Forman recounts the origins of Taking Off in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (109-13) and Dialogue on Film (6). Leonard Lipton describes them also (144-52). J. Anthony Lukas's articles ("The Chase," "The Two Worlds") were the sources of Forman's inspiration.

[7]Forman researched his material by renting a house in Greenwich Village that had an open door to teenagers. He met the parents of some runaways through a friend. James Conaway and Grace Lichtenstein both describe Forman's life in the Village. Forman also talks about his experiences with runaways and their families in Dialogue on Film (8) and in his interview with Eric Sherman (32).

[8]See Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories (102-03).

[9]Herbert I. London explains the goals of the Sixties' counter-culture and the general revolution in values during that time period in Closing the Circle (101-37).

[10]Carlin describes her strong personal differences with the character she played in Judy Klemesrud's article.

[11]This scene also originated in an actual incident. See Lukas, "The Case" (52).

[12]James Conaway discusses Forman's strong optimism in light of the early reviews and massive attention he received immediately following Taking Off's release. Forman's situation reveals how quickly fortunes can change in the entertainment industry and how valuable learning not to panic can be.

CHAPTER FIVE

THE DECATHALON AND ONE FLEW OVER THE CUCKOO'S NEST: COMMENTS ON HUMAN FRAILTY AND AMBITION

The irony in the title of Taking Off for Milos Forman was that, for a time, it brought his career to a grinding halt. Forman's plans had been to return to work in Czechoslovakia, but after Taking Off, two factors prevented him from doing so. First, Barrandov Studios fired him; as a result, he was no longer able to work within the national production system. Second, Taking Off's commcercial failure made Forman more determined than ever to prove himself in America. Only now, he also faced more difficulties than ever before. His professional failure sent him into a deep depression. For months, he sulked around in a bathrobe while fellow ex-patriate director and former co-screenwriter Ivan Passer went to a psychiatrist, telling Forman's problems as if they were his own, and then bringing the doctor's suggestions back with him.[1]

Another factor probably contributing to his depression was that Forman was now a man without a country.[2] In America, Forman had no personal history or integration with the people and culture from which to create, or, as he says, "I don't have this life experience to cook from in the United States." As a result, all of his feature films since Taking Off derive from already existing works. Forman says that the change in the origin of his material relates directly to the change in his nationality: "I realized that not feeling adequate, neither in

the language nor with the life experience in the country to cook from, I decided consciously to turn to working from written material by somebody whose language is English, whose life experience is American." The remainder of Forman's American films show the retreating personality at the end of Taking Off, having now taken a step back, re-examining life once again. Working with already existing material provides Forman the security he desires for interpreting a foreign culture while still allowing him the freedom to present his own vision.

Forman's next two films were the excellent and sadly overlooked sequence of the 1972 Olympic film Visions of Eight titled The Decathalon (1972) and the extremely popular One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975). These films are very different in terms of subject and style, but thematically similar. Most importantly, both allowed Forman to distance himself from American culture. In The Decathalon, Forman concentrated on accurately recording the event and then letting its meaning emerge from the material during the editing process. Forman thus preserved all of the contest's natural comedy and drama as a spectator would experience it without over-dramatizing or over-intellectualizing. He found in The Decathalon a parallel for man's constant striving after illusory rewards within the guidelines established by men who have little concern for the outcome. Cuckoo's Nest presents the very similar situation of a three-way struggle for power with most of the effort again appearing to be futile. In the film, Forman accomplished much more than winning his first Oscar and solidifying his status within the American film industry. Cuckoo's Nest fulfilled the complex and contradictory desires of an audience at mid-point between the socially liberal Sixties and the conservative Eighties. It also showed that those who strive for power are ultimately doomed to failure because of their own human weaknesses.

This message provides a reassuring interpretation of the Watergate crisis as being caused by people and not the system, even though it does portray social institutions as corrupt and self-serving. Furthermore, it contains Forman's consistent theme that individuals are responsible for obtaining their own freedom.[3] The combination of these messages make One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest a significant document of the immediate post-Watergate era.

Milos Forman's position now is completely reversed from what it was in the early Seventies. At that time, Forman found that even for a proven director, a box-office failure in America could have an effect almost as harsh as a political misstep in Czechoslovakia. During those years, Forman says,

> Because Taking Off was a commercial flop, I discovered the bitter reality behind it because suddenly there was not any exciting project available to me. I was not a commercial director and so even if I read something or saw something which was very exciting and was very rich material for a film, it was only to find out that others who had more power and more clout will be chosen before me to do it. Because I did not have the money to buy myself the rights to do some good successful property.

Forman spent part of this time living in New York City's Chelsea Hotel, famous for housing struggling artists, where he was able to stay for months at a time without paying rent. As soon as he was able, he began writing screenplays again, making one more effort at creating his own original American work before turning to literature as the source of his films. One of the scripts Forman worked on during these hard years, he says, was an adaptation of Thomas Berger's novel, Vital Parts:

> I worked on two projects, Bulletproof and Vital Parts. Bulletproof I never really got a shape to the script that I was happy with to start pushing hard to make it, especially in the situation I was in after Taking Off where I was not hearty enough to let me do an original screenplay with this unproved material or anything like that. Vital Parts was a different story. I enjoyed working with Berger very much, and I liked what he did. But for some reason which is a total

> mystery to me, we never finished the screenplay. There is something in that book which is very tempting and wonderful to work on except that somehow we never came to a satisfying ending for the story.[4]

Forman also wrote a screenplay called The Autograph Hunter with film critic Paul Zimmerman based on the writer's own short story, but it was turned down by Paramount.[5] Zimmerman later wrote a completely new script from the same story which Martin Scorcese made as King of Comedy (1983).

Forman's memories of this time in his career reveal his personal integrity. He never suggests that he might have been willing to take any project just to be able to keep working. The thought seems to never have entered his mind. Each of the aborted projects that he worked on were ones which he at least briefly felt a strong personal desire to make. He seems to have never considered a project for which he did not feel that desire. Forman's only completed film during these years was The Decathalon, and for that, as he says, he hardly received enough money to pay the rent:

> That was my only income between 1971 and 1974. Besides a 200-300 dollar fee for lecturing at some university which I only did two or three times a year. I got ten thousand dollars for doing Visions of Eight, and that was my only income for two or three years.

Producer David L. Wolper was the guiding force behind Visions of Eight, allowing one director from each of eight different countries to select his or her own aspect of the Olympics to make a short film about. The film was both a critical and popular failure, partly because the Arab terrorist slayings of nine Israeli atheletes at the 1972 Games far overshadowed its efforts to display feelings of brotherhood and optimism. Critics were particulary harsh with Forman, though none of them really bothered to analyze his contribution or search for his theme.[6] Had they done so, they might have discovered The Decathalon's real strength

as a film that both preserves the integrity of its subject and makes it a symbol for the modern world.

In 1936, Leni Riefenstahl's classic documentary Olympia created an homage to the ancient Greek ideal of physical beauty and a visual poem about the splendor of the athlete in motion.[7] Most of the directors working on Visions of Eight attempted to find contemporary meanings in the Games using methods similar to Riefenstahl's. They each concentrate on the athletes during a specific moment or event to illustrate a preconceived idea. Some of the segment's titles, for example, are The Beginning, The Longest, The Strongest, The Fastest, The Highest, and The Losers, indicating the directors' sole concerns with exploring a concept or the meaning of a moment.[8] Each segment begins with a series of black and white still shots of its director during which the artist explains his or her purpose in a voice-over.

Mai Zetterling chose to focus on the weightlifting competition and titled her segment The Strongest. She explains at the beginning that she knows nothing about weightlifting and cares little about sports but is concerned with the concept of obsession. Her film follows the athletes' mental and physical preparations for their brief moment of competition, which she includes before showing the dissembling of the arena, thus revealing the elaborate amount of work that goes into allowing these huge men one minute each in which to lift the weights and then put them back down. Her focus, in other words, is on her idea instead of on the natural drama of the event. Similarly, Juri Ovulov states at the start of The Beginning that he was interested in exploring the moment of concentration before the athlete competes. These directors are clearly trying to explain an idea rather than presenting the Games as a spectacle for the audience to enjoy and ponder, one that contains

its own inherent meanings. Their segments are didactic in telling the audience what to think rather than letting it take in the event and then search for meanings on its own.

By contrast, Milos Forman's opening statement clearly identifies him with his audience. Forman expresses a personal reason for wanting to make The Decathalon: "Ever since I was a young boy, it was my dream to see the Olympics. That is, I guess, why I made this picture. I got to see the Olympics free and have the best seat at the events." Forman thus identifies himself with any other average spectator who also wants to enjoy the decathalon's self-contained drama. The difference is that Forman is able to give the event a meaning that most others would not see. To him, life is like a decathalon, with some people exhausting themselves until they are either rewarded or forgotten or both. Meanwhile, others applaud from the sidelines while still others set the rules. Thus, Forman's title, The Decathalon, is general and symbolic, and his film is a microcosm of modern life, incorporating all aspects of the event.

Considering the nature of the project, Forman's decision to make the film fit his professional desires at the time as well as his personal ones. His identification during the opening credits as Czechoslovakian reflects Forman's insecurity regarding his nationality at that time. Because he lacked a firm identity, The Decathalon provided a perfect subject for Forman. Examining an event of an international scope allowed him to quit worrying for a while about addressing an American audience with interpretations of its own country. Forman's decision to film The Decathalon was also a wise one because it allowed him to create a variation on his work going back to the beginning of his career. The Decathalon's importance to Forman is similar to that of Why Do We Need All Those Brass Bands?, another short film that served the purpose of a

prelude to a feature. So the structural similarity of the two films should not be surprising, even though it probably was to Forman. Milos Forman is a director who, despite his intense preparation for each film and the consistency of his working methods and technique, has learned to rely on his artistic instincts. His own statements reveal that even though he very appropriately reached back to the beginning of his career in order to make a new start with The Decathalon, he never did so consciously:

> I don't know very much about myself. I can only answer one thing. Every time I thought, 'Well, this was a tough one, I hope I learned a lot,' when I go to the next one, I usually discover, to my consternation, that I have to do the same amount of work, use the same amount of energy spent, and go through the same amount of anxiety. And the previous experience didn't teach me anything.

That Taking Off resembled The Audition and The Decathalon Brass Bands is certainly a coincidence, even though a significant one, because a conscious effort to recreate his earlier film would have been clearly inappropriate.

In The Decathalon, as in Brass Bands, Forman again blends traditional music and sports, intercutting the two both in terms of visuals and sound. The difference in The Decathalon is that the two entertainment forms are used in a complementary fashion rather than being shown in competition with each other. To say that the music and athletics complement each other is not exactly true, because that is not what is going on. Instead, Forman uses the music as a dramatic equivalent for the spectators at the event while his filming of the competition communicates the comedy and drama of what the athletes are experiencing. Forman does not attempt to interpret what the athletes feel or come to any philosophical conclusions about the event. Instead, he presents his impressions by including both the spectators and the competitors, revealing his

experience to be similar to that of someone who is watching at home on television or viewing his own completed film in the theater. But unlike the television announcer who may want to heighten the drama for his audience or the other directors who worked on Visions of Eight, Forman keeps the entire event in perspective by not eliminating the spectators as a part of the whole. His approach does not diminish the drama of the competition or the beauty and power of the athletes' bodies, but it does allow the viewer to enjoy the event without raising its significance into the realms of important philosophical statements. Yet, a profound picture of our lives and times does emerge.

Forman begins The Decathalon by showing some performers in traditional costumes on a stage. The music that these and other similar performers make throughout the film creates the dramatic equivalent for the spectators at the event. Forman identifies them as representing the spectators through his editing. A brass band conductor stands in front of a line of musicians with his baton raised and looks off to the left for the signal to start. The next shot of a line-up of atheletes waiting to begin the first race makes it appear that his signal will be coming from them. When their race is over, he begins. Throughout the film, the music expresses emotions that sometimes match those of the athletes and sometimes do not. The high hurdles sequence at the beginning of the second day incorporates a transition from the first use to the second. Sometimes the music responds to events (as during the fifteen hundred meters), sometimes it manipulates them (as when the officials set the hurdles), and other times it is silent as the natural drama of the competition takes over (as at the conclusion of the last event). In all cases, it represents the emotions of the spectators.

If Forman had been attempting to represent the athletes' emotions through music, he could have merely created a soundtrack. By actually showing the performers, he indicates that the music is separate from the competition and belongs to someone else. By showing the performers in native Bavarian costumes, he gives them a quickly recognizable identity, matching the folk music that they play. The audience thus gains the impression of the music representing spectators who are average people expressing basic emotions and not necessarily interested in thinking of runners as an expression of freedom in an overly-mechanized world, Kon Ichacawa's description of sprinters in The Fastest. The only variation in costume comes during the final event where the spectators are represented by an orchestra and chorus in formal dress performing Beethoven's Ninth Symphony. The change here indicates the heightened nature of the drama for both athletes and spectators and the congruence of their emotions. The music expresses the joy of achievement in merely completing the two day, ten-event competition, while a grimace from the conductor matched in the following shot by a grimace from a runner demonstrates the equally felt pain of the struggle to achieve.

Forman uses three similar shots of the line of musicians, the line of runners, and the line of judges' hands at the beginning of the film to also indicate the congruence of emotions at that point of the event. Sensibilities are at a dramatic peak as the competition begins. The solemn music of two cow bells and a long mountain horn matches the tension of the athletes as they prepare and of the judges as they watch. Natural sound takes over during the first race as Forman and the spectators concentrate on the power of the athletes running down the track. When they finish, the conductor starts his brass band, which

plays some lively music, indicating the relaxation of the spectators as the long jump competition begins.

Forman also uses shots that complement the music at various times for a comic effect. During the shotput competition, a classical piece about a cuckoo bird expresses the awkwardness of the athletes as they shift their weight around in the throwing circle. During the discus throw, Forman creates a dance between the music and athletes who are prancing around in order to keep loose. Through these shots, Forman relieves the dramatic tension and thereby communicates an accurate impression of the event because neither the spectators nor the athletes are able to maintain a peak of drama throughout the entire two days. Forman shows that the athletes' and spectators' emotions are not always congruent at times when the music does not match the action taking place, such as when a frustrated long jumper pounds his fist while the music continues on happily.

Forman also uses the music sometimes to communicate the idea of the spectators seeming to manipulate events. For example, at the beginning of the second day's events, he shows a woman who begins playing the popular tune often associated with fox hunts and horse races. Forman then shows the judges marching in, helping to set up the high hurdles, and taking their places all speeded up to the beat of the fast-paced music. Those formalities would be a part of the event that the spectator would pay scant attention to and want to hurry along, yet they are part of the event and so Forman presents them. Forman mocks the judges at other points in the film also. He uses slow motion accompanied by natural applause to show one judge carrying a shotput ball over to a trough where the contestants pick it up. Intercut are shots of a conductor waiting to begin and appearing as if he is watching until the judge completes

his important ceremony before doing so. During the "dance" of the discus throwers, Forman contrasts the athletes with one judge whose rhythmical movement consists of shifting his chin. As the tension builds during the final event, another judge is shown sleeping in the stands. The music seems to nearly wake him, but he goes on sleeping.

Forman does not diminish the importance of the judges' tasks. He does show them a few times concentrating hard on their work. But he mocks their ceremonial nature in comparison with the freedom, power, and gracefulness of the athletes. They provide comic relief as they might for any spectator. The fact that these very non-athletic men ultimately have final judgement over these superbly trained athletes is somewhat ironic, and, despite their importance, they are easily subject to humor. Forman's use of them restates one of his most constant themes: the presence of freedom within limitations. In this sense, Forman has a similar point to make as Ichacawa, but his actual message is much simpler. Forman presents the decathalon as containing humor, drama, triumph, and pain much like many other events,but it is no more and no less than that. Yet, life itself is not any more than that. So Forman does express some animosity towards those who control or casually ignore the event and ritualize their own actions.

Despite the simplicity of his purpose in this film, Forman employs more aspects of film technique merely to relate to his audience what experiencing the decathalon as an outside viewer is like than all the other directors use in attempting to make their profound philosophical statements. For example, Forman makes four different uses of sound and two camera styles in presenting the high hurdles event. Following the fast-paced action and music of the set-up for the event, Forman switches to natural speed and sound for the beginning of the race. With the

start of the second day of competition, the complete focus of attention on the event is exactly where it would be. The sound remains natural until two of the runners fall and are obviously finished for the rest of the competition. The sound of a lamenting yodel, matching the spectators' sympathy for the fallen athletes, begins as they are carried from the track. The tune becomes a lively one as the race continues, but Forman also shows some shots of the injured runner being led back to the locker room, now obviously forgotten by the crowd.

Forman also employs stop action in the film during the high jump event. The "cuckoo" song and the picture both come to a sudden halt as the camera focuses on the bar, where attention is naturally placed during the event. The picture remains there as a series of jumpers go over the bar. With this sudden change of camera and sound, Forman captures the abrupt shift from comedy to drama that is often possible in sports and thus renders an accurate impression of the event. Since Forman typically blends these elements in each of his films, his viewing the decathalon as being like life is readily apparent.

At the conclusion of the competition, Forman again mixes his use of pacing and sound to heighten the drama where it would most naturally be strongest and most memorable. As the final lap of the fifteen-hundred meters approaches, the tension builds for the spectators, athletes, and judges as Forman cuts from the runners to the orchestra conductor to the official waiting to sound the bell for the last lap. Forman uses the natural sound of the bell to signal the end as the music and the race both reach a crescendo during the final lap. When the race is over, the music also stops as the runners collapse in agony. Forman again uses natural sound, allowing the drama of the ordeal to express itself and not attempting to interpret what the athletes are feeling.

He then hurries through the awards ceremony, an event which few people remember anyway, with lively music and fast-paced action and concludes with a shot of the two American contestants waving good-bye. Having given their performance, the actors leave the stage. That their drama is played out in a sports arena instead of a theater does not make it any less important to Forman, who finds it equally representative of life.

Visions of Eight was not capable of establishing anyone's reputation, and for some of the directors involved it did more harm than good. For Milos Forman, it was a means of distancing himself from direct interpretations of America or any foreign society, keeping active, and earning some money. In the meantime, Forman was still searching for a good property from which to make his next feature. His failure to bring either Bulletproof, Vital Parts, or The Autograph Hunter to the screen was almost certainly good fortune for him because his free time made him available to make the film that was to win him his first Oscar and solidify his position in the film industry.

Forman remembers having no question of wanting to accept the project when it was offered to him:

> It was my own luck that I was being offered such awful projects that for two years I was doing practically nothing until one day I found that [I was being asked] to do the honor of the book One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. So I read the book, and to my great excitement I found it by far the most intelligent and exciting piece of literature I had read in a long time. So, it was not at all a question in my mind to say yes I am interested to do it.[9]

Cuckoo's Nest, written by Ken Kesey and originally published in 1962, was a property uniquely capable of fulfilling Forman's professional needs at that time. The enormous popularity of the novel among college students throughout the Sixties and early Seventies provided the filmmaker with a ready-made audience, one which it was essential for Forman

to reach an identification with in his next film.

Making this connection depended on Forman's ability to distance himself from his characters as he had done in The Decathalon and working from literature allowed him to do so. He had not succeeded in Taking Off in acting as a direct interpreter of American culture. In making Cuckoo's Nest, Forman was able to begin from the position of being just like any other reader of the novel, a point he emphasizes when asked about why Ken Kesey dislikes the film:

> I'm sure that if a writer was capable to see how his readers, who love the book, are visualizing in their own mind, they would be very unhappy. They would call every reader an asshole. And unfortunately for me, the filmmaker is the only one who can present it and whose vision the author can see. Fortunately for the readers, no author can see what kind of vision he created in the minds of the people who are reading the book. And of course then, translating a book or a play to a film, now I'm talking as if I was just doing an illustration of the book, you know, because a reader reads the same words and only visualizes and sees people a different way probably. But in a film, it goes beyond that. My philosophy is that to make a movie, not just a photographic summary or record of the book, you have to use it as a source material for your own film vision. I think that every filmmaker has to have the same right as the author, who also doesn't write out of a vacuum.[10]

One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, coming to the screen thirteen years after its original publication, represented a particularly unique problem for a filmmaker. The work's established audience would naturally want to see the meanings they took from the novel displayed on the screen, but Kesey's themes were no longer appropriate and would only make the film seem outdated. Forman was mainly successful because he recognized the humor in the story, transforming it from a tale of horror to one of understandable human weaknesses.[11]

The film version of Cuckoo's Nest was released within a historical situation exactly opposite of what had existed when the novel was

originally published. Kesey was responding to what he saw as the overwhelming conformity of the Fifties. For him, to be a success in America meant a complete loss of individuality, and those who could not fit in to the system were sent someplace to be "fixed." Chief Bromdon, Kesey's narrator in the novel, a huge Indian who has been acting like a deaf mute for ten years in order to escape the attacks of an inflexible society, expresses the author's vision of what America is becoming:

> All up the coast I could see the signs of what the Combine had accomplished since I was last through this country, things like, for example--a train stopping at a station and laying a string of full-grown men in mirrored suits and machined hats, laying them like a hatch of identical insects, half-life things coming pht-pht-pht out of the last car, then hooting its electric whistle and moving on down the spoiled land to deposit another hatch. (203)

"The Combine" is what the Chief calls an imaginary organization that secretly controls the country, making sure that everything runs smoothly and is not interfered with by unpredictable human nuances. For Chief Bromdon, the Ward in which the novel's action takes place is the center of the Combine and is kept running smoothly by Big Nurse, also known as Nurse Ratched. She controls the Inside, as Chief sees it, while her accomplices control the Outside. In Chief's view, the world is full of the Combine's labels such as rooms known as OT, PT, and EST and its products or workers such as Public Relation, a cheery fat-faced man who gives middle-aged women tours through the hospital, telling them how wonderfully improved it is over the way it used to be.

Aligned against all these symbols of conformity is the book's hero, Randle Patrick McMurphy. His initials, R.P.M., are also symbolic. They indicate that his very nature is revolutionary and unable to bend to the Combine's demands. At one point, the Chief sees him as symbolizing the mythic American males known in legends as the builders of the country:

> He walked with long steps, too long, and he had his thumbs hooked in his pockets again. The iron in his boot heels cracked lightning out of the tile. He was the logger . . ., the swaggering gambler, the big redheaded brawling Irishman, the cowboy out of the TV set walking down the middle of the street to meet a dare. (172)

Kesey provided no escape from the Combine. It had taken over everywhere, and McMurphy's struggle was one in which he bravely fought on without hope of victory. McMurphy realizes that the only way that he will be able to physically survive either inside or outside of the ward is to spiritually defeat himself and become one of the Combine's artificially happy automations, dutifully fulfilling his place in society. When he finds out that almost all the other patients are there on a voluntary basis and cannot leave because they are afraid of the outside world, he realizes the power of the Combine and decides to take his stand against it. The other men are on the ward because of the Combine's work, and McMurphy does not want to see it go on any longer. His fight is for the spirit of the country and for the men who are unable to conform and afraid to do otherwise, and against the threat of everybody being forced to. When McMurphy is being given a series of shock treatments by Big Nurse, who promises to stop them if he will only realize his mistakes and demonstrate his willingness to conform, the Chief reports that he "regretted that he had but one life to give for his country" (242). His battle against Big Nurse is an epic struggle for the soul of a people and when McMurphy misses his one chance to escape the ward and ends by being subjected to a lobotomy, the Chief theorizes that no other ending could have been possible.

McMurphy is also an Ahab and a Christ-figure: someone who is able to strike out against God and act as a savior to his people at the same time. As Ahab, McMurphy is attacking the invisible powers that

control the universe of the book. His connection with the mad sea captain emphasizes the futile nature of his battle and Big Nurse as merely the mask of what he is fighting against. Kesey draws the analogy specifically in describing McMurphy's undershorts, which are "coal black satin covered with big white whales with red eyes" (76). McMurphy explains to the Chief that the shorts are from "a co-ed at Oregon State, . . . a Literary major. . . . She gave them to me because she said I was a symbol" (76). McMurphy fulfills the role of a Christ-figure by sacrificing himself for his people, although, as fellow patient Dale Harding says, "Don't ever be misled by his backwoodsy ways; he's a very sharp operator, level-headed as they come. You watch; everything he's done was done with reason" (224). This statement simply means that McMurphy has his own interests in mind before those of anybody else, which only proves that he is a peculiarly American-styled Christ-figure. Harding defends McMurphy as "a good old red, white, and blue hundred percent American con man" (223).

Still, Kesey makes the parallels between McMurphy and Christ blatantly obvious. McMurphy comes into the ward, gathers his followers about him, instructs them in how to live, and then sacrifices himself for them even though he has done nothing wrong. He dies merely because he is a threat to the status quo. Kesey leaves no doubt about his analogy when he refers to the electro-shock therapy table as looking like a cross and the Chief wanting to touch McMurphy merely because "he's who he is" (188). The fishing trip is also directly out of the Christ story. McMurphy leads his twelve followers out to sea and goes down into the hold, but when chaos breaks out on board, he is forced to come back up and calm everything down. The Chief completes the analogy by saying that the last time any of them saw him conscious "he let himself cry out" (267).

The obviousness with which Kesey makes McMurphy into a Christ-figure increases the effectiveness of the scene when Harding denies that he is one while at the same time denying Big Nurse a chance to regain her power. She feels that if she can make an example of McMurphy the ward will return to its former routine. Taking over the words of Christ, she tells Harding that McMurphy is going to return: "I would not say so if I was not positive. He will be back" (268). Harding responds, "Lady, I think you're so full of bullshit" (268-69). Now that McMurphy has shown them that they are men, the patients have no need of a myth to help guide them. They certainly are not going to return to Big Nurse as their savior.

Nurse Ratched is also a larger than life character in the novel. The Chief pictures her as being like a machine who sits at the center of a giant control system through which she can discover anything that is happening and work her will with whomever she wants. She is the center of a system that operates both outside and inside the ward to keep people contendedly going about their business without complaint. She works mainly with mollifying kindness, but is able to resort to force when necessary. Because the Chief is unable to go outside the ward, the novel only reveals fully Nurse Ratched's life on the inside. Harding speaks at one point of the charity work she does, and Nurse Ratched herself talks about her long relationship with the mother of patient Billy Bibbet, a shy thirty-one year old who stutters and has attempted suicide several times. At the end of the book and the film, Billy ends his life by cutting his throat. These outside activities of Nurse Ratched's support the all-encompassing role that she has in the novel, which is also symbolized through her name, Big Nurse, and through her most distinctive physical feature, a pair of very large breasts. Those breasts have

never nursed any infants, but they have provided a horrific type of sterile nurturing. Big Nurse's job is to produce men who are "useful" to society. The Chief says,

> When a useful product goes back out into society, all fixed up good as new, better than new sometimes, it brings joy to the Big Nurse's heart; something that came in all twisted different is now a functioning, adjusted component, a credit to the whole outfit and a marvel to behold. Watch him sliding across the land with a welded grin, fitting into some nice little neighborhood where they're just now digging trenches along the streets to lay pipes for city water. He's happy with it. He's adjusted to surroundings finally. (40)

The living robots that Big Nurse produces are a reflection of her own mechanical nature. The way in which she ignores her amply endowed bosom represents her denial of her own femininity and humanity and establishes the reason for McMurphy's last act in the novel: his attempt to rape her. Their battle in the novel is that of a struggle between two large conceptions of what America is, and McMurphy's one chance of victory is to get Nurse Ratched (its similarity to "ratchet" forming another reference to her mechanical nature) to recognize her own humanity. In telling his story, Kesey has thus blended three great works into one novel: Moby Dick, The New Testament, and 1984.

Milos Forman, in his film version of One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, also creates a story incorporating two visions of America: one of conformity and one of freedom. McMurphy once more battles Nurse Ratched, but this time his victory is narrower because the head nurse represents a much less significant force: she is a bureaucratic dictator but she is not part of a huge network of control. Forman maintains the spirit of the novel by presenting McMurphy as a rebellious hero within an institution that demands conformity. McMurphy performs a comic role when he undermines Nurse Ratched's authority by announcing the World Series in front of a blank television screen after she has denied the

patients the right to watch it, stealing the hospital bus to take the men on a deep-sea fishing trip, and organizing his companions into a basketball team that proves to be an equal match for the ward's aides. At the conclusion, McMurphy becomes an object of sympathy when Nurse Ratched has him lobotomized and the Chief mercifully kills him before escaping. When the Chief lifts a four-hundred-pound shower control panel, throws it through a window, and runs away, fans of the novel can experience the thrill of the familiar ending.

But, in contrast to the book, the Chief is the only character McMurphy sets free, because he is the only one who has gained the courage to act on his own. Forman gives the story a contemporary meaning by showing it as a struggle for power among McMurphy, Ratched, and Harding. On its surface, Forman's film appears to have a conservative message because the hero is battling an oppressive social system dominated by a woman and a homosexual. Forman's blending of the theme with Kesey's liberalism produced Cuckoo's Nest's tremendous success, but his depiction of all three characters as failing to achieve or maintain power because of their very lust for it presents his true theme. Forman shows that, like Richard Nixon, people who strive for power are susceptible to their own human weaknesses, a fact that everyone else needs to realize. In the end, each individual is responsible for either working towards his or her own freedom or remaining entrapped by the whims of whoever has power.

In the film, Forman's camera work complements the Academy Award winning performances of Jack Nicholson as McMurphy and Louise Fletcher as Nurse Ratched to create characters who are much more human than the mythic figures of Kesey's novel.[12] Nicholson's McMurphy is no longer an Ahab figure because he does not need to be.[13] Nurse Ratched is

exactly what he is striking out against and not merely the representation of some larger evil. McMurphy's John Paul Jones remark and Harding's reference to him as nothing but a traditional American con man have also been dropped, but Forman does translate the Chief's characterization of him as a mythic hero into the screen. The opening shot shows the red light of daybreak glowing out over a dark mountain. The music starts with the sound of an American Indian drumbeat, which is joined by a gentle folk guitar and a mournful harmonica that also has a mocking tone to it, like something has past but does not really merit deep sympathy. From out of the deep shadows of the mountain, the headlights of the police car bringing McMurphy from the prison camp to the hospital emerge.

In this one shot, Forman has created McMurphy as a mythic figure. He represents the freedom and elemental forces associated with the American wilderness. The mountain becomes an important symbol of manhood. When the Chief is ready to leave the hospital at the end of the film, he tells the comatose McMurphy that he is "big as a damn mountain." The native and folk music associates McMurphy with the basic instincts and emotions of Americans who are closely related to the land and do not have much power such as American Indians, farmers, and mountain people. The harmonica sounds like a lament, but McMurphy is not a character who would mourn anything and so the slightly mocking tone is appropriate. When the Chief makes his escape at the end, the harmonica tune briefly becomes a joyous orchestrated crescendo before lapsing again into its gentle sound. The feeling that it communicates and the possibility of it bursting forth in triumph are the emotions that Forman wants the audience to leave the theater with.

Throughout the film, McMurphy is also associated with other forms of music, country, Hawaiian, and Christmas, that immediately call to

mind stereotypically American lifestyles and traditions. This music contrasts directly with the records that Nurse Ratched plays on the ward, bland orchestral pieces supposed to soothe the men's nerves, which actually act as a repressive force designed to help the patients forget thier complaints and become adjusted rather than voice their opinions. McMurphy complains at one point that it is so loud the men cannot think. In addition, McMurphy's love of games and sports, his gambling nature, and his sexual prowess further identify him with the ideal values of the working-class macho American male. These characteristics also support his role as a Christ-figure since he uses them to get the other patients to gather their courage and pursue the possibility of freedom awaiting them in the outside world. The opening shot also associates McMurphy with the outside, which represents freedom.

For the second shot of the film, Forman pans from a window inside the hospital ward across the bed of one of the patients and on through the room. The darkness of the ward is broken by scattered patches of red light coming from the window, like sunlight seen from under water. The association of the red light with freedom and the idea of the men being kept like fish in an aquarium are important symbols throughout the entire film. At the end of the shot, Forman briefly shows an abstract painting of what appears to be a man screaming for help. The picture silently voices the condition of the patients and helps establish the hospital as a mythic world opposed to that of the outside. Such a painting would not seem to be one that a doctor would want his disturbed patients to have, and it is certainly not one that Kesey's Nurse Ratched would ever allow on her ward.[14]

Forman's starting the shot from the barrier formed between the two worlds by the wall, and the opposite movement of the camera from

the opening shot further support his quick division of the world in the film between the outside and the inside. This division does not exist in the novel. In the film, McMurphy is able to heighten the other men's feelings of freedom and self-respect to a degree exactly equal to the distance that he is able to take them away from the hospital by involving them in sports such as basketball and fishing. McMurphy starts simply, within the ward. When he arrives, four of the men, Charlie Cheswick (Sidney Lassick), Billy Bibbit (Brad Dourif), Harding (William Redfield), and Martini (Danny DeVito) are playing cards.[15] McMurphy gathers his first follower by flashing his own deck of pornographic playing cards at Martini and luring him away. This action demonstrates that McMurphy is presenting the men an alternative reality that is more appealing to them than anything they have experienced before.

Forman is able to use more subtlety in presenting McMurphy as a Christ-figure than Kesey does, which is completely appropriate to the way in which screenwriters Laurence Hauben and Bo Goldman have arranged the story.[16] In the film, McMurphy commits all his acts of rebellion before finding out that Nurse Ratched has complete control over how long he must stay in the hospital, which is opposite from the book's chronology. All of his sacrificing is therefore completely unintentional in the beginning. Nicholson's performance supports McMurphy's ambiguous nature. He seems to be always on the edge between supreme logic and absolute insanity. He demands admiration, but he really cannot be trusted. Nicholson's best demonstration of this dual nature occurs when he tries to lift the shower control panel. He begins by taking some deep breaths, working himself into a frenzy, and uttering some gibberish as if he were speaking in tongues. As he strains to lift the panel, every vein in his arms and neck seems to pop up. He is clearly entering his own

distinct reality. His failure at the impossible task seems to prove his insanity, but like the other patients, the audience can only admire his effort. What began as a whimsical bet had a serious purpose all along.[17] McMurphy's ambiguity also functions as the source of both his success and failure. The patients all think he is crazy but follow him as if he were sane, while the doctors believe him to be sane but treat him as though he were not. In the end, he is able to inspire the patients, but cannot maintain his freedom within an environment that demands conformity.[18]

Forman's subtlety effectively captures McMurphy as an unwilling sacrifice. He shows McMurphy on the ward for the first time taking exercises with the other men before the daily therapy session. Forman shoots him from behind as McMurphy stands briefly with his arms stretched out in the crucifix position. McMurphy repeats this stance a short time later when he first tries to show the Chief (Will Sampson) how to play basketball. He stands under the basket with his hands raised up in the air and gets the Chief to copy him. When he hands the Chief the basketball and looks down, the Chief looks at him briefly as if he would like to bounce the basketball right off of McMurphy's head, or worse.[19] No one else dares act so openly because they all know how vulnerable it makes them, especially the Chief, who later explains to McMurphy that the system destroyed his father because he was a strong man. The Chief has therefore acted deaf and dumb for twenty years to try to protect himself. But when McMurphy stands next to him on top of Bancini's shoulders, the Chief's expression changes. He realizes how big McMurphy is in spirit. Forman captures this idea in the next shot. As Bancini (another patient) begins to run around, McMurphy starts screaming, "Hit me Chief! I'm open." His voice fills the soundtrack, giving the impression that he is now the dominant force at the hospital, but Forman's camera is on

Nurse Ratched watching from an omnipotent position inside the hospital. She maintains the power and McMurphy's optimism is false.

The games and sports constantly going on among the men have an important dual function in the film. They identify McMurphy with the traditional interests of the stereotypical American male while also establishing him as a true life force. On their own, the men play meaningless games of cards and Monopoly. Games, especially Monopoly, are significant because they represent a way of bringing life down to a manageable size and taking risks that actually have no penalty. McMurphy always tries to get the men involved in a big game, meaning life. His fight with Nurse Ratched over allowing the men to watch the World Series on TV symbolizes a struggle for the world between Christ and the devil. Basketball represents an attempt to get the men to aim for a higher goal, and the fishing trip recalls Christ's proclamation to his disciples, "I will make you fishers of men."

The fishing trip provides important symbolism that relates to Forman's own message as well. In this scene, Forman strongly emphasizes the idea that the men are taking on new identities. McMurphy manages to confiscate a rental boat by telling the harbor manager that the men are doctors from the mental hospital. Forman captures them in individual shots as he introduces them and they all look suddenly sophisticated.[20] This segment represents a change from the novel where McMurphy tells the manager that they are a government expedition and gives him a phony number to call and check on it. The men then sail out of the harbor and under the bow of a bridge, an act symbolizing rebirth. When they are out on the ocean, McMurphy tells Martini, "You're not a loony now. You're a fisherman." Charlie Cheswick wears a hat in the same style and manner

as McMurphy and sings, "I'm Popeye the sailor man" while steering the boat. McMurphy gets the men started fishing and then goes below deck with his girlfriend. Martini immediately leads the men up front to try to peak in the windows. Chaos erupts when Cheswick turns around, sees no one on deck, and leaves the steering wheel. The boat starts going crazy, McMurphy comes up on deck, and Taber (Christopher Lloyd) hooks a fish. All of the men struggle together to bring it in while Harding and Cheswick fight over the steering wheel. Forman pulls up to a high shot to show the boat going in a circle. Its motion reinforces the association in the film of the outdoors with freedom, which is also symbolic not only in the opening scene, but in the shots of the Chief standing on the hospital grounds looking longingly out through the fence as well. When he helps McMurphy jump the fence in order to steal the bus, he smiles broadly at the sight of his fellow patient enjoying freedom. Similarly, inside the ward, Bancini always sits gazing out through a window. On the fishing trip, Forman's use of bright clear colors for the only time in the film also expresses the idea that the men are experiencing something totally new: a beautiful world that lacks restrictions.

Though McMurphy is associated with mythic qualities in the beginning of the film, representing the spirit and freedom of the outside, by the end, he is reduced to human status and his redemptive powers are not as great as in the novel. Nurse Ratched is also a much more human character than she is in the novel, which makes any victory that McMurphy achieves a smaller one. In the film, she is not the center of a huge organization. There is no Combine. Instead, Forman presents Nurse Ratched as the sole barrier between the men and their chances to be free. She represents the oppressive world of the inside, and she carries much

more responsibility for the men's conditions in the film than she does in the novel.

Hauben and Goldman's script makes a human character out of Nurse Ratched, but the combination of Forman's camera and Louise Fletcher's performance truly defines her as a person whose initially good intentions have been transformed into an oppressive personality.[21] Nurse Ratched is never called Big Nurse in the film. She is not a character of mythic proportions. She is even referred to by her first name, Mildred. Although she is in absolute control of the ward, she has human weaknesses and she makes mistakes. When she suspects trouble during the therapy session at which the men are voicing their complaints, the three black aides appear behind the patients in response to some invisible signal from her. McMurphy has expressed his resentment to the men for not telling him about Nurse Ratched's control over the length of his commitment. With him supposedly subdued, she falsely feels that she has restored order. She loses her composure and yells at Cheswick to sit down when he demands his cigarettes.

Forman presents Nurse Ratched as a character who genuinely believes that she has the patients' best interests at heart and Louise Fletcher offers no hint that the situation might be otherwise. Several times, Forman's camera captures Nurse Ratched in extreme close-ups or moves in on her as she is speaking, but Fletcher calmly ignores it. The deviousness of her statements in the novel are not apparent in the film. The most obvious example is at the staff meeting when the doctors are trying to decide what they will do with McMurphy (another parallel to the story of the crucifixion). When Nurse Ratched calmly states that they should not pass on their problem by sending him back to the prison farm, the camera is again unable to capture a note of malice. Her statement that

she thinks they can help him is made away from the camera and is dramatically ambiguous. Her major weakness is that she desires control. She treats the ward as her private domain, entering with a steady walk and saying good-morning to the aides with unfriendly reserve. At the end of the film, when she tells the sexually represssed, adolescent-minded Billy Bibbit that she will have to inform his mother about his spending the night with a woman, she knows what effect it will have on him. She searches for the way to regain her authority and shows little regard for its impact on Billy. In doing so, she causes his death and defeats herself. Billy slashes his throat, and the men no longer treat her with deep respect.

Besides the music, camera work, and performances, Forman also makes strong use of wardrobe, colors, and setting in Cuckoo's Nest, exploiting the symbolic possibilities of these aspects to a far greater extent than in any of his previous films. Forman reveals Nurse Ratched's love of order and conformity in his first shot of her entering the ward. She wears a black cape and hat and is balanced perfectly by her three black aides who all wear starched white uniforms. When McMurphy first comes onto the ward, he wears his own clothes until the end of the first group therapy session. He is dressed all in black like an avenging angel, his clothes indicating his feeling of independence. Among the other patients, only Harding, who has pretensions to being a leader, keeps his own bathrobe on over his hospital clothes. The fact that his institutional garb is the closest to him shows that he is really identified with the repressive hospital and his attempts to act independently are really just a flimsy cover. Taber is accurate in the first patient therapy meeting when he says that Harding is "full of bullshit."

As the story progresses, McMurphy's changes of clothes indicate how he is slowly and unconsciously being taken over by the hospital. His patient's clothes, which are the same color as the hospital walls, come to dominate him whenever he is inside. His entrapment evolves gradually. The first time he is in hospital clothes, he wears his shirt completely open down the front with his own on underneath. The next time, he has on a hospital shirt that has no buttons, and his own clothing is still on under it. By the end of the film, he is wearing only hospital clothes. The patients change in the exact opposite direction. At the meeting when they voice all their complaints, Scanlon (Delos V. Smith, Jr.) has a plaid work shirt on over his hospital clothes for the first time. Martini wears his own clothes and Cheswick holds his coat in front of him. Their status is exactly reversed, but Forman does not leave complete assurance in the conclusion that they will soon be leaving the hospital.

At the end, the men are all in their beds, still needing to take their first steps towards freedom. McMurphy's sacrifice means little if they do not accept responsibility for themselves the way the Chief does. Forman does not allow his characters to escape personal responsibility. McMurphy's victory over Nurse Ratched is a limited one because it is not going to insure the freedom of any of the men. At the end of the film, they must begin to individually assert their own independence.

When the Chief leaves, he will still encounter a world as ugly as the one he left when he first entered the hospital. Although Nurse Ratched only controls the mental ward in the film and is not a part of a Combine, Forman demonstrates the infective nature of the hospital's view of reality in society. When the men go out on their fishing trip, they see mostly deserted streets. The few people who are around are as lifeless as the

chronics on the ward. One couple has pulled a pair of folding chairs up to a television set playing in a department store window. They turn their backs on life in order to enjoy the culture that is presented to them. Forman thus presents television as another dictator of the social order.

When the men arrive at a trailer park to get McMurphy's girlfriend, an old man stares blankly at the camera. When they return from their fishing trip, a number of people line the dock, staring at the men just as blankly. These are people, young and old, who have been worn down, who go places to observe life rather than experiencing it themselves. When they are no longer able to do that, they just sit and stare. From his first film, Forman has always demonstrated a very intelligent use of extras and Cuckoo's Nest is no exception. The vision that he presents of America in October of 1963 is not one filled with the optimism of the Kennedy Administration's Camelot, but of stifled individuals for whom being on the outside is no guarantee of freedom.

Even within the hospital, Nurse Ratched has not been completely defeated, but only shaken. Forman makes further symbolic use of her wardrobe in the film's closing scenes to demonstrate her remaining authority. On the morning following the party that McMurphy holds to celebrate his planned escape, she and the aides stand facing the men. She asks Scanlon to retrieve her cap for her, which is lying on the floor. Her cap symbolizes a crown, showing that she is in control. The symbolism is supported by a line of McMurphy's from the night before when he tells Harding, "Lord Randle is stepping down." Nurse Ratched has waited while McMurphy had his fun for a chance to regain control, and now she has it. When Scanlon hands the cap back to her, Forman focuses on it in close-up. It is battered and dirty, but she is still wearing it. When the film

ends, Nurse Ratched has a large brace around her neck, but she is running the ward. Her power is no longer what it once was, but she does has some. The men act much more freely than they had previously. Harding imitates McMurphy's style of dealing cards and they talk now with a confident sounding slang, but they are still there.

What McMurphy accomplishes briefly and what the Chief preserves with his escape is a blending of the inside and outside, which can be compared with the physical and spiritual worlds. In presenting the characteristics attributable to each, Forman effectively uses both color and setting. When McMurphy takes the men outside, they begin to experience a sense of freedom and fulfillment that transcends their individual weaknesses. Charlie Cheswick's comment of "Isn't it wonderful?" when they arrive at the boat dock applies to more than just the setting. Inside the hospital, Nurse Ratched is able to administer to their physical needs, but she provides no release from their spiritual troubles.

Forman's use of color and setting is particularly skillful during the scene in which McMurphy finds out about Nurse Ratched's control over how long he will have to remain in the hospital. McMurphy acquires this knowledge in the hospital pool from one of the aides. The setting is appropriate because of the contrast presented with the freedom of the ocean. Unlike the open sea, the pool has definite boundaries. The men sit in it like fish while the aides walk around the side holding long poles. These are not to bring in a catch, but to push the men away from the sides, and in contrast with fishing poles, they are completely inflexible, reflecting the attitudes of the hospital staff. Moreover, the pool is not a natural environment. Forman first shows the water as a murky gray. One of the chronics known as the General (Peter Brocco) looks thoroughly confused as he gets wheeled into it by another patient.

Forman then shows the water as a clear blue when the aide tells McMurphy, "You still don't know where you are, do you?" McMurphy may feel free while he is in the water, but the pool is much different from the ocean. He also feels free to act as he pleases, but the hospital is not like the prison farm. He is now on the inside where Nurse Ratched has control.

A short time later, Cheswick's demand for his cigarettes at a therapy session results in a fight among McMurphy, the Chief, and the black aides which ends with all three unruly patients being sent for electroshock therapy. When they enter the shock ward, a small red light goes on indicating that the gate is unlocked and the attendant can let them in. Cuckoo's Nest was actually filmed at the Oregon State Hospital where the action of the novel took place, and this brief shot indicates Forman's ability to create symbolism out of the natural environment that he is working with. The red light, which symbolized freedom in the opening shot of the film, is used here to represent the entrance to what the hospital considers to be freedom. The insanity of the notion that this therapy is actually being used to help the men is emphasized by the fact that the hallway of the ward is lined with jail cells filled with men probably considered to be hopeless cases. The empty whiteness that dominates the setting represents the blank future that the hospital methods are leading the men to. In one shot, a bright rectangular white light shines at the end of the hall. A future dominated by the forces of the inside and excluding the outside is a future devoid of life and color.

Essentially, the men on the ward feel trapped because Nurse Ratched, along with everybody else associated with the hospital staff, has a warped idea of freedom. For her, men are only free when they are controlled and given a sense of order. In dealing with McMurphy, she is attempting to take someone associated with the freedom of the outside

and make him submissive to the restrictions of the inside. Forman makes effective use of a small prop to symbolize the hospital's philosophy in McMurphy's first interview with its director, Dr. Spivey. McMurphy admires a photograph of the doctor holding up a large fish he caught. The picture contrasts significantly with the later fishing trip scene and also reveals the doctor's character. He takes the freedom of the outside and tries to conveniently frame it in a very casual manner. He is not a malicious man, but he very easily conforms to oppressive measures. McMurphy carries the analogy of the photograph to society as a whole when he mentions that he has had only five fights and always gets arrested while Rocky Marciano has had forty and earned a million dollars. The point is that society admires violence and macho tendencies, but, hypocritically, only when they are controlled.

Forman naturally ties all of the film's symbolism together in the closing scenes. When carefully analyzed, they make both his real theme, and the fact that Cuckoo's Nest is neither sexist nor misogynist, abundantly clear. When McMurphy lets two girls into the ward for the farewell party, he begins the blending of the outside and the inside. He wakes up the men by calling over the intercom, "the nighttime spirits are here," referring to the liquor that the girls have brought. As with most things, Forman shows that liquor to have a dualistic quality. It provides the men with feelings of release and confidence during the party, but the next morning finds McMurphy lying by an open window with an empty fifth next to him. The alcohol has become a further source of entrapment. The morning begins with a shot of some birds sitting on the open windowsill, representing McMurphy's blending of the outside and in. The passage is closed when McMurphy loses his last fight with Nurse Ratched and becomes subject to a lobotomy, but the Chief reopens it at the end of the film.

In contrast with the book, Forman presents Nurse Ratched as the sole barrier between the inside and outside. Ken Kesey presented a much greater condemnation of American society than Forman does, which is understandable since Forman found a release in this country from imposed conformity while Kesey was in the exact opposite position in 1963. Kesey explains all of the men's troubles as stemming from some time when each was very young. Therefore, McMurphy's dethroning of Nurse Ratched in the novel also overturns society's oppressiveness and almost automatically sets the men free from their fears. Forman makes no such references to any social causes to the men's problems. He does present the outside world as a scary place, so that the film ends with none of the men having yet moved out.

A television news report playing as Nurse Ratched leaves the dorm on the night of the party indicates both her role and the nature of society. The announcer first states, "Officials are cautiously hopeful about a temporary opening in the Berlin Wall over the holidays." McMurphy does create that opening, but Nurse Ratched closes it again when she returns the next morning. She and the aides stand opposite the patients, forming a human wall between the men and the red exit sign that indicates freedom. The second report is about the bombing of a church in Birmingham, Alabama that killed three children. That kind of social pressure is something that the men may not be able to handle, since their status in society is not much higher than what that of blacks was in the early Sixties. America, in 1964, was not especially kind to its minorities. Here, Forman accurately captures the nature of society that Kesey was attacking in his writing, but he does not pretend that McMurphy's victory would make much difference in it. Thus, the final scene of the film only indicates that some of the men might now

have the confidence to try to leave the hospital, but that is all.

Nurse Ratched is not only a barrier between the men and spiritual growth, but also the symbol for an empty and stagnant future unless she has her power taken away. The disturbing notion included in Forman's version of Cuckoo's Nest is that he seems to be making a condemnation of a society led by professional, asexual women and homosexuals. Harding is the homosexual character, and Forman presents him much more negatively than Kesey did. McMurphy's rebellion is actually an attempt to reverse an inverted social hierarchy. As the dominant female imagery available to the men, Nurse Ratched's sterilizing qualities are evident in her stiff posture, her all-concealing clothing, and her separation from the men in both the group therapy sessions and in the sacred sanctum of her inner office. Her relationship with Billy Bibbit most clearly reveals her role as a castrater. At one meeting, she makes Billy nervously answer questions about his failed relationship with a girl he wanted to marry. When McMurphy is about to leave the hospital at the end of the party, he stays only because Billy wants to have a quick "date" with one of the girls (Marya Small) who came. McMurphy agrees to it, and never does get away.

The girl's name represents one of the two ways in which almost all the women in the film are viewed: either as sexual threats or builders of male egos, or as castraters. When McMurphy first picks her up for the fishing trip and she enters the bus, he says, "Boys, this here is Candy." Candy's function is obviously to help turn boys into men and she succeeds in doing so with Billy. The other patients eagerly wheel Billy up to the room where he is to spend the night with her. His success will be something that they can all share. Just before the two enter the room, McMurphy affirms the importance of the act to establishing manhood and the functional nature of the girl when he tells Billy, "I've

got twenty-five dollars that says you burn this woman down!" The challenge also makes the act communal.

The men demonstrate their new maturity the next morning when Nurse Ratched returns and discovers Billy. They all cheer him, and Billy speaks clearly for the only time in the film, proudly telling the nurse that he is not ashamed of what he has done. The men appear to have won until Nurse Ratched mentions telling Billy's mother and reduces him once again to a quivering, helpless boy. McMurphy again tries to leave, but stays in order to support the other men's new-found manhood. He is standing by the open window, facing a black aide who has left Billy to come and stop him. The occurrence re-emphasizes Nurse Ratched's primary concern with cutting off the patients from freedom. In the meantime, Billy kills himself by slashing his throat with a piece of broken glass. Everybody rushes back to see him and Nurse Ratched attempts to maintain control by insisting that everybody should go back to their old routine. McMurphy is not about to let her regain that control, but thinks now that the only way to stop her is to kill her. He then attacks. The difference from the novel, where McMurphy attempts to rape her, is significant. In the film, Nurse Ratched does not need to be exposed as merely human. She is evil and she needs to be killed.

Another woman present in the film, an aging night ward supervisor, supports the image of professional woman as castrater. She comes onto the ward just before the party is about to begin while the janitor, Mr. Turkle (Scatman Cruthers), McMurphy, the other men, and the girls are hiding in the inner office. Turkle goes out to try to explain why the lights had been on. He is not doing well when a crash is heard from inside the office. Candy looks out from the door and says "Sorry." The supervisor tells Turkle to "get that woman out of here immediately," and

then leaves. The party and Billy's chances for maturity are thus saved at the expense of Turkle's job. Eliminated from the film are references to the Chief's mother as the cause of his father's drinking and to Billy's mother as the cause of his shyness. Forman thus avoids any attacks on motherhood. He also removes from the story the young intelligent and humanitarian head nurse of another ward who completely opposes Nurse Ratched's methods.

The only other woman in the film is the young impressionable aide to Nurse Ratched. The direction that she will eventually go presents an interesting question. This girl is shy, nervous, and afraid of McMurphy's wildness. She does not understand the world and she believes that she is helping the men by drugging them in order to keep them under control. When McMurphy is arguing with the men about his committed status, Forman briefly captures her in close-up to show her reaction to him. When he shows her in a two-shot with Nurse Ratched, he reveals the security she receives and lends the ward dictator a true quality of motherly protectiveness.

This girl fears McMurphy, but she has also seen the impact that Nurse Ratched has on Billy, being the one who discovers his body. Most likely, her fear of McMurphy will dominate her. McMurphy has thus acquired some negative points in his struggle to help the men. He has cost Turkle his job and succeeded only in scaring Nurse Ratched's young aide. Both situations have positive possibilities from McMurphy's shaking these two people out of their complacency. But what they mainly prove is that McMurphy's vision of order contains little more human compassion than Nurse Ratched's. In the end, McMurphy's attempt to strangle Nurse Ratched and her ordering of his lobotomy demonstrates that their methods of problem solving are essentially the same. These points

indicate Forman's lack of complete admiration for the freedom that McMurphy has to offer. The film seems to say that choosing between macho males and asexual women is really no choice at all. Somebody is always left out. For all of McMurphy's struggles, not much change ever occurs. When the Chief leaves, he is returning only to the same society that beat his father down, and the rest of the men are left behind.

Harding represents an example of McMurphy's failure. In the book, Harding is also a homosexual who symbolizes the weak status of the patients before McMurphy arrives. But he is intelligent, and Kesey explains his problems originated from social factors when he was very young. McMurphy has no trouble accepting him. Forman makes him a negative figure because he challenges McMurphy for power, counseling conformity to Nurse Ratched's wishes. Harding is in a leadership position, running the patient's games and speaking like an intellectual at the first group therapy session, but he is intimidated by Nurse Ratched and all his talk is meaningless. He is weak because he is more committed to holding empty power than to resolving his personal problems and becoming a real leader. Harding frustrates the other patients, particularly Taber, because he wants to keep their respect without taking any chances. A key example of Harding's passivity occurs in the scene in which some of the men are playing Monopoly in the tub room. Harding gets into an argument when Martini insists that he has a hotel on Boardwalk. Taber starts poking Harding and telling him to "play the game." Harding just keeps backing away and screaming that he can "only be pushed so far," but never does retaliate. McMurphy ends the suspense by spraying them all with water.

McMurphy then tries to lift the control panel, and Harding realizes that he has lost his leadership position. In the next scene, he reluctantly joins the vote to watch the World Series on television. But Harding never gives up his desire for power. When McMurphy is sent off

for his lobotomy, Harding immediately attempts to take his place and destroy the masculine image that the men are trying to hold on to. But the men will not let him, even though he alone acknowledges that McMurphy has finally been defeated for good. Harding is not McMurphy either as a card dealer or as a leader. In the end, he is still trapped inside his personal weaknesses by his desire for power.

McMurphy continually challenges Harding's masculinity and insults him throughout the film. On the fishing boat, when he is introducing all the other men to the dock manager as doctor, he introduces Harding as Mister. McMurphy is also constantly asserting his own sexual prowess such as when he returns from electro-shock therapy and tells the men, "Next woman who takes me on is going to light up like a pinball machine and pay off in silver dollars." McMurphy is thus a sexual hero as well as a spiritual one and Forman is thereby able to satisfy his audience's contrasting desires for rebellion and reassurance. Through his revolt against bureaucratic control and association with freedom, McMurphy is a Sixties' hero; but through his reassertion of a traditional social hierarchy, he is definitely one for the Seventies. Yet, the film does by no means condemn homosexuals. During the party sequence, when McMurphy seems to be firmly in charge, Forman does show homosexuality as acceptable. McMurphy calls Harding by his first name, Dale. Forman presents Frederickson (Vincent Schiavelli) and Sefelt (William Duell), who are together throughout the film, as clearly homosexual. They dance together during the night, and aides push their beds apart the next morning. Scanlon also demonstrates deviant sexuality at the party by putting on a dress and nurse's cap. McMurphy never objects to Frederickson, Sefelt, or Scanlon because they never challenge him. Scanlon has only one line in the whole film. Harding's offensiveness, therefore, is clearly because of his desire for power.

McMurphy's struggle with Harding actually reveals his own sexual

insecurity as well as his prowess. Perhaps he does actually overreact to situations. The viewer must wonder along with the doctors whether or not McMurphy is sane. Although on its surface, Cuckoo's Nest seems to be arguing for a very traditional social structure, Forman is not in favor of seeing someone like McMurphy in control. McMurphy's first scene in the film, when he jumps around, screams like a baboon, and kisses a policeman, most accurately expresses his own opinion of the hero. Forman admires his struggle for freedom, but McMurphy's actions during the basketball game, when he decides it is fair for the Chief to hold the net to keep the other team from scoring, indicates that he is not above bending the rules to suit his own purposes. Forman likes him as a rebel, but not as someone who should be in control.

In the final scene, after the Chief and Taber have awakened everybody, Forman shows individual shots of some of the other men in the dorm. Harding is behind a gate, symbolizing his still-repressed state of mind. His condition is not caused by his homosexuality. Each of the characters who quests for power in Milos Forman's version of Cuckoo's Nest, Nurse Ratched, McMurphy, and Harding, is actually defeated by his or her own personal weakness. This depiction of social leaders as fallible human beings, subject to corruption and decline because of their own desires for power, provided the American public with a believable explanation of Watergate and made Cuckoo's Nest an important document of the era. Forman skillfully created a film that can be read as either a rebellious or a conservative statement on the surface, when in reality it expresses many of his long-held beliefs about power and feelings of compassion for the people who lack it.[22] The magnificent subtlety, complexity, humor, and drama with which he presents his message in One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest regained for him a popular audience and established him as an American director of intelligence, integrity, and wit.[23]

ENDNOTES

[1]Accounts of this portion of Forman's life and Passer's trips to the psychiatrist are provided by Robert J. Moss (18), Tom Buckley, "The Forman Formula" (50-51), Chris Hodenfield (23), and Francesco Scavullo (85).

[2]Henry Kamm and David Ansen and Edward Behr both briefly mention Forman's attempt to make a film in Czechoslovakia in 1971 which resulted in his dismissal from the studio. In the spring of 1969, Forman told Antonin J. Liehm that he wanted to make his next film in Czechoslovakia (Closely Watched Films, 235). At one point, Forman had planned to film The Cowards, of which Josef Skvorecky writes, "I translated it into English, for we--at one time--hoped we could find an American producer for it. We did that treatment some time in the first half of 1968, then Milos went to the States, after his return we planned to finish the script and the film was to be shot in the summer of 1969. One scene from the treatment was used--naturally, with a difference--in Hair" (Personal letter). Stanislov Zvonicek provides a good indication of why Forman was unable to return to his home country. In reassessing Czech cinema in 1970, he claims that the New Wave had petrified, its directors placing themselves above the people and the system. The Firemen's Ball, he claims, went "almost too far" in continuing the nation's satiric traditions (29-30).

[3]Social and political analysts verify Forman's assessment of the struggle for power and social institutions as matching public attitudes at mid-decade. People generally agreed with Douglas Muzzio's conclusions that "Richard Nixon fell not because he was 'mad' or 'needed to fail' but because he and others made decisions to attain certain goals in situations of conflict and uncertainty. The interaction of these choices (and 'chance') led to outcomes that were ultimately unfavorable to the president" (161). The 1976 Presidential election reflects public opinion of Watergate as Nixon's personal blunder:

> While no judgement can be applied automatically to the individual voter, a general overall characteristic did hold: Ford represented the continuation of the Nixon line and Carter a fresh start. The people collectively were almost ready to accept as president the man appointed by Nixon, the same one who had pardoned him. In the last analysis, a mere 1 percent majority turned down Nixon's version of moral behavior and were persuaded to reject the Nixon line of succession (Rangell, 262).

This explanation reflects public willingness to forgive Nixon for understandably human failures, an analysis of political corruption depicted by Forman in his film.

As a result, as Lang and Lang report,

> once the issue was resolved and the initial shock of Watergate had worn off, the political system could continue to operate much as it had before. The coalition that had formed over Watergate and should have been strengthened by the Congressional class of 1974 failed to produce meaningful reform. Few of the underlying conditions that made Watergate possible were dealt with in its immediate aftermath (305-06).

Nevertheless, Peter N. Carroll concludes, public attitudes in 1975 reflected a widespread disillusionment with society's dominant institutions: "The problems of confidence and credibility extended far beyond questions of willful dishonesty, touched the most basic foundations of American culture" (235). People of "the Me decade" were more than ready to accept Forman's message of individual responsibility, though perhaps often in a more selfish manner than what he intended.

[4]Forman discusses his desire to make Bulletproof and work with Berger in Liehm's The Milos Forman Stories (125-26). Gordon Gow's "A Czech in New York" (24) and James Conaway (11) also provide information on Bulletproof. Universal rejected the film, but Forman was expecting to receive financing from Columbia and begin filming in August of 1971. Buck Henry and Mike Newfield were to produce, with Michael Hausman as associate producer. The title refers to bulletproof Bibles that mothers sometimes gave their sons who were going off to war to wear over their hearts. Forman describes the film as

> a comedy which takes place in a little town near New York, and in New York itself. The starting point is a farewell party which the local military veterans are throwing for a young kid who is going into the war. I don't say which war really, but it takes place today so apparently it's either Vietnam or Cambodia or Laos or any war, you know. (Gow, "A Czech," 24).

The description bears obvious resemblances to both The Firemen's Ball and Taking Off. Forman also talks about his work on Vital Parts in Richard Combs' "Sentimental Journey." Thomas Berger also discusses the attempt to script Vital Parts, his only screenwriting effort.

[5]See A. H. Weiler, "Milos Forman Takes Off Again."

[6]Antonin J. Liehm was the only critic to give The Decathalon a complete analysis and the only one to praise it. Liehm synopsizes the film in a manner that matches Forman's editing and expresses the film's depiction of the event as a mad rush towards a temporary goal under the watchful eye of men commited to organizing events and lives. Liehm also shows how Forman demonstrates the similarities of men more than the Olympics themselves do (The Milos Forman Stories, 131-36). Other reviewers devoted only a few sentences to each segment of Visions of Eight and therefore reveal no careful analysis. Roger Greenspun thinks that Forman simply speeds everything up, demonstrating nothing but witless humor and the worst sequence in the film. Stanley

Kauffmann calls The Decathalon "so devoid of sympathy or insight that it quickly becomes a detestable bore" ("On Films," 15 Sept. 1973, 33). Variety ("Visions of Eight") merely refers to Forman's juxtapositions as sometimes gratuitous. John Coleman ("Game Pie") manages to pay Forman a backhanded compliment by pronouncing his segment mere self-parody that helped relieve the dismalness of the film as a whole. Forman's contribution was the most unique, so perhaps the critics were merely more in tune with the approach used by the other seven directors. In a later review of Forman's career, Peter Cowie disagreed with the dominant opinion, stating, "his episode in Visions of Eight makes the other seven look hopelessly pompous and severe" (50 Major Film-Makers, 91). This study's analysis will agree with Liehm and Cowie.

[7]See Parker Tyler's review of Olympia and Riefenstahl's own discussion of its making.

[8]Forman was tempted with making a similar film. George Plimpton describes his original idea as a twelve-minute close-up of a rifleman's finger squeezing the trigger. Plimpton also describes The Decathalon, calling it occassionally startling, but providing no analysis.

[9]In "Dialogue on Film: Michael Douglas," (35-36), co-producer Douglas discusses how he hired Forman on the basis of the director's previous films and their ability to talk together. Douglas also talks about the development of the project and finding the humor in the story in Variety, "Laff With, Not At." Tom Buckley also describes the origins of Forman's involvement with the film in "The Forman Formula" (51).

[10]George Bluestone agrees with Forman's philosophy, finding all comparisons of films with the novels they are based on irrelevant:

> What is common to all these assumptions is the lack of awareness that mutations are probable the moment one goes from a given set of fluid, but relatively homogenous, conventions to another; that changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium. Finally, it is insufficiently recognized that the end products of novel and film represent different aesthetic genera, as different from each other as ballet is from architecture. (5)

Les Ledbetter explains Ken Kesey's early involvement with the project and his eventual hatred for it. Kesey feels that the filmmakers stole his work from him and inappropriately changed the story's focus from Chief Broom to McMurphy. Stuart Byron ("The Industry") advised Kesey to calm his protests. Byron claims that Kesey's royalties for new book sales more than made up for his loss of profits on the film. Every contract is a gamble, Byron states, and Kesey simply agreed to a bad deal. Nevertheless, the author is still angry. In 1983, Kesey complained to Peter O. Whitmer that the filmmakers missed the novel's entire point by making Nurse Ratched the villain, and he totally dislikes the slightly-built Jack Nicholson as Randle Patrick McMurphy (27). Kesey, it seems, wanted a pure translation of the novel and cannot consider the film as simply telling the same story with a different theme, though for him literal meant unrealistic. Kesey's approach was to "do it wierd. I could do it so that people, when they left there,

they couldn't find the exit" (Goodwin, "The Ken Kesey Movie," 33). Co-producer Saul Zaentz discusses the inadequacies of the script Kesey submitted in "Dialogue on Film: Saul Zaentz" (14, 68).

[11]Unfortunately for Forman, some critics insisted on judging the film on a basis of comparing it with the novel, though their generally negative comments did nothing to hurt its commercial success. Marsha McCreadie ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest: Some Reasons") and Elaine B. Safer present distinctly opposite views in the Spring 1977 issue of Literature Film Quarterly. McCreadie details how Forman kept the novel's spirit by retaining important characters, settings, and dialogue, even though he altered the point of view and structure and completely discarded the surrealism. Safer faults Forman for merely simplifying the novel, noting his use of slapstick comedy techniques and realism, but completely ignoring Forman's own meaning. Donald Palumbo provides a detailed analysis of the novel, but concludes that the film captures only its surface and therefore lacks a message.

John Simon's review ("Unholy Writs") is the most offensive. Simon blames the film for missing the essence of Kesey's novel even though he admits to having never read the book. He finds Forman more humane than in Taking Off, but cites what most other critics see as the film's strengths as its weaknesses. The ambiguity of the main characters displeases Simon. He would rather see the mythic struggle of Kesey's broadly defined figures even though he finds the author's position reprehensible. Simon asks for plainness and subtlety at the same time, an impossible requirement for any artist to fulfill. Richard Schickel ("Aborted Flight") spends half of his review praising, and misinterpreting, Kesey's novel, while viewing the film as shallow and too concerned with pleasing its audience to provide any dramatic tension. Nevertheless, he denounces Forman for only showing the ugly surface of asylum life in documentary fashion, an ironic comment since the final screen version is much more subdued than what either Ken Kesey or cinematographer Haskell Wexler would have wanted.

By contrast, Stephen Farber praises Forman for realizing the story's irony and softening its tone, but disagrees with almost every other critic in finding Nurse Ratched completely dehumanized and the film as misogynist as the novel. Jack Kroll ("You're All Right") refers to it as a well-made film that lacks the novel's insight, complexity, passion, and terror. Similarly, Frank Kermode praises the ambiguity in Fletcher's and Nicholson's faces, admiring Forman's focus on them, but sees the film as a simplified version of the novel, and more mythological. Kermode builds his analysis from Leslie Fiedler's explanation of the novel as an updating of Huckleberry Finn, fitting an American literary tradition depicting male flight from female sexuality. Pauline Kael ("The Bull Goose Loony") produces the most intelligent comparison of novel to film of any reviewer, revealing why the story had to be changed and updated. She likes the film solely for its story and acting.

[12]Forman eventually fired Cuckoo's Nest's original cinematographer, Haskell Wexler, who wanted to create a liberal statement by giving the institution a much darker look than what it has (See Beverly Walker, "In the Picture," 217). Basically, Wexler disagreed with Forman's humorous approach to the material. Forman comments on his differences with Wexler in Tom Burke's "'Casting is Everything'." Forman wants the camera to serve the actors, while Wexler is exactly the opposite. Forman also discusses his work with the film's cinematographers in

his interview with Larry Sturhahn, who provides insightful comments about the focus on faces and hands and the realism of the sets. Sturhahn also presents the best brief summary of Cuckoo's Nest available, calling it "a film about choice and what it means to make one" (26).

Michael Douglas originally criticized Wexler's work in his interview with American Film ("Dialogue on Film: Michael Douglas," 38). Haskell Wexler then wrote that the final version of Cuckoo's Nest is eighty-five percent his and argued that Douglas had nothing to do with the photography. Douglas admitted to having no direct influence on the actual lighting, but claims to have made several trips to the location to determine how the film should look. Douglas denies Wexler's claim to producing most of the finished work, saying instead that his material did not fit the film's requirements.

[13]Saul Zaentz states that Nicholson was always the first choice for the role of McMurphy, with Robert DeNiro as a possible alternative ("Dialogue on Film: Saul Zaentz," 14). Ken Kesey's preference was for Gene Hackman (Whitmer, 27). Forman, who often likes to work with amateurs and unknowns, had no problem accepting Nicholson in the role: "I thought it very right that the people inside the unknown world of an asylum are unknown actors, but the outsider through whose eyes we see this world is somebody we know and trust and can identify with. So Jack was perfect for that purpose" (Kennedy, 39).

[14]Stanley Kauffmann ("Jack High") gives Forman particular credit for his control in these opening shots and also heaps praise on Nicholson. But he fails to find any theme beyond rebellion against authority and unwittingly points out the danger in making McMurphy a hero, a factor which this study will show Forman understood well.

[15]Casting the patients was crucial to Forman: "Since [they] have few lines to say, [the] audience must remember each simply by their look" (Burke, "The Director's Approach," 15). Forman also discusses the film's casting in Burke's "'Casting is Everything'" and in his interview with Larry Sturhahn, where he describes reviewing nine hundred possibilities for the roles (28).

Pauline Kael criticizes Forman's depiction of the other patients, particularly in the fishing scene, where they all act incompetent. These men have lived in the Northwest all their lives, she states, and should know something about the sport ("The Bull Goose Loony"). John Coleman, although admiring the film, also feels that as voluntary patients, the men would hardly be little more than harmless eccentrics and hence available for genial comedy ("You All Crazy?"). Robert Murphy defends Forman's approach because the characters are not real, but artifacts that he brings to life. Murphy has a valid argument since Forman has a thematic need for showing the men as unaccustomed to outdoor life. The fishing trip has to function as both a unifying and liberating experience. Nevertheless, the characters could possibly have been more complex and perhaps reveal an over-reliance on the novel.

[16]Lee Myers and Hugh T. Kerr give an insightful application of the film to Christian principles and workers in the helping professions. They see McMurphy and Christ as people who redeemed others by accepting them as they are and not imposing their own ideas of what is right. David M. Graybeal also discusses the Christ story as symbolized in the film.

[17]Pauline Kael ("The Bull Goose Loony") provides significant insights into Jack Nicholson's careful handling of the McMurphy role, showing ambiguity and avoiding the temptation to flaunt his shrewdness. Bill Davidson tells how Nicholson became lost in his role through a two week period of observation at the Oregon State Hospital preceeding filming. Nicholson gives a little more information about playing McMurphy in Mel Gussow's article. He drew partly on his experience in working with schizophrenics and did not notice the huge transitions within certain scenes required for the character when he first read the script. Other critics offering Nicholson special praise are Marsha McCreadie ("One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest"), Rex Reed, and Molly Haskell ("Nicholson Kneads").

[18]Both novel and film exploit the notion that the sane and the crazy are difficult to tell apart, also suggesting that perhaps the "insane" have actually retreated from the world because they have the clearest understanding of its true nature. Two chronic patients, Chief Broom and Bancini, offer the deepest insights into reality in both Kesey's and Forman's works. They both seem to know what none of the other characters are able to, that, as Bancini says, "It's all a lot of baloney." Beverly Walker, Richard Levine, and Tim Cahill all write about how sanity and lunacy became indistinguishable on the Cuckoo's Nest set as well, a case of life imitating art.

Levine's article is particularly valuable for revealing details about casting, filming, and working with the hospital staff, patients, and facilities. Tim Cahill describes several incidents involved in making the film: the fearsomeness of some of the patients and the difficulty of separating them from cast and crew members. Nicholson ordering one pancake for breakfast was the craziest thing anybody on the ward did one morning. Cahill also describes an electroshock treatment and Nicholson's being forced to recognize that it sometimes does have positive value. The article ends with describing one patient who does return to the community, using him as a symbol for Cahill's view of the film: an anthem to the human spirit.

[19]Grace Lichtenstein ("He Refuses") describes how Will Sampson made an important contribution to the film in convincing Forman that his character was articulate and had perfect diction. Both Forman and Nicholson felt Sampson was a natural actor, and he appeared in several other films after Cuckoo's Nest (Buffalo Bill and the Indians, 1975, The Outlaw Josey Wales, 1975, and The White Buffalo, 1976). Sampson was also a talented Western artist.

[20]Michael Wood ("No, But I Read") finds Forman's theme of individual responsibility in the scene of the men boarding the boat:

> The joke here is not simply the old gag about doctors in mental hospitals being indistinguishable from their patients, it is also a suggestion of genuine liberty. We look like whatever we choose to call ourselves, and the camera proves it. If we call ourselves crazy, or allow ourselves to be called crazy, we shall look crazy. (4)

But Wood does not carry his analysis through to the film's conclusion. He accepts what seems like the only obvious interpretation: that it is a sexist and racist film.

[21]Aljean Harmetz ("The Nurse") explains the importance of Louise Fletcher's contributions. The amazing subtlety of her performance, drawn from her personal background, anchors the film. Of all the actresses approached for the role, only Fletcher viewed the character sympathetically. She uses Ratched's out-of-date hair style to symbolize how the woman's life stopped long ago. Forman saw her by accident while watching Robert Altman's Thieves Like Us (1974) and then fought to get her the part. Forman comments on Fletcher's detachment, which allowed her to portray Ratched as a fanatic who does not realize that she is one in Tom Burke's "'Casting is Everything.'" He mentions a few star actresses such as Ann Bancroft, Collen Dewhurst, Angela Lansbury, and Ellen Burstyn who turned down the role in Robert Murphy's article. Pauline Kael ("The Bull Goose Looney") deftly analyzes Fletcher's performance, noticing the character as a hurt human being.

[22]Among the film's other commentators, David Thomson (America in the Dark) likes Cuckoo's Nest and accurately notes its depiction of insanity in a manner that questions all standard concepts of reality. The audience leaves the theater wondering whether or not its own spirit will be crushed. But after coming so close to stating Forman's theme of individual responsibility, Thomson misses it when he wonders about the contradiction in Jack Nicholson accepting an Oscar for playing a loser. I. G. Edmunds and Reiko Mimuera offer a terrible piece, giving a brief, partially inaccurate, Forman biography and a story synopsis based as much on the novel as on the film.

Vincent Canby ("Nicholson, the Free") dislikes the film, but bases his analysis on false interpretations of McMurphy and the story. Canby praises all the excellent performances, but sees the film only in a 1960s context. He thinks that Forman has attempted to make McMurphy into a hero fighting an oppressive system. McMurphy does that, but the film does not work for Canby because he fails to understand Forman's conscious creation of a hero who fails. In a second review ("'Cuckoo's Nest'--A Sane Comedy"), Canby tries to be kinder, changing his mind about Forman using the mental ward as a symbol for America, but merely repeating most of his other remarks. Canby simply does not understand the film and his review rambles pointlessly. In a third article, Canby states his opinion that neither of Forman's American films have the resonance of his Czech ones ("Can a Director").

Vernon Young ("Nobody Lives Here") uses as many criticisms as he can to condemn the film for being exploitative and incorporating every liberal cliche. Judith Crist ("Kubrick as Novelist") praises Cuckoo's Nest, but sees the thesis as simply a "free-spirit" fighting the system. To her, the ending only proves once again that bureaucracy cannot be beaten. Variety interprets the film in heavy nostalgic terms, noting fine efforts on behalf of everyone involved, but attributing little meaning to the whole. The reviewer makes copious references to the 1963 play as the "legit" version ("One Flew Over"). Finally, Seth Cagin and Philip Dray misinterpret the film as equating manliness with sanity and showing Harding being won over to McMurphy's side (233-36).

[23]Shortly after Cuckoo's Nest's success, Variety rumored that Forman was being suggested to direct either Who Is Killing the Great Chef's of Europe? or Las Vegas Love Story ("After his 'Cuckoo' Smash"). Later

that year, the magazine reported him to be working on a script in Paris with Jean-Claude Carriere (co-writer of Taking Off) on At Play in the Fields of the Lord, which would probably be his next film ("Forman May Lens").

CHAPTER SIX

HAIR--A CONTEMPORARY VARIATION ON CLASSIC HOLLYWOOD MUSICALS

When Gerald R. Ford took over from Richard Nixon as President in 1975, he declared, "Our national nightmare is over." America was able to begin putting Watergate behind it during Ford's tenure in office, but it had not yet begun to deal with the painful memories of the war in Vietnam. Near the end of the decade, three major films attempted to remind Americans of the deep divisions caused by the war that still needed to be resolved. In 1978, Hal Ashby's Coming Home and Michael Cimino's The Deer Hunter were released, followed in 1979 by Francis Ford Coppola's Apocalypse Now. Amidst the large amount of public attention that each of these films received, critics failed to notice Milos Forman's Hair as another work addressing America's need to resolve its differences over the war. The strong topicality of the original stage production a decade earlier blinded reviewers to the possiblity of the work having a contemporary theme.[1] Yet, Forman and co-screenwriter Michael Weller were able to look beyond Hair's original purpose as a celebration of the "hippie" lifestyle to its inherent capabilities as a musical for bringing opposites together.[2] In Hair, Forman suggests that those who were divided by the war can find a common basis for agreement in devoting themselves to people rather than to institutions, though he reaffirms that society needs its formal structures. Forman's

achievement in Hair is in adapting the optimism of traditional musicals to the uncertainty of the modern age. The result maintains his focus on the significance of individuals while addressing an issue peculiarly relevant to its times.

Forman's evolution since One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest has been as much in terms of technique as in terms of theme, but with each story that he brings to the screen he adds elements that make it relevant to its own time period. This ability is remarkable, first because each film takes two to three years from conception to release and second because each film that Forman has made since Cuckoo's Nest has been set increasingly further back in time. Discounting his skill and perseverance, Forman gives a very simple reason as to why his career has continued to develop in the manner that he wants it to:

> I am not trying to sound modest. I think it's actually correct what I'm saying. It's good luck. Because if Cuckoo's Nest was not a great commercial hit, I would probably not be in a position, neither artistically nor financially to continue to do only work I choose, I like, and consider worthy to spend two or three years of my life on. . . . From that moment, if I wanted to do something, suddenly all the doors were opening for me. You want to do this, you want to do that, what do you want? And everybody was willing to get me whatever I wanted. And besides that, the commercial success of Cuckoo's Nest left me financially able to not have to rush into something only because I have to pay my rent. So, that's good luck.

Basically, winning his first Oscar enabled Milos Forman to maintain a gradual evolution in his career by giving him the time to develop each project in the manner that he wants to.

Time, and his own creative methods, allow Forman to give contemporary meanings to by-gone eras because he is dedicated to a story first and to a theme second. Sometimes Forman is able to choose his own story, and sometimes the story chooses him. Hair resulted from a combination of both. Forman explains how the project almost never materialized and how

he was almost upset when it finally did:

> I . . . expressed my interest to do Hair the first day I saw the first public preview off-Broadway before anybody had discovered it publicly, like the critics. But then it was sort of a strange game in that every year somebody called and asked me if I'm still interested in doing Hair, and maybe now it can happen. So the first three, four, five years I was going back to the record and the book and listening to the songs again to find out if I'm still excited by them. If I still like them. If I still feel fond enough of this music to spend two or three years of my life on it. And then slowly, nothing ever happened and I started to give this answer as a routine. Someone would call and say, 'Well, I think we can pull off this project. Are you still interested in doing Hair?' And I'd say, 'Sure. Yes, I am' without even thinking about it, knowing that it will not happen. And the same was in 1975 or 1976, when they called to ask me if I was still interested to do Hair. I said 'Sure. Yes, I am.' And they called me back a few days later and said 'All right, let's go. Let's start.' I panicked because I didn't know if I was really still so hot about it. Thank God, I listened to the record again and I still found the same enthusiasm.[3]

Forman's co-screenwriter on Hair, and later on Ragtime, was playwright Michael Weller, who seemed like a logical choice for the job since he had produced two works for the stage, Moonchildren and Fishing, about the Sixties youth counterculture. Yet, Forman was not at all concerned with Weller's past work when he was interviewing writers. Forman had seen Moonchildren when his English was still poor and had never seen or read Fishing. Weller comments about Forman that

> When he interviewed me for the job, his first question was 'What are your ideas about how to make a screenplay of Hair?' I had none, and I told him so. And that answer, it turned out, was why he hired me. Other writers had come in with well-developed notions about how to approach the material, but what Forman wanted was a writer with an open mind who could wing it with him while we both discovered what the story might reveal. I did not draw on my plays for any characters or situations in Hair. At least not deliberately.[4] (Personal letter; all subsequent quotations from Weller are also from this letter.)

Forman's reluctance to approach his projects with any preconceived notions of what themes he wants to stress explains his success at transforming already-accepted works from other mediums to the screen.

He is able to take the basic elements such as characters, dialogue, situations, and settings and rearrange them in a way that keeps the spirit of the original work and also updates it.

Weller explains how Forman's screenwriting methods create a work that is not merely a re-creation of the original story on film, but an entirely new set of ideas:

> We sit together every day and bat it out, line by line, scene by scene until we have a completed screenplay. Sometimes, as in Hair, we will improvise a scene with the actors, tape it, then I'll put together a new scene from the improvised material, but Forman never allows this to happen without a good, tight scene having been written into the original screenplay. . . . Our collaboration takes a form difficult to describe to anyone who hasn't sat in and witnessed it. Something between a trance and an argument in which both of us feel completely free to say whatever comes into our minds, to interrupt, to disagree, encourage, insult each other, and by the end of the day, we always seem to come out with a few good pages of screenplay.[5]

The original work of Hair provided ample opportunities for creating a new story, since the play barely contained any plot at all. The purpose of the stage production had been to present the youth counterculture of the Sixties as living a vital new lifestyle that provided a chance for freedom and self-expression as opposed to the war-oriented and hypocritical social formalities of the "straight" society. The youth were seen as spiritual seekers reaching back to the honesty of tribal relationships while also projecting themselves forward with a mixture of high expectations and fear. Adults, with a few exceptions, were portrayed as oppressive.[6]

Obviously, to try to merely recreate the play on film in 1979 would be meaningless. The "love generation" that had so proudly proclaimed itself ten years earlier had now grown older and the hippie philosophy was no longer relevant. As Michael Weller says, few people at the time seemed interested in seeing the production any more: "I

had no apprehension about how Hair might be received. Virtually everyone I know felt that the time was wrong for such a film to be made; too soon for nostalgia, too late to capture the mood of movie-goers."[7] Forman could not very well make a film of Hair that repudiated Sixties youth, but neither could he celebrate the counterculture in the same way as the play had. Although Forman would never consider directing a film that does not express his own vision, he did have certain elements of the stage production available to expand upon. First, he had the characters Berger, Claude, Sheila, Hud, Woof, and Jeannie, though each of them needed to be developed. He had the story of Berger and Claude both being interested in Sheila, who is an NYU co-ed in the play who enjoys acting like a revolutionary. In the film, Claude and Sheila stay together while Berger only has a slight interest in her. The story of Claude being drafted is also in the play, though in the film he is not a hippie and has very little trouble in deciding to join the Army. Finally, the play also contains the notion of the hippies forming a modern tribe with rites and spiritual relationships with the earth and sky in the same manner as ancient people. Forman makes his most significant comments in Hair about this philosophy. His ending is also derived from the play, and, while it maintains the tension between the spiritual pretensions of the hippies and the often oppressive structures of modern society, it fully condemns neither. Instead, it reaffirms some traditional values while also supporting the manner in which modern society must seek to establish its spiritual basis.

Forman and Weller's achievement in Hair is in varying the structure of traditional Hollywood musicals in a way that maintains their exuberance while not emitting a false optimism. A standard Hollywood musical presents two people of opposite backgrounds and interests who

nevertheless fall in love and find each other during the film's musical numbers.[8] Hair also presents two very different people who come together during the course of the film. Claude Bukowski (John Savage) is from a middle-income rural Oklahoma family. Sheila Franklin (Beverly D'Angelo) is a wealthy society girl from New York City.[9] By the end of the film, they have united and represent a feeling of optimism for the future. But they are not the story's central characters. Hair focuses mainly on Berger (Treat Williams) and his friends, who make two allegorical journeys during the film: from birth to death and from primitivism to civilization.[10] Berger is also on a spiritual search, rejecting materialism in his quest after a unification of his being with earth and sky. Eventually, he accomplishes his goals, but his success costs him his life, proving that a new compromise between spiritual separation and social obligations is required. Forman shows the modern world as being necessarily dominated by formal institutions, which makes a knowledge of practical necessity absolutely essential. Claude's faith in established social institutions and Berger's haphazard search for a new spiritual reality are the most important opposites that need to be combined in Hair. Claude and Sheila bring them together in the end, but Forman shows that the union still needs to take place within society as a whole. Both of the film's important resolutions, therefore, occur outside of the central concerns of the story, which are the problems of coping with the war and modern life in general. The hopefulness and exuberance of traditional musicals is present, but significantly muted.[11]

Forman adheres to the structure of traditional musicals in the opening scenes by establishing a number of opposites between rural Oklahoma and New York City that need to come together during the film. Claude is different from Berger in his response to being drafted and

from Sheila in his social background. Yet, Forman deviates from standard musicals by showing more concern for ideas, communicated through contrasts in setting, camera movement, physical movement, color, and sound, than for characters. Significantly, none of the film's three main figures take part in the opening musical number, "Aquarius." The story's thin plot revolves around Claude, Berger, and Sheila, but Hair's central consideration is for the opposing spiritual philosophies presented in the first two scenes.[12]

Hair opens with a shot of Claude and his father leaving their house early one morning and saying good-bye to his mother. The house is a beautiful large white one, with horses grazing in the front yard. The two men take a pickup truck to the bus stop, where Claude is to depart for New York to be inducted into the Army. Forman presents the Oklahoma countryside as wide open and idyllic, but also a certain sense of order presides. Despite all the space, Claude has probably lived a very restricted life with few options as to how to think and what to believe. As Claude and his father ride by, Forman focuses briefly on a small wooden church that probably plays an important role in the life of the community. Claude's father later reveals his simple faith in the only piece of advice that he gives to his son: "It's only these smart people that got to worry. The good Lord will take care of the ignorant." The belief that God has ordered the world and everything is in its place finds confirmation in the scenery that Forman shows. Placing his camera at the corner of a road, a fence and a line of telephone poles with the posts of each perfectly spaced recedes into the distance, matching the symmetry of the family house and the church building. A farmer rides by on his tractor as he probably does every morning. Claude and his father arrive at the stop just as the bus comes into sight. The length of this shot,

starting well before the Bukowski's truck comes into view, demonstrates Forman's concern with evoking the philosophy that the landscape reflects.

The casual acceptance of a well-ordered world is also apparent in the relationship between the two men. Both of them wear cowboy hats and express themselves in slow, quiet tones. They both shuffle their feet in the dirt and awkwardly lean together to give each other a one-armed hug before Claude departs. Forman accentuates the simplicity of this world through the camera techniques that he employs and the subdued tone of the setting. The countryside does not look very colorful or exciting in the misty morning, and Forman uses very few cuts or camera movements. From the appearance of the pickup truck on the road until the time that Claude and his father have walked over to the bus stop is all done in one shot including a long pan from right to left. The slow movements, the straight lines, the subdued tones, the imagery of church and family, the awkward but true affection, and the expression of faith all communicate the idea that in this environment people are sure of their place and comfortable with their identity. Their spiritual values support their family ones to produce a balanced vision of the world in which they can feel secure. As Claude's father states, they can depend on "the good Lord" to protect them from trouble.

When Claude arrives in New York's Central Park, he immediately discovers a world in which his whole sense of order is overturned and his values are not appropriate. The performance of "Aquarius" expresses an entirely different spirituality that is in direct conflict with everything that Claude believes. As the bus travels from Oklahoma to New York, Claude gradually enters an entirely new world. The soundtrack fills with the beat of an electric bass guitar and drum. Individual family houses are replaced by the towering New York skyline. As Claude's

bus enters a tunnel, the lights along the side begin to swirl crazily. Out of the darkness, Berger and his friends, Hud (Dorsey Wright), Jeannie (Annie Golden), and Woof (Dan Dacus), appear individually, floating into close-ups as if they were spiritual beings. More accurately, they are like infants still in the womb, and the act they are performing is one of rebellion against the order that life is attempting to impose on them. In this environment, the faceless society housed in the tall buildings establishes order, handing out its instructions to individuals on neatly printed pieces of paper. Because Berger and his friends do not see this order as natural, their response to the draft is exactly the opposite of Claude's. They stand around a barrel in a Central Park tunnel as Berger reads the instructions off his card and then burns it. Their rebellion is simple and spiritual in nature, for they are attempting to ignore the imposed order and assert their right to remain in the womb. Immediately, two policemen appear at the end of the tunnel, which forces them to run out into the light. Berger's attempts to cut his ties to society and seek a more "natural" life-affirming existence continue throughout the film, but instead of creating an alternative, he finds that he is increasingly drawn into the world until it finally destroys him. Thus, Berger's journey in the film is a symbolic movement from birth to death.

"Aquarius" expresses the hope for re-creation of spirituality that Berger is seeking. During the song, Forman and choreographer Twyla Tharp create an association between the performers, the earth, and the sky through camera movement, wardrobe, and dance. The song lyrics indicate the beginning of a way of life more closely related to the rhythms of nature than to the artificially structured schedules of modern society. An important aspect of the "Aquarius" number is that it is a prediction of a world that is hoped for and not a statement about actual conditions.

The relationships between the performers and the elements is one created by Forman and Tharp and not one that exists in reality. Furthermore, this spiritual nature applies only to the singer and dancers and not to any of the main characters. The extremes of spiritual existence are thus restricted to a small group of people in Central Park and the Oklahoma countryside, but the film focuses on the people who are struggling in between those opposite poles. Berger seeks an impractical solution, but his death gives his friends the chance to create a satisfying blending of these divergent philosophies.

Forman begins his manipulation of the physical world with the swirling lights as Claude's bus enters the tunnel. After Berger and his friends are chased from the cave, Forman's camera moves through the flames in the trash can while two dancers, a black man and white woman, rise Phoenix-like from the ashes of the symbolically burned "old" order. The dancers, their arms closely entwined, symbolize the harmony sought for in the dream of the new existence. Forman's camera rises high into the air and then down through the trees, creating a unification of heaven and earth, until it locates the singer and swirls around her as if paying honor to a priestess. The woman also symbolizes a connection between the two spheres. She is a black woman with white flower petals in her hair that make it look like the night-time sky. She is standing, and when the camera moves around her at a low angle, it emphasizes her as a link between earth and sky.

The season at the beginning of the film is autumn, and the colors in the dancers' costumes, orange, red, blue, green, and brown, associate them with the trees and all of nature as do their movements. At times they leap into the air, while other portions of the dance are close to the ground with slow Zen-like qualities. Forman alternates between

concentrating closely on an individual dancer and capturing the movement of the entire group. Forman always makes excellent use of music in his films, but Hair was his first "musical," and, as Michael Weller says, he did not approach it in the manner of traditional Hollywood productions:

> We screened a lot of the old MGM musicals, mostly, as it happens, to find out what we wanted to avoid. What Forman had in mind was to film dance as if it was an actual event in real life. Normally, in the old MGM musicals, the moment a number begins, the set is treated like a stage and the camera becomes the audience. Whereas, when Forman films a scene between two or more characters, he blocks the movement so that it happens as it would in real life, and then decides what camera angles would best report the action. And this is what he did with the dance and song sequences. I'm simplifying, of course, but this was the underlying notion of the performance numbers.

Another assumption of traditional musicals was that for some people, life is so enjoyable that breaking into a song and dance at almost any moment is only natural. One explanation for the downfall of the genre is that as modern life became increasingly complex and stressful, musicals became unbelievable.[13] Forman's separation of the hippies from society in the opening number makes their performance acceptable. It seems like a part of life, but these are not "average" people. Their joy is in asserting themselves against what is normal and not because of it. Forman has been criticized for cutting the dancing too much, but the combination of his camera movements and Tharp's choreography actually captures the dancers' expression of their spirituality excellently.[14]

The exuberance of the opening number is infectuous. The relationship between the hippies and all living things is demonstrated through the first real comic moment of the film. All of the dancers depart from a field, except for two, a black woman and white man, who are confronted by the mounted police who chased Berger and his friends out of the tunnel. The couple continues dancing, and the black and white horses, representa-

tive of the harmony in nature, imitate their movements.[15] The brilliant colors, active camera, and loud music create a direct contrast between Central Park and the immediately preceeding scenes in Oklahoma. The separation of spiritual values from the social order thus conflicts with everything that Claude believes. While Forman presents life in Oklahoma as based on the nineteenth-century Christian philosophy of imposing God's order on a wide-open world, the New York hippies are attempting to express their freedom within the constricted and oppressive environment of the modern city.

Forman continues to emphasize the conflict between the hippies' nonconformity and the demands of society's traditional institutions, particularly the Army, throughout the film. Following the model of traditional musicals, Forman creates a series of oppositions in terms of the film's structure, major symbolism, and other conflicts, all connected by the progression of the main character. Forman and Weller divide the story between the hippies' search for a new spiritual nature in the first half and their attempt to cope with society's demands in the second. The hippies' symbolic journey from a primitive to a civilized state links the two halves of the story and all of the film's other major contrasts. Twice during the first twenty minutes of Hair, Berger and his friends are in a Central Park tunnel, creating an association between them and cavemen. After a night of dope smoking, they wake up the next morning under the roof of an amphitheater. The structure again resembles a cave, but now the group is greatly exposed to the elements. During the next scene, they experience their first confrontation with society when they disrupt Sheila's debutante party and barely escape having to spend time in jail. In the second half of the film, Forman shows the group at one point entering the park from the city, indicating their

increasing involvement with society. Since it is winter, they are possibly looking for shelter. After talking with Sheila about going to Nevada to visit Claude at his Army base, the fiance of Hud appears with her son. The incident shows how the group must begin to cope with the demands of organized society. It also indicates the inadequacy of hippies' illusory independence for fulfilling basic human needs in comparison with the comforts provided by a traditional home and family. During the scene, Berger unconsciously realizes how his own philosophy can be as oppressive and inconsiderate as the one he opposes. Hud first tries to put his fiance (Cheryl Barnes) on a bus back home because she does not understand "cosmic consciousness." When she refuses to go, he tries to walk away from her, but Berger goes after him and brings him back. The song that his fiance performs as Hud argues with the others, "Easy To Be Hard," perfectly expresses the cruelty of being so devoted to the high goals of love and compassion for mankind that the needs of close friends and lovers are forgotten. Barnes sings the song simply and beautifully as Forman focuses on her and the little boy, ironic victims of the philosophy through which the hippies are trying to build a new future.

The fiance's wardrobe indicates her superior common sense as opposed to the others. The ground is now covered with snow, and the hippies' dark coats reveal that they can no longer maintain the illusion of being primitive souls, living in harmony with nature. By contrast, Hud's fiance wears a white coat that blends perfectly with the setting, and her little boy is wearing a brown jacket and white ski cap that creates a balanced picture. Her appeal to Hud to rejoin the family also comes at a good time because the warmth provided by a stable home makes more sense in the winter than attempting to maintain freedom at the price of freezing to death.

The hippies' final integration into society begins with their decision to visit Claude. The action involves Berger's acquiring possessions and losing his identity, symbolizing man's separation from his basic nature as his world grows in complexity. With Sheila's help, Berger, Hud, and Woof steal a car to drive to Nevada in. Once there, they steal another car and an officer's uniform so that Berger can sneak onto the base and smuggle Claude out. The base is on full alert with no one allowed to leave since they are preparing to depart for the war. Berger's resorting to devious means to acquire the cars and the uniform clashes with the directness of his confrontation with Sheila's family and symbolizes the way that formal society operates. Once on the post, Berger again changes identity by taking Claude's clothes so that he can sneak out to visit Sheila and the others. Berger is now twice removed from his natural self, which is perhaps why he is simply unable to identify himself while he is being shipped off to Vietnam in Claude's place. The final shot of Berger shows him marching into the pitch black opening of the troop plane, again resembling a cave, but this time symbolizing a return to the earth in the form of a tomb. His last words are a reprise of the lyrics "I believe in God/and I believe that God believes in Claude/That's me" from the song "Manchester, England." The scene thus represents both his physical and spiritual death.

Forman develops one major contrast by associating straight lines with conformity and oppression and curved lines with freedom. He establishes this symbolism when Claude's bus enters the tunnel into New York and the line of lights begins to swirl around. Similarly, when Berger is arguing with Sheila's father at the debutante party, he stands in front of a curved window while a solid post is in the wall behind Mr. Franklin. Forman also uses this symbolism to undercut the hippies'

sense of freedom as they drive to Nevada to visit Claude at his Army post. As the group finishes the song "Good Morning Starshine," the camera rises to a high vantage point to show them heading down a long straight highway, an ominous prediction of their fate. Finally, when Berger takes Claude's place on the base and gets marched off to war, he is put in a long line of soldiers heading into the troop planes. Army jeeps drive by in a curved line. Berger, having given up his hippie identity and completed his symbolic journey into organized society, now totally lacks freedom. Because he has attempted to live without restrictions throughout the film, he is unable to handle the situation when he becomes confined.

Long hair, of course, is another symbol of freedom. During a break in the title song, Forman inserts a scene of Berger visiting his parents to ask for the money to keep his friends out of jail. His dad promising it to him if he gets a haircut emphasizes the random nature of social formalities. For the hippies, short hair represents conforming to a corrupt system while long hair is again associated with nature and spirituality through its connections with both primitive man and Christ. The lyrics of the song "Hair" make its symbolism explicit: "a home for the fleas in my hair," "Hair like Jesus wore it/Hallelujah, I adore it." The number is a celebration of long hair and freedom. Forman simply shows women on the street allowing their hair to flow through their hands. The dancing to the song takes place in the city jail where Hud, Woof, and Claude are brought down the hallway while the prisoners riot in their cells. The scene creates a plain connection between having short hair and being a captive of society, enforced by the bars of the cell. Similarly, Berger's getting his hair cut in order to sneak onto Claude's Army base at the end symbolizes his forfeiture of his freedom.

Forman and Weller maintain the structure of traditional musicals by depicting individual conflicts within both the hippie and conventional worlds. A series of musical numbers during the first half of the film demonstrates the hippies' struggle to create a new spirituality through the unification of earth and sky within themselves. Berger and his friends first meet Claude when they ask him for money so they can get something to eat. When he throws them some change, they add it to what they already have and rent a horse. When it gets away from them and Claude catches it, Berger starts his first song of the film, which expresses his spiritual searching. The lyrics "Looking for my Donna," actually refer to a quest for Madonna, a "sixteen-year-old virgin." Berger sings as Claude rides after Sheila, who is horseback riding with her friends, attempting to impress her with some tricks. Again, Tharp's choreography perfectly expresses the spiritual nature of the dancers. Their movements copy Claude's, symbolizing their desire to be at one with nature. Forman films the scene mostly in medium-full shots that capture either three or all four dancers at once.

A short time later, after Berger and his friends have introduced Claude to smoking dope, Forman presents a series of songs in which the hippies struggle to identify themselves between the two poles of primitivism and spirituality. The entire sequence consists of three numbers, "Colored Spade," "Manchester, England," and "Ain't Got No." A group of black men join Hud to perform "Colored Spade." The song takes just about every derogatory term ever used about blacks and turns them into a threatening statement. The singers take over these words as their own, and thereby emphasize, for their own purposes, the reasons that the terms were invented in the first place: the fear of primal energy associated with virile black men by racist whites. The second

half of the song lists all the foods traditionally associated with blacks, heightening the spectre of the performers as carnivorous creatures. The African dancing used during the number also increases the impression of primitive forces coming loose. The next two songs contrast spirituality with practical necessities. During "Manchester, England," Claude accepts hippie spirituality. Berger literally turns him upside-down in the first verse, and Claude takes over the vocals on the lines about believing in God in the second. At this point, a large group of hippies join the song and dance, briefly making Berger and his group a part of the community.

For "Ain't Got No," Tharp's choreography once again adds immensely to the meaning of the song. The dance takes place on a broad set of steps which the performers struggle up and down, pulled between the forces of heaven and earth symbolized in the previous two songs. The movement perfectly matches the dilemma, suggested by the song, of having no possessions: does it require a person to be subservient in order to fulfill basic needs or free the individual for spiritual contemplation? The dancers finally rise to the upper level, but the conflict continues to the end of the number. At one point, all the dancers seem to give up and sit down on a park bench, but one woman pulls them back up again. The final two shots of the sequence focus on someone's foot stepping in a puddle and a low-angle shot of two people rising up to hug each other. The end at first appears to represent a successful battle into the realm of spirituality, but the desperate nature of the embrace does not evoke confidence.

In the next musical number, Forman ironically demonstrates the weakness of Berger's philosophy during his most exuberant performance. The hippies' supposed spiritual communion with nature is entirely superficial.

The caves they dwell in are really Central Park tunnels, they cannot control a horse, and smoking dope represents their path to enlightenment. Berger's rejection of social rules gives him the freedom to do as he pleases, which creates all of the action in the story and brings Claude and Sheila together. Through them, his death is made meaningful by contributing to the hope for a better future. On his own, Berger is more vulnerable than he is forceful. He is witty, clever, and independent, but he is also tied to physical necessity. The song "I Got Life" emphasizes all of these points. Berger performs it while dancing down the main table at Sheila's formal debutante ball. The lyrics are a celebration of pure physical existence, which also implies certain requirements. Forman stresses the inadequacy of having nothing but life at the end of the song when the police appear to take Berger and his friends to jail.

Forman and Weller present the conflict within conventional society in terms of Claude and Sheila's struggle to find a reasonable alternative between the hippies' extravagance and a hypocritical society. Forman symbolizes Claude's real desires in the hallucination he has after taking LSD for the first time. The scene takes place in the old wooden church that he and his father passed at the very beginning. The doors open and Claude, dressed as a cowboy, pulls Sheila, dressed as a bride, into the church. The ceremony is a weird combination of primitive, modern, and traditional elements performed by a priestess who floats in the air above the altar, but Claude kneels solemnly. For Claude, the ceremony is both an affirmation of tradition and a rebellious act that is breaking down social barriers. Elements of earthiness and spirituality are combined in the event. As Claude is about to say his vows, the rented horse walks in the church. While the couple is kissing, the song "Hari Krishna" begins, the words eventually changing to "mari juana."

Sheila backs away from Claude's kiss and she is pregnant, fulfilling the dream of a new family, but they are quickly separated by a line of bridesmaids dancing between them. Sheila combines the elements of nature and spirituality in herself, but they are not unified and each appears fearsome to Claude. He looks to his right, and Sheila is performing a ritual behind a large urn. She turns into a priestess and a fire starts in front of her. Claude looks to his left, and Sheila is crouching in the mud by some other hippies. She also turns into a laughing hippie covered with mud. She dances in a manner that mocks prayerfulness. Claude also looks and sees the chandelier from Shiela's house swinging over the dinner table, and sees himself ride by on the horse while wearing a tuxedo, thus blending rural and high society cultures.

The singers on the soundtrack are now chanting "Beads, Love, Freedom, Happiness." Claude looks over to his right again and Sheila is carried in on a tray by a waiter. She floats to the center of an altar shaped like a large blue flower and again turns into a priestess. The now riderless horse walks by the base of the altar, and another priestess, dressed in blue, appears in the air. Her appearance marks the beginning of the disintegration of Claude's dream. She floats over to two hippies embracing on a park bench and separates them. She then floats back the other way and Berger dances in from the left side. He reaches up and spins her out of the way, eliminating her intrusive spirituality, and then dances over to Sheila, who is again pregnant and in her bridal gown. Berger sees Sheila start flapping her arms and eventually gets her to fly. Forman briefly cuts to a shot of the hallucinating Claude smiling at his vision.[15] But Berger is associated with the earth and his highs are related to drugs and marijuana. Claude now envisions a line of hippies dancing in front of some high flames. Sheila begins to

fly out of control and the hallucination ends with she and Claude both flying into the flames. The horrified Claude standing in Central Park, stares in shock and drops out of the frame. The scene ends with Berger dancing mockingly after some Hari Krishnas, again chasing away spirituality.

In the next scene, Claude indicates his willingness to stay out of the Army if he can be with Sheila instead. The two of them follow Berger, Hud, and Woof into a Central Park pond for some nude bathing. There, Claude tells Sheila that he might not go, but he quickly changes his mind. They soon discover that their clothes are missing, and the frantic Sheila angrily runs off in nothing but her panties to catch a cab. The first one to see her screeches to a halt. Berger's prank puts an end to Claude's idea. The ordered life of the Army suddenly becomes more appealing to him than the fragile freedom of the hippies, but Forman immediately presents a series of musical numbers that show Claude once again doubting his decision. In the first one, Claude sings "Where Do I Go?" while walking down a New York street through a crowd of society's robots going about their daily business. The flag above the door to the recruitment center provides the answer to his search for guidance.

The next two songs are both pieces of inspired comedy and another clue to Claude that the institutions he is seeking answers from are basically corrupt. A group of Army doctors, half black and half white, sits at a table looking over the new inductees, who stand naked in front of them. At first, they laugh at a boyish recruit named Woodrow Sheldon who has red toenails, but when some muscular men come in they get very excited, start dancing in their seats, and sing. The white officers first join some girls on a Central Park sidewalk who are singing

"Black Boys," and then the black officers do the same on a song called "White Boys." The white girls who perform outside are eyeing two black basketball players while the black girls first ogle a handsome guy who is a slick dresser and then two intellectual-looking types. Forman is playing with social stereotypes and mocking the military at the same time, suggesting the latent homosexuality that exists in the male lover of the macho image in other men. Claude called Berger ridiculous at the end of the swimming scene, but his well-ordered society is ludicrous also. The scene ends with Claude standing in front of the officers.[17]

The song "Walking in Space" plays over the next sequence of Claude going through various basic training drills, suggesting some of the thoughts that might be going through his head. The song begins with the lyrics "Doors locked/Blinds pulled/Lights low/Flames high," which referred in the play to the hippies starting to get high, but here indicates entrapment by the military. A Vietnamese girl who floats across the screen sings the lyrics "My body is walking in space," creating an association with the East and spiritualism and implying a condemnation of the U.S. war effort. In the final drill, Claude is walking through a river flooded in red light as the song lyrics state "In this light, we rediscover sensation." Claude's experiences cause him to stop and think, which does not please the drill instructors. His situation makes him think about other possibilities for human relationships, and the sequence ends with his writing to Sheila. He would probably be willing now to risk the lack of stability that accompanies the hippie lifestyle.

The final step in Claude's re-evaluation of his situation occurs as the troops at his base are lined up for review before shipping out. As the commander attempts to speak, the sounds of "Prisoners in Niggertown"

begin to blast out of the loudspeakers. Some soldiers go to shut it off, but they do not know how. Whoever started the music has simply left it running and gone away. The mysterious origins of the music and the high position of the loudspeakers associate it with a spiritual nature. Forman makes use of some of his dominant symbolism in the incident. As the music plays, the men break out of the straight lines of their formation. Meanwhile, in Washington, D.C., a performance group continues the song on stage at an anti-war rally in front of the Lincoln Memorial. Their all-black costumes, one with a skeleton on it, and very physical presence re-emphasizes the actual earthly nature of the song lyrics, which speak of bodies being torn apart in war. As the lyrics change to "Prisoners in Niggertown/It's a dirty little war," the segregated white and black performers join together in a mock celebration of military ethics. The setting of the performance on the other side of the country from Nevada and in front of the Lincoln Memorial makes the song into a symbolic statement of the nation's perverted spiritual values. The way Forman presents the songs in the second half of the film also emphasizes this point. After "White Boys," all of the songs are either performed with very little motion or confined to the soundtrack, the stage, the car, or a jukebox. The lack of live performances symbolizes the reduction in spontaneous responses in the journey of men from primitive life to organized society. As the world becomes increasingly civilized and complex, life becomes more ordered. The end of the "Prisoners in Niggertown" scene emphasizes this point as a line of soldiers finally shoots out the loudspeakers and the troop leaders get their men back in order. The commander, played by director Nicholas Ray, reasserts his authority by saying, "Now, can all you men hear me?"

Forman thus incorporates the harsh realities of recent history into the structure of a traditional Hollywood musical. Claude and Sheila finally get together at the end, but the bridging of their social differences actually has very little importance. What they represent is a union of their strong traditional backgrounds with the hippies' emphasis on informal relationships and human compassion. They are also the reason for hope, though Forman concludes by indicating that formal institutions have a continual need to "let the sun shine in."[18] Only Berger's sacrifice, representing the only possible outcome when nonconformist individuals confront unyielding institutions, allows Claude and Sheila to get together. In the final section of the film, Berger finally reaches his spiritual goals, being appropriately transformed into a Christ-figure for the occasion.

After he has taken Claude's place in the barracks, the men are ordered to stand at attention beside their bunks to prepare to depart. Forman shows Berger in a three-shot between two other soldiers, a repetition of the shot of Charlie Cheswick, McMurphy, and the Chief on the bench in Cuckoo's Nest. Again, though Berger does not make the decision, plans are made to depart for another world. As Berger stands there, a white post behind him with a red coffee can nailed to it symbolizes the blood on the cross. Once again, the main character is not the only one being sacrificed, but Berger is the most distinct Christ-figure since he is centered between the other two and he is dying in another man's place. The symbolism is complete when, after Berger enters the plane (or tomb), he ascends into heaven.

Forman's cut immediately thereafter to his grave represents his finally achieving the unification of heaven and earth. Forman indicates the value of his sacrifice by panning up to show three newly-formed

families who have all been influenced by his life. Woof stands with his arm around Jeannie, Claude and Sheila stand in the center, and Hud, his fiance, and their son are on the other side. The group's presence symbolizes the creation of a new family based on new values. Forman, though, is making no statements about the impact of the Sixties' youth counterculture on American society. The final shots of the film show a large crowd of hippies rushing together and standing outside the White House, a solid iron gate separating the two. Forman thus presents the continual need for institutions and symbols of authority to be instilled with humane and spiritual values. The last shot is of an American flag in the crowd that changes to a still photo and fades to black and white, reminiscent of the first scenes of the film in Oklahoma. The flag (which could be of any country, but in this case is most appropriately American) is a final reminder of the references throughout the film that all of the action has taken place within the same all-encompassing society from which there is no escape. Everyone must, and will, in one way or another, make their own contributions to it. Forman's message in Hair is that Americans must not mistake faith in their country with a blind acceptance of the order imposed by its institutions, because spiritual greatness is not produced by an unbending social structure. In this theme, he has accurately captured the hippies' message while presenting a true account of their fate and ambiguous contributions to American society.[19]

In Hair, Milos Forman does not at all address the issue of whether America was right or wrong to be in Vietnam. Instead, he sees the evil of the war as existing mainly in the fact that it threatened to break up families, which are presented as the true spiritual strength of America. Forman's view of war in this regard again relates to his personal experience of losing his parents in the concentration camps and

is particularly accurate in relation to Vietnam, which not only separated families physically but also spiritually in terms of many of those youths who opposed it. The hopefulness that he places in the conclusion of Hair derives from his creation of the hippies as a symbol of a new family with a spiritual basis instead of an artificial relationship to an imposed order. Claude and Sheila are the primary representation of this new family, which is why they are centered in the shot of the group standing in front of Berger's grave, and their basis in natural as opposed to social values is symbolized when they are reunited during Claude's absence from the base. The group waits for Claude out in a field, and Forman reinforces the association with nature through the use of acoustic music, partly live. Hud plays a harp while a folk guitar is also playing on the soundtrack. When Claude arrives, he feels Jeannie's pregnant stomach and then walks off into the woods to spend some time with Sheila. When they return, Forman shoots them through some high white flowers, emphasizing their association with nature.

Forman thus establishes the basis for the new family and suggests a renewed focus on man and nature over institutions as a means of healing the wounds left by Vietnam. Considering Hair's lack of box-office appeal and the themes that Forman developed in it, the film's problem was possibly that it appeared too early rather than too late. Forman's concern with spirituality and the family anticipates two major issues of the Eighties while also providing an alternative to traditional political and religious institutions as a source of these values. Yet, this message certainly does not guarantee that even people in this decade would have listened. Before he even began filming Hair, Forman knew that his next project would be Ragtime, and he had some very definite ideas about E. L. Doctorow's book. Taken together, Hair and Ragtime represent

a two-part statement on individual responsibility in the modern world. The first part establishes the need to find a human basis for spiritual values while the second half argues that an individual must become knowledgeable about the world or suffer the consequences.

ENDNOTES

[1]Frank Rich provides the most accurate analysis of Hair, though a few others come close. Rich praises Forman and co-screenwriter Michael Weller for creating a musical based on believable characters that expresses exuberance while also showing movement from utopia to reality, with the songs and dances used for narrative purposes. Rich states that in the conclusion, "Forman at once resolves the plot, reopens the national wounds of Vietnam and pulls back to bring the whole movie into a historical perspective" (90). Ethan Morden also gives an excellent summary of the film, crediting its success to its combination of "intoxicating imaginative flights" and an accurate presentation of the era. The necessary realism, Morden suggests, was also the film's downfall. Sixties youths had moved on to other concerns, and older people did not care to re-view events they hated the first time (227-28). Leonard Quart and Albert Auster are also fairly accurate in describing Forman's theme as the gains and losses of liberation. They find his meshing of design, dance, and music perfect, and also comment on his transformation of Central Park into Oz. Auster repeats this statement of the theme in his individual review, praising the film as Forman's best American effort. Jack Kroll ("Aquarius Reborn") praises just about every aspect of the film, regretting only that some of the original numbers are cut. Kroll says that Forman treats the material as a myth of our popular consciousness, harking back to America's search for innocence in the late Sixties.

Other reviewers simply miss Forman's theme completely and have very few positive comments. Stanley Kauffmann ("Ex-Champions") feels that the film offers some pleasantly imaginative escapes from reality, but fails to overcome its dated topicality. Kauffmann sees the main character, Berger, as a silly failure, but never asks why that might have been intended. Richard A. Blake finds Hair upbeat even though the times were not, but offers the confusing remark that selective memory can be bad. He simplifies Forman's theme by labeling it as anti-institutions. Robert Asahina ("Cinematic Delusions") simply cannot understand the film and admits it. Forman's frank protrait of the hippies' positive and negative values confuses him. Consequently, he interprets all of Berger's bad qualities as only confirming what he had thought about hippies all along. Vernon Young ("Film Chronicle: Trash") also uses the film as an excuse for venting his pent up hatred of hippies. He dislikes Hair for having no unifying style and celebrating the "ugly" Sixties.

John Coleman ("Tripping Up") apparently liked the music, dancing, and photography, but hated the characters. He finds Berger arrogant and concludes, "shutting the mind to the prevailing moral weather permits incidental pleasures." Rob Edelman also sees the characters as superficial and the theme of freedom versus conformity poorly stated. Variety ("Hair") likes the cast and praises parts of the

film for rising above other contemporary musicals, even though, the writer contends, Forman fails to evoke the potent nostalgia. Finally, Vincent Canby ("Film: 1969 Relived") takes a completely opposite and equally shallow view, praising the film as a combination of fable and Broadway polish that makes no pretensions to being contemporary.

[2]Charles F. Altman's analysis of film musicals reveals that

> Instead of focusing all its interest on a single character, following the trajectory of his progress, the American film musical has a dual focus, built around parallel stars of opposite sex and radically divergent values. This dual-focus structure requires the viewer to be sensitive not so much to chronology and progression--for the outcome of the male/female match is entirely conventional and thus quite predictable--but to simultaneity and comparison. (11)

[3]"Hair: The Second Dawning" briefly discusses the film's development from Forman's first viewing of the play to the final version and gives background information about some of the stars.

[4]Forman discusses the proposals other writers gave him and his reasons for hiring Weller in Tom Buckley's "At the Movies." Some of the suggestions he got were to make the film completely "psychedelic" or set it in outer space. Forman also tells about the need for a film to have an exact plot and his difficulty in finding an ending for Hair. Michael Goodwin ("Thousands Dance") describes some of the other production problems on Hair.

[5]Thomas Berger comments that while working on Vital Parts:

> On such few occasions as I did furnish Forman with a suggestion for the script, he politely disparaged it and provided an alternative I invariably thought brilliant, and praised: a foolish move, for Milos is as bored by agreement as he is stimulated by dissension. We all remained fast friends, Forman, [producer Jerome] Hellman, and I, no doubt that was why Vital Parts never reached the screen. (34-35)

[6]Jerome Ragni and James Rado explain in their introduction to the play,

> today's youth is involved in group-tribal activity. So Hair should be a group-tribal activity. . . . Note should be taken of the spiritual theme running through the play; outer space, astrology, the earth, the heavens, interplanetary travel, mysticism as seen in the songs "Aquarius," "Walking in Space," "Early Morning Singing Song," and "Exanaplanatooch," especially. Also take note of the ever-present threat of the outside world on The Tribe, as expressed through the presence of the large police puppets, the projections on the walls of FBI, CIA, dark mysterious men, and Mom and Dad at times. (viii-x)

[7]Forman comments on Hair's lack of audience appeal in Harry Stein's "Milos Forman."

[8]See Altman, (10-12).

[9]"The Yellow Brick Road" describes the cast's unhappiness (John Savage in particular) during the making of Hair and the critics' apathy. Forman defends the film as an objective view of the times.

[10]Tony Chiu recounts William's life and career and the process of having his hair thickened for the role.

[11]Penelope Gilliat, in the midst of some generally confusing comments about Hair, does accurately remark that its lack of exuberance rests on its shifty notion of where true exuberance lies. Janet Maslin and David Denby ("'Hair' Transplanted") also desire a more exhilarating film, though Denby does praise Forman's objective view of the hippies and Sixties' issues. In order to present his theme honestly, Forman seems to have been forced into sacrificing either some of the high-spiritedness of the original show or some contemporary objectivity. Since presenting the hippie values as a hope for the future in 1979 would be ridiculous, his decision to temper the film's enthusiasm seems like an obvious choice.

[12]This approach represents Forman's most significant variation from traditional musicals. As Altman describes, "the dual-focus structure of the American film musical derives from character" (12).

[13]Michael Wood cites the death of the classic Hollywood musical as occurring about twenty-five years earlier: "What killed off the vivid musical of those years was a growing failure of music in the life outside the movies. By the mid-fifties, it was beginning to seem impossible to break into a general song and dance in America, even metaphorically" (America in the Movies, 153).

[14]Perhaps the critics who wanted Hair to be an exhilerating experience were looking for Forman to transform it into a traditional musical because several of them criticized his filming and editing of the dance sequences. John Simon, in a typically caustic review, criticized these scenes and Forman's casting most heavily ("Timely and Untimely"). Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. criticizes the dance sequences and cites Forman as having a dangerously superficial view of American culture, thus revealing his own shallow analysis of the film. The film, according to Westerbeck, lacks the tension of the original show ("Hair Today"). David Denby ("'Hair' Transplanted") also criticizes Forman's editing of the dances, believing that the Central Park scenes could have had more liberating power if they had been filmed more simply. Vincent Canby ("Film: 1969 Relived") also finds the dances too heavily edited. Twyla Tharp partially agreed with the critics, expressing difficulty about working with Forman and her belief that too much dancing was cut. Nevertheless, she still seems happy with the outcome and has worked on both of Forman's films since Hair as well (Cameron). Forman describes Tharp as naturally antagonistic. She often feins disgust with a project in order to test her collaborator's commitment (Hodenfield, 20).

[15]Editor Stan Warnow talks about working with Forman and the dancing horses sequence as an example of editing to music in Roy Huss's "The Man Who Cut Hair" (300-01).

[16]Warnow explains that these shots of Claude in the park had to be edited in to clarify for young audience members that the wedding scene was Claude's hallucination (Huss, 298).

[17]Warnow describes the filming and editing of these songs, and the need to avoid "tasteless camp--an unintentional parody of gay life-styles" (Huss, 299-300).

[18]Forman's philosphy is,

> we all are--and want to life like--individuals, yet we need institutions to help us live. And by the law of nature, I guess--I don't have any other explanation--institutions always have a tendency to dominate us and control us rather than the other way around. We create something to help us, we pay for it, and we end up being owned by it." (Kennedy, 41)

Forman's statement explains why labeling any of his films as anti-institutions is over-simplistic. He always carefully distinguishes between institutions and people who are a part of them.

[19]Eric Bradford was the only reviewer to emphasize how Forman met the challenge of making "let the sunshine in" a meaningful phrase once again. After the film's premier, Diane von Furstenberg also revealed a knowledge of its message, remarking,

> Seeing the movie right now is very weird, because our generation isn't speaking right now--and somehow I think some of us should. It seems like the world is being led by very old men, and it's very shaky at the moment. Still, the women did their job in Iran, so we shall see. It's all about freedom, isn't it. (Bennetts)

CHAPTER SEVEN

RAGTIME AND OUR TIME

Ever since Milos Forman began filming Hair, he has been constantly involved with his filmmaking career. In each of his works, he has continued to create statements that speak directly to contemporary society. Despite the poor commercial showing of Hair, Forman did not consciously choose his next projects primarily on the basis of their promise at the box office. Instead, he reveals, he has directed his two most recent films basically because the stories captured his interest and suggested new ideas to him:

> I was offered Ragtime before I made Hair. So I had enough time to digest the book and what excited me about the book to find out if the excitement is genuinely that I am really in love and not just in lust. And the same was with Amadeus, because Amadeus I saw before I made Ragtime. So I had enough time to say no if I discovered that it was just a temporary infatuation with the project. I had enough time to figure out if it is a lasting love affair with the project.

In Ragtime, Forman was able to find themes from a story set at the beginning of the twentieth-century that apply directly to the 1980s. The tale is about the changing nature of America due to the rising power of immigrants and minorities, about the struggle to create a fair system of justice in the face of a society dominated by racism and archaic Puritan values, about a world in which terrorism now constantly threatens established institutions, and mainly about the clash of the human spirit with technology and the need to either understand the modern world or be controlled by it. Out of this mixture of themes, E. L. Doctorow created a

novel with an optimistic tone. It showed the humiliation of those who tried to maintain the traditional social hierarchy in America headed by male WASPs and the creation of a new heterogenous nation following World War I.[1] Milos Forman used these materials to once again present his own vision of America and a message that upholds the importance of individual responsibility. Forman indeed shows the creation of a new world, but it is one that has gone out of control because people do not know how to interpret it.

E. L. Doctorow strenuously objected when he heard that Forman planned to make the rebellion of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. the central part of the film.[2] In the story, Walker is an eloquent young black man who turns to violence to obtain his rights when some racist volunteer firemen desecrate his car and the legal system offers him no possibility of reprisal. Yet, Walker's story makes the film relevant not only because Americans had to cope daily in 1980 with the spectre of terrorism in Iran, but mainly because the use of violence as a means of expressing grievances has been a fact of life throughout the twentieth century.[3] The era opened with the assassination of President William McKinley, and the film also refers to an attempt on the life of President Theodore Roosevelt. Terrorism and violence have recently become vital issues, but they have not solely been a problem of the present generation. An equally important aspect of the modern age is the growth of technology and the benefits it gives to whoever has access to it. Not only does technology connote status, as with Walker's car, but it also offers the opportunity of a better life to all those who are able to control it. In Ragtime, the Russian immigrant Tateh rises from the slums to become a Hollywood director because he is able to exploit cheap public transportation and somehow learn how to use a movie camera.[4] Both Walker's and Tateh's fates are therefore determined

by their relationship to technology, and the black man's rebellion merely symbolizes how minorities who are denied access to twentieth-century resources will sometimes resort to violence to obtain equality. Coalhouse Walker's story is thus central to Ragtime, but it is not the sole basis for Forman's theme. Forman is intent on showing that people's understanding of their history and their world must go deeper than simply acknowledging that minorities and underdeveloped countries lack adequate resources for advancement, because individuals who do not comprehend their environment for whatever reason, are doomed to suffer. In Ragtime, two people die and a family collapses as a result of misinterpreted images. Forman uses the film's structure, a few key shots, his actors, and colors to extend the significance of these events to the viewers, who are left with an important choice to make. They can either relate to the world superficially and suffer for their ignorance or learn how to properly define it and progress along with the twentieth century.[5]

Arnost Lustig tells the story that Doctorow once visited Forman on the set and said that the director was not being true to his book. Forman replied that Doctorow had not been true to history (Personal interview). Whether or not this story is ture, Forman did not entirely get to make the film he wanted to in Ragtime. Producer Dino De Laurentis forced the cut of twelve minutes of finished material, but Michael Weller states that his effect was much greater than that. Weller has one regret about the final version:

> I would try again to make the producer film the entire script. We had to cut half of it out, and though I thought the final film was a good one, I think that a fuller more complex version might be more satisfying.[6]

Ragtime is already a film of epic length and scope, so a version that is even twice as long would be difficult to imagine. A producer's desire to avoid risking the box office chances of a film over four hours long is

understandable. Even so, Forman's Ragtime already presents a direct challenge to the viewer to seek the reality beyond the image.

Milos Forman has never been deluded into thinking that a director is the sole creator of a film. His screenwriting methods and openness to improvisation on the set allow him to make use of the creative talents of others without worrying about his own ego. Forman states that being able to do so depends on all the crucial work that must be done prior to filming:

> you really spend 50% of your time and energy just putting the right people together, finding the right locations, and the right means to finance and distribute the film, which finally, indirectly reflects on the screen. If you don't expend this effort to find the right people, what's on the screen will look different. Despite your best intentions, your work still depends on the work of many other people.[7]

In Ragtime, Forman derived particular benefit from the dedicated efforts of one of his main actors. Michael Weller describes the strong contribution of Mandy Potinkin, who played the role of the immigrant Tateh:

> He contacted a group of Russian emigres and a translator, sat down with them, whispered his lines in English to the translator, had her say the lines out loud in Russian, then asked the Russians in the room how they would translate these Russian lines into English. None of them spoke proper English yet, so their broken and incorrect usages formed the basis of the lines that Mandy finally spoke in the film.

These types of efforts certainly added to the quality of Ragtime, but, as Weller states, the film is specifically Forman's vision:

> I was happy to work with Forman again. I had no particular feelings about the book, positive or negative. Forman had strong notions about what the book meant to him, and it was his ideas that interested me.

The film makes clear that Forman's ideas related to modern communications and technology, minority grievances, terrorism, and the changing nature of the family, but it also states that these themes will only be fully discernable by those who can properly interpret cinematic art.[8]

Forman's opening presents the idea that film is a complex system of communication with many layers of meaning. Right from the beginning, Forman uses every part of the film's structure to encourage viewers to look for levels of meaning beyond what is presented on the screen. He unwraps Ragtime in the fashion of peeling the individual layers off an onion. The title first appears in red on a black background. As it grows large and leaves the screen, a new shot appears through the capital letter "G." Evelyn Nesbit (Elizabeth McGovern) dances a waltz with a man who is wearing a black tuxedo. Evelyn wears a gaudy, but stylish for the turn-of-the-century, black and red gown. The characters and the waltz are thus an image for the era communicating elegance, sophistication, and a bit of extravagance. The opening credits appear over this shot, Forman's name being the last to come on the screen. This graphic also grows large, revealing a close-up of the hands of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. (Howard E. Rollins) playing the piano. The camera pans up to his face and then to the silent newsreels that he is providing music for. These film clips present a broader picture of the era than the opening waltz did, further explaining the nature of the world supporting the opening image of elegance.

The music and picture both immediately contrast with the initial scene. Randy Newman's silky but sorrowful waltz changes to a dramatic and tense set of chords to match the shot of a group of immigrant children playing under a gushing fire hydrant to escape what the title says is New York's "Hottest Summer in 30 Years." One of the children is naked, and he keeps getting covered up by the others. Walker then plays "Battle Hymn of the Republic" to match a clip of Booker T. Washington having dinner at the White House with Teddy Roosevelt and immediately finds other appropriate musical moods to accompany shots of Houdini and

his mother being mobbed by people as they leave on a national tour and a nude statue by architect Stanford White being raised to the top of Madison Square Garden. This scene also reveals something about the nature of film and Coalhouse Walker's personality. The newsreels provide a picture of the full society, from the unknown immigrant children to the rich and famous, but the images are still all superficial.

Walker is obviously a man who knows all the cliched attitudes of his time and can instantly produce them in order to please his audience. He probably even believes in them himself. He is a talented, sophisticated, and educated individual who expects society to live up to its professed ideals rather than abiding by its racist reality. This idea is the basis of Walker's rebellion in the film. At the beginning, he probably believes in the conciliatory stance of Booker T. Washington towards coping with racism. When the two finally meet, Walker shows respect and admiration for the great black scientist. Walker is willing to support society's superficial structure, but he is also ready to undercut it. Intuitively, he knows that the smoothly functioning social hierarchy indicated by the newsreels does not match reality. When another character, Younger Brother (Brad Dourif), later asks him what type of music he plays, Walker answers, "Anything they ask me to. And then I play ragtime." His statement indicates a willingness to bow to convention first, but then a desire to abide by the more hectic and exuberant rhythms of real life. Milos Forman's film provides the same alternatives to the audience.[9]

The final newsreel begins with the title "Evelyn Nesbit Denies Modeling For Nude Statue" and ends with a shot of the celebrity laughing and smiling into the camera while her husband, millionaire Harry K. Thaw (Robert Joy), acts perturbed. Thaw finally turns and takes a punch

at the camera lens, whereupon Forman cuts to a shot of a chandelier in a ballroom where a party is being given by Stanford White (Norman Mailer). Forman is thus unpeeling another layer of the onion. The remainder of the film will provide even more details of the society to explain the newsreels, which were a more complete image than the waltz. The viewer should therefore understand something about the nature of film from these opening scenes. He can accept the superficial level of meaning and be satisfied, but to truly know what the images are telling him he must be able to interpret them. The viewer can enjoy the narrative that Forman presents, which really begins with the shot of the chandelier, but another layer of meaning lies even below that, which the audience must discover for itself. The price of not being able to do so is to allow those who control the images produced by film and other media to control people's lives. When people merely abide by the dominant images in the media, they will not be able to understand their world. They will be happiest with only the most superficial images and lack the power to make independent, intelligent decisions. The end of the newsreel indicates that those with power can control the images and do not have to learn how to interpret. Thaw simply turns and punches the camera and worries about it no more.

From the close-up of the chandelier, Forman pans downward to White's party. In the following scene, when he introduces the suburban family also central to the plot, Forman again pans down, this time from a close-up of a large tree to a full view of the house and lawn. These shots contrast directly with the introduction of Coalhouse Walker, in which Forman pans upward from his hands to his face, and comment on the eventual fall of both White and the family in comparison with the rising power of minorities and immigrants. Forman carries the contrast further with the introduction of Harry K. Thaw into the party scene. Thaw is literally an

outsider. He twice emphasizes the fact that he is from Pittsburgh, and he must force his way into White's exclusive New York party. His entrance into White's residence repeats the upward movement that introduced Walker. Thaw charges up the stairs to where the party is being held and demands entrance. The path of his movement predicts that he will eventually succeed in his goals.

The conflict between Thaw and White demonstrates one instance of a man meeting his downfall because he misinterprets the significance of an image. The suburban family and Coalhouse Walker's fiance Sarah (Debbie Allen) also become victims of their own lack of understanding. In each of these stories, Forman and Weller reveal the social fortunes of both established individuals and anxious status seekers being determined by images.

Stanford White dies because even though he creates and shows concern about images, he does not demonstrate the same regard for their impact that Harry K. Thaw does. White creates a nude statue using Thaw's wife as a model and displays it on top of a famous building for all the world to see and then tries to ignore the effect that his actions have on a small jealous man who already feels a lack of respect. Just before Thaw shoots White in the rooftop restaurant of Madison Square Garden, White tries to simply ignore his nemesis when Thaw calls to him. His arrogance costs him his life. White also demonstrates his shallowness and superficial concern with images during the party scene. He and all his male guests wear garlands on their heads and cavort with chorus girls in the manner of decadent Roman senators, which becomes another prediction of White's eventual downfall. When Thaw and his four hired thugs break down the door to enter the party, White yells at him, "God damn it, Thaw. That door is priceless." His remark reveals his primary concern with

material objects rather than people. White and his friends feel secure because they are surrounded by prostitutes and black servants who are all subordinate to them, but they stupidly ignore the power of outside forces that are clamoring their way into the upper levels of the American social hierarchy.[10]

The nameless suburban family of the story represents all of the classic Victorian, Christian, and free enterprise values of nineteenth-century America. When they come to dinner in their very first scene, they are all in formal dress and the father assumes that he is the head of the household. Their conversation reveals that not much exciting ever takes place in their lives, and they have very little communication with each other. They are isolated both as individuals and as a group. When Father (James Olson) rewards Younger Brother for his good work in the family business by asking him to say grace, he demonstrates how his Christianity relates more to materialism than to the needs of his fellow man. Forman also reveals Father's attempt to isolate his family through the apparent seclusion of the house, which is surrounded by large trees. The family's collapse in Ragtime demonstrates how values must either actively respond to social needs or die. Forman shows the first challenge to their beliefs in terms of their responses to a very basic image, that of a helpless baby. This incident is also in the novel, but Forman uses it for his own thematic purposes. Forman challenges his viewers by holding the shot of the baby lying on the ground for a longer than necessary period, questioning whether his viewer's response will be in terms of social propriety like Father's or human compassion like Mother's (Mary Steenburgen).

The shot of the baby also calls to mind several popular myths and stories. First is probably the tale told to children that babies come

from cabbage patches, and the ridiculousness of that story must also be thought of as well. The image also relates to two Biblical stories, and parallels exist between the baby and both Moses and Christ. Like Moses, the baby has been abandoned by its mother and found among some plants. It too is taken in by the members of a race that has enslaved and been hostile towards its own people. The image of the baby born in poverty, out of wedlock, and lying in nature also brings to mind the picture of Christ in the manger, and the dilemma that the discovery poses to the family is the same as the one that Jesus presented to his followers: how will they treat the least among society? The baby has the potential to become a future leader of his people, and the dual suggestions related with this first shot of him become important later in the film when Coalhouse Walker meets with Booker T. Washington (Moses Gunn). The two men represent alternative paths for blacks to take: Walker operates according to a code of Old Testament vengeance while Washington abides by the principles of New Testament forgiveness. The boy child in the vegetable garden could grow up to be either man.

The opposite responses of Father and Mother towards the discovery of the baby demonstrate the ways in which they respond to intrusions from the outside world and the reason why one will be left alone at the end of the film while the other travels off as part of a new heterogeneous twentieth-century family. Father's reaction is to turn away and ask the maid what she has done. Rather than take any responsibility himself, he attacks someone in a subordinate position. By contrast, Mother, with the help of Younger Brother, steps right into the garden and picks up the baby. As she carries the tiny child away, Father follows behind saying, "Where are you taking it? Not in the house?" Father's critical reaction, like Stanford White's, eventually costs him greatly because

he does not make basic human needs his primary concern. After the baby, and eventually her mother, Sarah, enter the household, his ability to assume authority quickly begins to erode. Eventually, he loses his entire family because he ignores Mother's pleas to stay with her in order to do what he feels society requires of him.[11]

When Coalhouse Walker, father of the child, begins his rebellion by killing firemen and taking over the J. Pierpont Morgan Library, the family becomes inundated with reporters and protesters. They escape temporarily to a resort hotel, but the situation follows them. Two detectives arrive to get Walker's baby for use as a pawn in negotiating with him. Father resonds to the law's insensitivity by seeking to comply with it and protect what he sees as his own self-interest. Mother feels that the police are "just being ridiculous." She will not accept a life or a society in which people merely act according to orders without thinking of the effects on others first. Father ends the conversation by saying that he will be going to New York with or without the baby. Mother tells him, "Please don't go. Don't leave me here alone." Both of them know that her statement is a lie because Father has already seen her dancing with Tateh, who is in Atlantic City working as a director. What Mother is actually doing is giving Father one last chance to prove his loyalty to her and to people in general rather than to the system, but he does not take it. When he later calls the hotel from New York, he discovers that his family has already checked out. Mother's final statement is a challenge to Father and the audience as well, because the viewer who is not able to interpret a film will not be able to understand her any better than he does.

Stanford White and Father are both victims of their own lack of consideration for people, but Sarah misinterprets the world for a very

different reason. She knows nothing about practical affairs such as the difference between political rhetoric and imagery and reality. When she disrupts the smooth functioning of a campaign rally to seek help for her fiance, she thus falls victim to a policeman's club. Forman naturally expects the viewer to learn from her error.

Sarah goes to the campaign rally because Father has told her that she is completely responsible for doing something to help Coalhouse Walker. While there, she attempts to scream her message when the Vice-President comes out to speak from the back of his train. His presence there again symbolizes the exclusion of blacks from modern technology and the social-political power structure. The Vice-President says all the words that Sarah wants to hear: that the President's door is always open and that the Republicans stand for rewarding the self-reliant, both of which fit Coalhouse Walker's needs exactly. Sarah, even if she hears, does not understand that his words are only empty rhetoric. She pushes her way through the crowd, while the police, sensitive to the threat of assassination after the attack on Roosevelt, move out from the train to meet her. Sarah is just able to yell her message before being tackled and clubbed. A week later she dies of internal injuries. Through no fault of her own, Sarah becomes an example of one who has completely good intentions, but dies because she is totally ignorant of the world around her. On her deathbed, she tells Coalhouse Walker that the President now knows who he is. She does not even know that the man on the train was only the Vice-President.

Father and Sarah are tragic examples of what happens to people who lack knowledge about their world and other people, but Forman also provides a comic example. When Walker lays siege to the library, the police force takes over an old lady's apartment across the street and keeps her

out in the hall throughout the entire ordeal. The situation is another example of the justice system trampling on individual rights, and the woman (Bessie Love) has no idea of what is happening. At one point she asks a large silent officer, "Can you give me just a rough idea?" In the twentieth century, most people find out about their world through the mass media, and this lady is helpless without it.

Forman presents another key image in the scene where Evelyn Nesbit first goes to the ghetto and meets Tateh. At the end, she will be the lead actress in his film, but to begin with they are in completely different worlds. Evelyn Nesbit is a former chorus girl and mistress of Stanford White. Harry Thaw's marriage to her represents his attempt to fulfill the American male's dream of having a wife who is a combination sex goddess and perfect homemaker. After taking Evelyn to a European castle on their honeymoon, where he whips and has his way with her, he demands that she present an image of virgin purity to the public. Thus, dominated by a Victorian social philosophy that she does not fit into and wants no part of, she is rootless and comes to the ghetto looking for life. As she rides in the cab of her chauffered sedan, Forman shoots the passing scene of crowded streets and squalor from her perspective. The window frame around the view makes it look just like a television picture, which is exactly the way that Evelyn sees it. For her, life is what takes place on a screen or a stage and the immigrants are one big show. She looks at them completely unemotionally. Evelyn becomes a successful movie star, showing her ability to manipulate the media, but she never forms any attachments or demonstrates any social concerns. She has no idea of her work being significant. In the end, Forman never shows what happens to her. She is simply a temporary and ephemeral phenomenon like the image of her waltzing, which Forman also uses to close the film.[12]

In Ragtime, Forman uses three veteran Hollywood actors, Donald O'Connor, Pat O'Brien, and James Cagney to challenge viewers who share Evelyn's television-level consciousness of reality. By undercutting each of these performer's popular images, Forman encourages his audience to look beyond mass media to actual life. O'Connor's major scene occurs when he sings "I think that I could love about a million girls" at the Madison Square Garden rooftop restaurant on the night Harry Thaw shoots Stanford White. His song reverses the woman-as-idol-to-be-conquered theme associated with many of the traditional musicals that O'Connor starred in. Forman later shows him as Evelyn Nesbit's dance instructor, part of a team designed to make her famous and earn a lot of money off her. Forman goes even further in his undercutting of Hollywood stereotypes with his use of Pat O'Brien and Jimmy Cagney.

O'Brien, famous for the upstanding values associated with his portrayals of characters such as Father Jerry Connelly in Angels With Dirty Faces (1938) and Knute Rockne in Knute Rockne--All-American (1940), here plays the lawyer who offers Evelyn a bribe to change her testimony in order to save Harry Thaw. His role is exactly the opposite of that in Angels With Dirty Faces where he attempted to convince Cagney to act like a coward on his way to the electric chair so that his youthful admirers would no longer think of him as a hero and be tempted to emulate him. In Ragtime, O'Brien is the one who is fixing the system so that his client will not have to face justice. Cagney, as New York City Police Commissioner Rhinelander Waldo, at first acts in a way that completely supports his film image. When he arrives, he quickly takes care of everything that needs to be done and then asks for coffee and a roll because he knows that he will have a long wait. The audience expects this type of action from him because they have seen him in this situation several times before,

so of course he knows what has to be done. Forman then undercuts audience expectations by having Cagney give the order for Coalhouse Walker to be shot after seemingly indicating that he will be able to surrender safely. Walker takes a few steps after being hit and dies on the front steps of the huge Pierpont Morgan Library. The scene is reminiscent of Cagney's death at the end of The Roaring Twenties (1939) where he expired on the front steps of a Cathedral. The audience does not now expect to see him in the role of the killer policeman. Forman's use of these three stars forces the audience to question all of its assumptions about film stereotypes.[13]

Cagney's seemingly unmotivated order to kill Walker also confronts viewers with racist and vigilantist philosophies. Since Walker is obviously guilty, many viewers would probably feel that a trial would be just a waste of time and money, especially since Walker's crime involves shooting people for merely having his car desecrated. Ragtime refutes such arguments because Walker's actions prove that when a fair system of justice collapses, only chaos and violence can result. Those who agree with Cagney's action must question themselves as to whether or not they really want that kind of society.[14]

Forman includes recent films also through his use of Brad Dourif, who gives a repeat of his Billy Bibbit performance in One Flew Over The Cuckoo's Nest.[15] As Younger Brother, Dourif plays a man desperately committed to either rising to the top of the established social system or overthrowing it. He is always thinking about something and working to transcend his domestic environment. When the family dinner is about to start at the beginning of the film, he is sitting at his place busily writing. His job as head of the family business' fireworks department

and his responsibility for the upturn in company fortunes symbolize his volatile and aggressive nature.

Younger Brother pursues Evelyn Nesbit throughout the first part of the film. He follows her from a distance, and he is at the garden when her husband kills Stanford White. Evelyn knows that he is following her, but whenever she looks towards him, Younger Brother shyly looks away. When she glances at him on the night of the murder, Younger Brother looks up towards the nude statue revolving high atop the garden, a revelation of his inner desires. He follows her twice on her trips into the immigrant ghetto, and finally gets the courage to approach after trailing her into the empty apartment abandoned by Tateh. There, he begins to reveal himself as being much like her husband. Evelyn first asks him if he is some kind of lunatic, but Younger Brother puts her at ease by using one of his business cards to identify himself. Evelyn accepts his invitation to escort her someplace, and the two of them begin a short affair.

Like Harry Thaw, Younger Brother wants a combination housewife and sex goddess. When Evelyn returns from a long night of partying after the end of the trial, she finds Younger Brother waiting at her door. He had planned on being there, but she had no great concern about meeting him. When they kiss, they each reveal their distinct natures. Evelyn kisses in a drunken but genuine fashion, while Younger Brother is still concerned about where she has been and the business she has been doing. Younger Brother tries to give Evelyn some advice, but she leaves the room and returns naked. As the two of them tumble together on the couch, Mrs. Thaw's lawyers emerge to interrupt them and get Evelyn to sign a paper agreeing to take only $25,000 instead of one million in return for a divorce from Harry. Her affair with Younger Brother has left her open to a charge of adultery that will cost her more than the murder of Stanford White cost her husband.

The scene thus represents the intrusion of a corrupt legal and moral system right into an individual's private life. Younger Brother attempts to cover up Evelyn with a large grey blanket when the two lawyers enter, but she just lets it drop and conducts her business in the nude. Despite Younger Brother's protests, Evelyn signs the paper. Her nudity represents that for once she is not playing a role but acting on her own behalf, and she chooses to act directly. Evelyn has gotten what she wanted out of Harry Thaw, money and fame, and she is glad to be rid of him and his family. When Younger Brother invites her to dinner so that his brother-in-law can start getting the company lawyers to work on her case, Evelyn agrees to go, but never does. She does not need to replace one restrictive family with another. Denied his opportunity to mix sexual and domestic pleasures, Younger Brother reacts in exactly the same way that Harry Thaw does. He turns into a murderer. Only when he joins Coalhouse Walker's gang is Younger Brother able to break loose from the bonds of suburbia.[16]

Younger Brother's story is an exact parallel of Billy Bibbit's, except for the ending, which is where Forman once again undercuts audience expectations. When Dourif has finally approached Evelyn Nesbit in the empty apartment and asks her for a date sometime, she responds by asking him the same question that Jack Nicholson did five years earlier: "What about right now?" Dourif has the courage to accept on his own this time, but later the events of Cuckoo's Nest again repeat themselves. He is once more caught with a naked woman, stands up for himself, and gets pushed to the side. The scene in which he interrupts Evelyn's rehearsal to ask why she never came to his house and beg that she help him escape from the seeming meaninglessness of his suburban existence is reminiscent of the point in Cuckoo's Nest when Nurse Ratched tells Billy

Bibbit that she will have to tell his mother about him. Both times, Dourif responds by screaming and fighting against being taken away. In both situations, he can feel oppressive social standards closing in on him. The difference comes in his final response to being forced back into his place. Billy Bibbit commits suicide, but Younger Brother joins Coalhouse Walker's gang of terrorists and builds bombs for them.

Forman also goes against popular attitudes in his presentation of the film's other major historical figure, Booker T. Washington (Thaw, Nesbit, and White are also based on actual people). In his confrontation with Coalhouse Walker, Washington appears not at all as the acquiescent person that he is habitually thought to be, but as one who speaks forcefully about the need to begin creating the basis for a peaceful world. While Walker's violence represents a reversion to the Old Testament doctrine of "an eye for an eye," Washington stands for the New Testament philosophy of forgiveness.[17]

When Washington goes to the Library to talk with Walker, the crowd of black women standing behind the police barricades begins singing "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," thus enhancing his stature. As Washington goes up to the front door, the sun comes out and birds begin to sing. He calls to Walker in a commanding voice that even startles Rhinelander Waldo, who is watching from a window across the street. The following meeting demonstrates the dilemma of the black man's position in America. The women who are singing do not realize the irony in their words that although they may have a voice with God, they have none on Earth. Coalhouse Walker does not realize the irony of the fact that his men are dressed in masks that make them look like Klansmen.

Washington speaks eloquently of the fact that violence will only continue until a man has the courage to stand up with Christian love

and brotherhood and say, "No, I will not seek to avenge the wrong that has been done to me." He makes a strong case because Walker's actions do seem to have risen totally out of proportion to the wrong done to him. Walker is not completely justified because, as Younger Brother knows, legal recourse was available to him. When Father tells Sarah that she must do something about Walker because the lawyers are powerless to help him, Younger Brother asks why he is lying to her and tries to tell her the truth. The struggle would be long and difficult, were the lawyer's actual words, but not hopeless. Father merely tells him to leave, and he does.

Thus, Walker might have found another path to follow if he had been patient, and his present course may only result in deeper hatred coming down upon the black race. Walker replies to Washington in words that echo the irony in the spectators' song, "You speak like an angel, Mr. Washington. It's too bad we are living on the Earth." The dilemma for black men and for all oppressed people is that being forgiving is difficult when no means of achieving justice exists. A further flaw in Washington's argument is that Walker does accomplish his goal to a certain extent when his men are able to escape and presumably continue to spread his fight for dignity throughout the black community. Walker's goals do go beyond vengeance. At the end, he sits in the library alone with his hands around the detonator, crying and praying that God show him what to do. In his decision to come out, he displays a sense of optimism, not for his own life, but that man's accumulated knowledge might yet be put to better use.

All of these examples represent Forman's attempt to make the viewer aware that a film's meaning does not lie on the surface in the same way that the opening segments reveal that both the cinema and society are

composed of many levels. Forman presents technology as having the potential for being a very positive force if it is used correctly. The availability of cheap public transportation allows Tateh and his daughter to escape from the ghetto and begin a new life. The telephone allows Coalhouse Walker and Rhinelander Waldo to negotiate their way through the dispute at the library. Tateh makes the most important statement about modern technology when he speaks about film during the dinner party at the Atlantic City hotel. He gives a toast to light, which has made all of his accomplishments possible and speaks about the endless opportunities available in the photoplay. His speech, which starts with an account of how much each of his first two pictures cost and earned, covers all aspects of filmmaking from the practical to the philosophical and is also a summary of Ragtime itself. He talks about how film allows people to see themselves: "how they fight, how they eat, how they love." Tateh's reference to light instead of mechanical equipment is significant because film is Christ-like in its potential to bring light into the world. But like Christ, it needs to be understood to be valued. Film can reveal life, but it is valueless to people who do not know how to look.[18]

Forman, for example, makes a subtle use of color and props to show the changes in both the suburban and Tateh's ghetto family.[19] In the first dinner scene and the two immediately following involving the baby and its mother, Forman already provides indications that the suburban family is not as secure as it appears on the surface. Father and Mother sit at opposite ends of a long table with Younger Brother in the middle of one side. Each of them are individuals with their own separate wills, heading in their own directions. Father wears a black sport coat, a color associated throughout the film, along with dark blue and grey,

with authority. For example, the policemen, the judge, and every male in the courtroom except for Younger Brother, and Harry Thaw's mother all wear black or dark blue. The room in which Thaw threatens to take some action against White if no legal means of attacking him can be found is grey. Forman ends the scene by filming him from a low angle that seems to increase his stature and gives him a greater sense of authority.

Younger Brother wears a light brown sport coat, a color associated thoughout the film with community. The walls in the family dining room are a dark brown, and when the baby's mother is found and comes to live in the house with her child, the two of them stay in the attic which is also made completely of dark brown wood. Brown is also the dominant color in the ghetto, and Tateh, who has strong ties to family and community, is first seen wearing a brown vest and cap. He is also sitting under a large black umbrella, its color symbolizing the social forces that are overshadowing the immigrant community and tearing it apart. The brown suit that Younger Brother wears symbolizes his entrapment in community values that he partially adheres to, but is also trying to escape from.

Mother is also a strong-willed individual who continually undercuts Father's illusory authority. Her position at the opposite end of the dinner table from him symbolizes their conflicting perspectives on the world. Mother also wears a yellow dress that stands out from the brown all around her. She is like the single ray of sunshine in an otherwise gloomy world, but in the following scenes, when the baby's mother is found and brought to the house and Mother and Father argue over what is to become of the pair, Mother's views come to dominate. While the police inspector, who has come to the house to handle the case, explains that the mother will probably receive two months in prison and her baby will be sent to a state-run institution, he sits in front of a section of the

room in which the wall is painted yellow. The wall behind Father, who agrees with the inspector, has also taken on a yellowish tint. Both of the men base their arguments on the idea that blacks are more savage than Christian and do not have the same respect for family as white people. The inspector's statement to this effect contradicts his own desire to separate the mother and her baby.

Mother's sense of Christianity is different. She believes that direct care should be given to the black woman and her child, and so she offers to take them in until the reasons for the mother's actions can be discovered. Mother knows enough to defer to Father's supposed authority. She asks him if she can ask the inspector a question. But when she stands up to ask to talk with Father privately, Forman captures her in a low-angle close-up that reveals her true position. She takes Father out of the brown dining room, through a small yellow room, and on out the front door. She is thus moving him first into her own environment and then forcing him to confront the outside world. The inspector sits at the table looking like he cannot believe what he is seeing.

Forman also employs some standard sexual symbolism to emphasize the opposing viewpoints of Mother and Father. The wall paneling behind Father features masculine straight lines while Mother sits in front of a hutch on which several dishes are standing, associating her with circular feminine imagery. A short time later, when Mother is debating with Father and the inspector, not only has the wall behind her husband taken on a yellowish tint, but a strong breeze is blowing in through the windows, indicating the encroachment of outside forces. As the family comes apart during the film, Father becomes increasingly immersed in the feminine imagery, and the outside world gets so intrusive that eventually he is sitting in front of a yellow wall with the dishes

behind him, wind blowing in through a nearby window, and loudly chirping birds heard from outside. Only when the family becomes besieged by reporters because of their association with Coalhouse Walker and Father decides that they must all leave does the imagery ever support his point of view. At that time, when the family needs to retreat from the world, his philosophy becomes logical and Mother willingly submits to it. He leads her into the brown dining room and tells her what they are going to do. For the only time in the film, she is happy to have him take control.

When Mother is making her case for housing the black woman and her baby, Younger Brother stands behind her next to the hutch and dishes, thus demonstrating his sympathy with her compassionate outlook. Forman includes on shot of him with the back of his head reflected in a mirror and three lights above it. The shot symbolizes Younger Brother's dual personality. Although he gives assent to proper social forms externally, he is convulsive and disturbed internally. The candles on the dining room table in this scene and the cigars that various men smoke during the film provide further masculine imagery, though of opposing qualities. The long white candles in front of Father, Grandfather, and the inspector symbolize the three men as being pliant and vulnerable. At the end of the first half of the film, when Coalhouse Walker is playing the organ at his fiance's funeral, the end of each church pew has a large white candle that is burning, foreshadowing how Walker will attempt to burn down the white racist society in the second half of the film. By contrast, cigars symbolize social influence. Those without power smoke half-finished ones, while those in authority always have a long new one in their mouths. Sig-

nificantly, when Walker bombs a fire station in the second half of the film, he lights the fuse by using his half-smoked cigar.

Finally, Forman's use of the color white is ironic. It does not symbolize purity, but the ignorant people who the social system either favors or who are able to use the system to their own advantage. Father is all in white when he receives a call from Coalhouse Walker, asking him to come and post bail after refusing to simply move his car and insisting that the firemen clean it. Evelyn Nesbit dresses in white throughout her husband's trial, and the racist fire chief Willie Conklin wears long white underwear all during the closing scenes of the film. The earlier association of white with the candles, however, is a reminder that each of these people represents a vanishing state of being. By the end of the film, Father has lost his family. Evelyn is a film star, a career dependent upon the whims of public fancy, and Willie practices a brand of racism that only brings down the wrath of his fellow white racists upon him.

Forman shows the social structure and formal institutions that Walker is attacking as destined to collapse because they emphasize systemic values over human ones and because they are corrupt. When the police find Sarah, the black child's mother, and drag her into the family house, Forman arranges the characters in the room to reflect the accepted social priorities. Father stands behind Mother and the inspector, and more policemen stand on the outskirts of the circle, behind the doctor and Sarah. The positions represent the dominance of authority over human compassion. Because of this corrupt orientation, the society creates all of its own troubles. Several people seek justice during the film, but

none of them are provided for by the system except for Harry Thaw, who is able to manipulate it. Besides Thaw, Evelyn also seeks payment for services rendered but ends with far less than she bargained for because of a set of moral values that exacts a harsher punishment for adultery than it does for murder. Mother desires justice for the black woman and her baby, and achieves it only through the force of her own will to do what is right and defy the social order. Finally, Coalhouse Walker Jr. seeks justice for the damage done to his beautiful Model T Ford by the racist fire chief Willie Conklin (Kevin McMillan). When Walker, who is talented, courteous, educated, and successful, discovers that the system will not accord him equal respect with the ignorant white fire chief Conklin, he decides to seek his own form of justice. Forman makes another significant use of the color brown when he focuses on the excrement that Willie Conklin puts on Walker's car seat, possibly the first time that the substance has been shown in a major film. The shot is appropriate for associating Willie with the sordid community values he represents.

When Walker attempts to receive justice for the affront to his dignity, he is rebuffed by the corrupt legal system that does not allow equal respect for a black man. The policeman on the scene when Conklin defiles his car (Jeff Daniels) does nothing to help Walker except to tell him to clean up the mess himself and then go on his own way. Walker refuses and insists that the fire chief clean his car, whereupon the officer arrests him. When Father arrives at the police station to bail Walker out, the officer taking the money tells him the facts of life: "Once a nigger goes wrong, there's no putting him right." The fact that the policeman leaves unstated is that American society is what makes it impossible for a black man to "act right" unless he wants to accept a life of servitude. Not even the white men who feel sympathy for his

plight are able to give him dignity. That is something that he has to earn for himself.

Father attempts to appease Walker by offering to help get his car fixed, but the black man insists on making his own decisions. Father's role has become that of the white liberal who wants to "help" the black man but still keep him sublimated. He feels that he has done Walker a favor and is now owed some consideration. Walker responds to his suggestion by saying "It's a little too late for that kind of thinking, and I have to work tonight." His statement asserts his desire to handle his own problems and applies to all of American history as well as to this specific incident. Cosmetic changes will not be enough. Father's attitude reveals that the real fear among white liberals is that blacks will attempt to compete for power, thus undermining the liberal's basis for existence.

In his efforts to have his grievances redressed, Walker first goes to see an established black lawyer whose hefty build and long cigar mark his secure status in the community. The lawyer advises him to save his money, forget the incident, and go about his business. Walker is astounded at the man's casual acceptance of a dual system of law, but the lawyer does have a good point to make. His schedule is full of cases dealing with people who are being evicted from their homes, improperly imprisoned, or starving. Walker's cause seems like a very small one in comparison, but, like the similar minor struggles of McMurphy in Cuckoo's Nest and Berger in Hair, it represents an important principle. Walker may not have the pressing physical needs of the lawyer's other clients, but, unlike the established professional man, he refuses to accept security if it means being satisfied with the scraps left over from white society. As he tells the lawyer, he will not "learn how to be a nigger."

Forman's presentation of the justice system and law officers supports Walker's struggle. The reaction of the first officer involved to Walker's complaint is only one of several examples of the police being completely ineffectual. When they act at all, as in this case, it is only to uphold the dominant community standards, which is why they grudgingly support Willie Conklin's side in the dispute even though they feel that Walker is justified in his anger. They perform very authoritatively when dragging the helpless Sarah into the family home in New Rochelle, but when Tateh and his wife are fighting in the Jewish ghetto, they stay completely out of the melee, prefering to let the community control itself. When Coalhouse Walker starts creating havoc, the police post a man in Father and Mother's house in case he should try to come for his son. Forman shows the officer sitting stupidly on the steps while Mother is frantic over the protestors and reporters who are invading their lives.

Forman's most explicit portrayal of the lawmen's clumsiness occurs when a group of policemen invade the apartment of an old man and woman in order to find Willie Conklin. Forman creates a real Keystone Kops effect in the scene. After easily busting through an outer door, one policeman shoots off the lock of an inner one. They burst into the room and begin to carry away the wrong man, but the old guy points to where Willie is hiding and they let him loose. Willie pops up from under the bed, yells "You son-of-a-bitch," and tries to run. Three officers chase after him, one of them stepping on the bed in which the old lady is still lieing, and needlessly collapsing it. The fact that they take Willie out of the bathroom marks the second association of him with excrement, and a third reference occurs when Rhinelander Waldo says to Conklin, "People keep telling me you're nothing but worthless slime." Forman ends the comedy when a group of policemen all force their way into a room

with Willie at the same time in order to bring him before Waldo.

The fates of several of Ragtime's characters emphasize the importance of understanding Forman's subtle references to film history and uses of color, symbolism, and mise-en-scene. Everyone in the film who is able to manipulate images is successful. Harry Thaw may be crazy, but, through his mother's ability to fix his trial, he is able to commit murder and get away with it. Evelyn Nesbit uses the new film media for her own purposes, but in a very different way from her husband. The opening newsreel shows that while Harry Thaw wants to keep the camera from revealing the truth about himself, Evelyn wants to perform for it. When Evelyn leaves the trial after its successful conclusion, she rides away smiling and posing for the reporter's cameras. She whisks off to a party where she again poses for some publicity photos and signs the contracts that are to lead to her career as an actress. Similarly, Tateh, the Russian immigrant, is able to work his way out of the ghetto first by selling flipbooks of paper cut figures and eventually by becoming a director. The point of all these examples is that the twentieth-century is an age dominated by technology and mass media, and those who are not able to cope with or understand these factors are going to suffer.

Forman's use of the Keystone Kops sequence has a similar purpose. It overtly demonstrates his presentation of policemen and challenges the viewer to recognize his manipulation, which plays as big of a role in Ragtime as it did in Hair. In Hair, Forman left several aspects of the story unexplained, such as why Claude had to travel from Oklahoma to New York City to enlist in the Army, how Jeannie was able to keep her baby despite being undernourished and living outside, how Claude and Sheila could be in love despite only speaking to each other once, and then arguing, why Berger and the others are never stopped and arrested

for car stealing during their trip to Nevada, and why Berger is in Vietnam long enough under Claude's identity to get killed while Claude never gets arrested for desertion. He also includes several incongruencies in Ragtime such as Younger Brother being at the family house while Coalhouse Walker is there and then at Evelyn Nesbit's New York dance rehearsal studio before Walker is even able to drive into New Rochelle, Sarah finding out about the Vice-President's speech without ever leaving her room, Willie Conklin being in his underwear in the old couple's apartment and remaining in them for the rest of the film, or the New Rochelle inspector and Pat O'Brien being in the room with Rhinelander Waldo at the end. In these two films, Forman takes greater liberties with his material than at any previous time in his career. Far from demonstrating sloppiness, these unexplainable facts actually show Forman's control over his material and represent an opportunity for the viewer to see through the plot to his themes.

Ragtime reveals Forman's liberal attitudes by arguing that a society dominated by white males is sowing the seeds for its own distruction when it attempts to restrict minorities from equal access to modern technological resources or women from an equal participation in governing. Like all of Forman's heroes, Walker is attempting to transcend his limitations. What the black lawyer, Father, and all the other white men fail to realize is that the car is only a symbol of what Walker is fighting for. His real goal is to achieve equal respect for black men in the society. Father finally understands only after Walker has taken most of his actions that the angry black man merely desires to have his case heard in court. Near the end of the film, Father tells Walker that he thinks there is a good chance that people will listen to him. Walker responds, "I'd like to believe you. I really would like that." Walker's

immediate goal may be small, but Forman sees the attempt to transcend limitations as one of the most important aspects of life. His view on the subject explains its centrality to his films, and the compassion with which he views even criminals:

> Well, it's not this particular subject that made me choose whatever particular film you can apply it to. . . . That's not the reason why I chose this subject, but I think it's this kind of ambition of man to reach further than he can, that is the source of both the greatest discoveries of mankind plus the greatest dispairs. Because without trying to reach higher than what you are capable of, you probably would not reach the heights of what culture, civilization, technology, science have reached up to today. But, also failing to just surpass yourself a little bit creates so much dispair and jealousy and envy that it can turn people into a dangerous species. I think crime is basically psychologically based on this. Where people realize they don't have the means to obtain things through their own capability, they desire very often to turn to crime to obtain it.

These comments characterize Coalhouse Walker's story exactly.

Despite the oppressive and superficial natures of the justice and political systems as presented in Ragtime, Forman is not entirely anti-institutions. More accurately, he is concerned about them, particularly the family. Similar to Hair, one of Ragtime's many themes is that institutions must be responsive to basic human needs if they are to maintain order in the modern age. Tateh's story is the basis for this theme. Though Tateh's values are based in the ghetto, catching his wife in adultery breaks his family and his ties with the community, and so he leaves with his daughter. Their arrival in Philadelphia is a scene that demonstrates Tateh's ability to adjust to the new technology and still maintain his traditional values. As they get off the bus, a cart full of wooden wagon wheels goes by, symbolizing the death of the old way of life. The two cross the street where Tateh sees another pair of wheels in a shop window. These are some mechanical children's toys: a brightly painted ferris wheel and carousel. The toys give

Tateh an idea, and he asks his daughter for the flipbook that he made for her showing an ice-skater doing a figure-eight. The way he asks her for it is truly touching because whether or not they eat that night and their whole future might depend upon his getting that book, but he does not demand it from her. He asks politely and promises to make a new one for her. When she gives it to him, he goes inside and sells it to the shopowner, who asks him to make more. Thus, his path towards becoming a film director starts, and he does not forfeit his family values. Ultimately, Tateh, Mother, and Coalhouse Walker's son form the basis of a modern heterogeneous family which is presumably democratic and therefore strong.

At the end of the film, Forman reconstructs the picture that he took apart at the beginning. Typically for Forman, Ragtime ends without a clear resolution to the situation. Walker's men escape by hiding in a Model T provided for them while Younger Brother, not known by the police to be a member of the gang, drives them away. This development seems to indicate that positive change will eventually take place, but after Coalhouse Walker is killed, Forman shows Willie Conklin standing next to a policeman, looking relieved and justified. His spirit is still alive as well. Walker's men are only able to get away because a white man is driving the car, and the final shots show the whites still in control of technology. Tateh and Mother drive away from the suburban house and Harry Thaw gets out of the asylum and rides away with some friends. Harry Houdini hangs upside down from a crane and a newspaper headline reads "War Declared!" America is entering a long precarious era. Someone on the ground snaps a picture of Houdini.[20] The century's major form of communication, the visual image, has now become a casual pleasure for the masses, but with meanings that will be understood by few.

Ragtime ends with Evelyn's waltz, the two dancers standing still as if in a photograph at the conclusion. It is the popular image of an era, now emulating as much corruption and ugliness as it does elegance.[21]

By the time he finished Ragtime, Milos Forman was all set to begin work on his most recent film, Amadeus. Ragtime represents Forman's most thorough assessment of American culture, concerned with temporal issues in contrast to Hair's spiritual ones. In Amadeus, Forman turns to new issues that have been important to Americans in the Eighties while continuing to examine the nature of man and his individual responsibility.

ENDNOTES

[1]Doctorow's novel was first published by Random House in 1975.

[2]Charles Higham describes the immense confusion around the original attempts to film Ragtime. Producer Dino De Laurentis fired his first director, Robert Altman, after arguing with him about the final version of their previous film together, Buffalo Bill and the Indians (1976). He hired Forman only after the commercial success of Cuckoo's Nest. Before that, Altman claims, De Laurentis had never liked Forman. Both Forman and De Laurentis deny wanting to make Coalhouse Walker the focus, and De Laurentis claims that Forman and Doctorow have a very good working relationship. Forman clarified to Harlan Kennedy what he meant by being faithful: "The greatest disloyalty, I think, would be to be completely literal. . . . Because a book's a book, a movie's a movie, and they speak in different languages"(41). Larry McMurtry advises Doctorow to quit worrying about what becomes of his book because his work is done. McMurtry makes some intelligent comments about how the work, once purchased becomes a property of the media complex, which wants a marketable product, not art.

Several critics, naturally, discuss the novel and make comparisons with the film. Andrew Sarris merely discusses Doctorow's creation of Coalhouse Walker from an 1808 German novella, Michael Kollhaus, by Heinrich von Kleist. Morris Dickstein is unusual in finding Forman too heavily swayed by Doctorow's fondness for Sixties' historical revisionism. He praises Forman's handling of human problems, but believes that placing black insurrections of the Sixties in the century's first decade creates a historical travesty. Judith Crist ("Dazzling 'Ragtime'") reviews the film as doing honor to its sources. Crist recounts the plot and applauds the performances and Forman's blending of stars and unknowns. Others sympathized with Doctorow. Stanley Kauffmann("Turning the Century") finds no evidence of recreating the novel in cinematic terms. He feels that Doctorow was unfairly hounded by overly-patriotic right-wing critics and that Forman's work is as conventional as the script. Margo Jefferson chastizes Forman and co-screenwriter Michael Weller for doing nothing more than stripping the work of its psychological and historical texture and replacing it with simplistic, stereotyped characters. Richard Corliss ("One More Sad Song") calls the film impressive, but complains that Forman included only half of Doctorow's novel. For Corliss, the film thus lacks historical sweep. Michael Sragow criticizes Forman for reducing the novel's complexity to the theme of "the underprivileged and lower class get screwed."

John Coleman ("Exteriors") admires the casting and performances, but regrets what is missing from the novel and comes nowhere near Forman's

theme. Vincent Canby ("Why 'Reds' Succeeds") thinks that the film fails simply because the novel is unfilmable. He finds Forman's version too confusing. Pauline Kael ("The Swamp") primarily praises the novel and admits to simply not understanding the film.

Other reviewers wish that Altman had been kept as the director. Altman would have been less predictable, William Wolf argues, but more capable of creating a work of genius. Altman reveals to Wolf how he had planned to make a film with Doctorow much like the book. The first scene would have shown Sigmund Freud arriving in America. Wolf feels that the only artistic justification for adapting a highly successful or classic work can be to express its spirit and essence. Leonard and Barbara Quart also state a preference for Altman. They find Ragtime a safely accessible film that avoids intellectual risks, but never look for its own themes. Their entire review is a comparison of the film with the novel.

Kenneth R. Hey, another reviewer who wants Altman, argues that the film concentrates on characters' shortcomings more than social change, but never explains his meaning. Forman's film, Hey declares, must be measured against what this country has stood for, but never says what that is. Bea Rothenbuecker, who also wishes Altman had directed, praises the casting, but finds the film disorienting. The contrasting attitudes in these reviews actually reveals Forman and Weller's success at creating a film that works well at both a popular and intellectual level. While some reviewers find the film too accessible or simple, others do not understand it. Those who wish Altman had directed offer a confusing set of arguments. Altman is not a predictable director, but Forman's work already confuses them. The Quarts find the film too plain, but Doctorow's script, which Altman wanted to use, was a 390-page re-creation of the novel. Altman's idea was to make it into a television "mini-series." One consistent theme of these reviews is that Forman's constant undercutting of audience expectations in Ragtime seems to have confounded most critics. Thomas Sobchack provides a particularly insightful analysis of Ragtime's comedy, preposterous sentimentality, and accurate historical melodrama. Sobchack explains how Forman undercuts traditional narrative structure, characterization, and audience expectations. In contrast with the present study, he argues that Forman provides no morals, but leaves his viewers to ponder meanings for themselves (19).

[3]William Borderer's report of the company's having to build a facade of the J. Pierpont Morgan Library because Library trustees did not want the idea of holding the building for ransom to spread demonstrates the relevance of the terrorism issue.

[4]Robert Altman wanted to make Tateh the center of his film (Higham).

[5]David Thomson, in the most thorough and intelligent analysis of Ragtime, accurately describes it as a film about looking:

> Thank God Robert Altman wasn't allowed to make a carnival of the project. The film has to be as precise as the book. The faces are always examining an issue, just as the novel never forsakes the numb inability of the present to intervene in, or stop contemplating the past. ("Redtime," 13)

Bruce Williamson ("Movies," February 1982) similarly claims that the film is about cinema and rejects a simplistic liberal interpretation of its conclusion.

[6]Weller expresses his regret about the cuts, including scenes of Evelyn Nesbit with Emma Goldman and with Harry Houdini in Wolf's article.

[7]Richard T. Shepard provides an interesting side-story about Ragtime's creation in the renovation of New York's 11th Street, including the film company's work with the community, and the residents' hopes of the changes bringing new progress.

[8]In terms of contemporary themes, Tom Pulleine does not find any in Ragtime. He finds the film lacking in character motivation, narrative logic, and the evoking of popular legends. Similarly, Robert Asahina ("Sorting Out") describes Ragtime as a disaster, not explaining Tateh's success, unintentionally trivializing Walker's cause for rebellion, and spending too much time on the murder of Stanford White.

More positively, Robert Hatch ("Ragtime") admires the film as well-constructed and acted, with a liberal social theme more sobering than the book, but attempting to "say" more than most epics. Harlan Kennedy accurately describes Ragtime as a thinking man's disaster film, one of sociological rather than physical proportions (41). Seventeen magazine ("Movie of the Month") briefly notes the plot's blending of fact and fiction and some of the social characteristics of the early part of the century. Marc Kristal, in a letter to the New York Times, admires Forman for making Ragtime personal while also telling about dissent and change in America.

[9]The role of Coalhouse Walker, Jr. was a major breakthrough for the career of Howard E. Rollins, Jr. Clarke Taylor, Anna Quindlen, Dan Yakir, and Lynn Norment all describe his life and career. In Harlan Kennedy's article, Forman discusses his attempt to shape a story out of the novel, using the suburban family as a hub so that Coalhouse Walker stands out in clear relief (40). Only Robert Hatch ("Ragtime") notes the irony in relation to the film's liberal intentions of James Cagney receiving top billing over Rollins.

[10]Harlan Kennedy and Milos Forman (Conniff) both discuss Mailer's work on the film. Mailer talks about getting the part of his date at Madison Square Garden for his new wife in William Borderer's article.

[11]Ragtime's original screenwriter, Joan Tewkesbury, wanted to make Mother the central figure (Higham). In a way, Forman does so, but very subtly:

> Like a little boy, silent and unnoticed, but sill suckling the idea of his mother, Forman attaches the film to Mary Steenburgen's face. When the black baby is discovered in the vegetable patch, the visual and aural consternation are resolved in the close-up of Mother holding the baby. (Thompson, "Redtime," 14).

[12]Andrew Sarris believed that people's opinions of the film would either stand or fall with their judgement of Elizabeth McGovern as Evelyn Nesbit. His own feelings about McGovern are ambiguous, but he admires the film as a liberal tract flying in the face of rising Reaganism. Among other reviewers, Pauline Kael attacks McGovern ("The Swamp") and David Thomson defends her ("Redtime," 14-15).

[13]Ragtime was Cagney's first film in twenty years, and there was great anticipation about his reappearance. Variety ("Cagney, at 80") and Aljean Harmetz ("Will Cagney Return?") both speculate on the issue and review the film's production history. Harmetz also discusses Ragtime's importance to the fledgling Filmways company, superceeder of American International Pictures. In Susan K. Reed's article, Cagney and Forman discuss his decision to work on the film, and his co-workers praise his remarkable skill. Forman talks about his own admiration for Cagney with Tom Buckley ("The Forman Formula," 53) and the still immense size of his legend with Richard Conniff (18). Tom Pulleine also admires Cagney's performance, and Thomas Sobchack analyzes Forman's undercutting of Cagney's popular image. By contrast, John Coleman's comments on Cagney, O'Brien, and O'Connor are empty ("Exteriors"). Coleman is a perfect example of the need for Forman's theme.

[14]Richard Schickel describes Cagney's performance as making the audience think he is likeable until showing them he is an evil genius ("Some Kind of Genius"). In a way, this description also fits with Cagney's popular screen image. He was always the tough guy who gave no quarter and asked none, and audiences admired him for that. They always will. But Forman is asking if they really want to return to that kind of philosophy. David Thomson finds in Cagney's performance "an oblique criticism of the ethos of his earlier work" ("Redtime," 13).

[15]Tom Buckley ("At the Movies: Brad") discusses Dourif's career. Robert Altman signed Dourif for Ragtime after the actor's agent suggested that he was perfect for the part. Forman had signed him for Cuckoo's Nest after seeing him in the play When You Coming Back, Red Ryder?

[16]Thomas Sobchack comments on this scene as revealing the attitudes women must have about their bodies if they expect to get ahead: a no-nonsense consideration for it as the one comodity they have to bargain with.

[17]John Coleman ("Exteriors") sees Washington as nothing but an Uncle Tom. Thomas Sobschack finds the character ambiguous (15).

[18]David Thomson describes this speech as both a declaration of faith in humanity and a salute to the cinema.

[19]Stanley Kauffmann ("Turning the Century") thinks that Forman got too much out of every color and used too many close-ups. He does not suggest where or how Forman could have cut back on either.

[20]David Thomson defines the image of Houdini, free of his strait jacket but still hanging from the crane, as Forman's judgement of America: freedom is not enough.

[21]Among Ragtime's other detractors, Jack Kroll ("Ragtime in Waltz Time") finds it lacking a central vision, informed style, passion, and excitement. Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. ("Rags to Revolution") judges it merely entertaining. In his opinion, the characters are bearable because there are a number of them: audience's cannot dwell on any one's shortcomings. Ragtime deals, he writes, "as lightly with history as it does with human relationships." Michael Buckley comments on the acting and calls the standoff sequence unexciting. He finds the film interesting but flawed and ultimately depressing. John Simon ("Wrong-Note Rag") describes Ragtime as an earnest, but conventional, social document, whose slight distortions of history are more annoying then the novel's wild ones. Variety ("Ragtime") disagrees with all these critics by giving the film high praise for all aspects of its production.

CHAPTER EIGHT

AMADEUS--EXPLORING THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN SUBSTANCE AND FORM

One constant concern of Milos Forman's films has been to reveal reality, whether it be the struggles of Czech youths to find their self-identities or the true significance of visual images in twentieth-century America. The cinematography of Forman's films is thus always one of a plainly stylized reality. Forman always establishes the basis for his camera movements and editing at the very start. Working with Miroslav Ondricek throughout his career, except for on One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, Forman has benefited greatly from always having a cinematographer who understands what material he wants and needs, and knows when to vary from a predetermined pattern.[1] For these reasons, Forman's camera movements never shock the viewer or allow him to think that what he is watching is unbelievable. In Ragtime, for example, one potentially disorienting shot is the close-up of the chandelier at the beginning of the ballroom sequence following a shot of Coalhouse Walker playing piano at the dark movie theater. But this shot, and the downward camera movement that follows, have a special significance in contrast with the close-up of Walker's hands and the pan upward at the beginning of the previous scene. These shots also demonstrate Forman's ability to use simple methods to achieve revelations. Besides symbolizing the social movement of the two classes Coalhouse Walker and Stanford White represent,

the two shots also indicate that viewers must be able to look above the imaginably low status of the black man and below the apparent opulence of the wealthy architect to find the truth about each of them. Forman's cinematography utilizes the camera's ability to record surface reality by placing meaning beyond the image.

In examining culture, Forman holds the same idea that reality lies somewhere beyond the nature of appearances. For example, Forman finds much of value in American films amidst the large number of cheap and artless productions:

> that's an optical illusion that in the Eighties American film is getting more vulgar and cheaper in the sense of audience's tastes or of money. It's an optical illusion. It's not true. Because every year you have at least four, five, six really ambitious and successfully accomplished films made, coming out of American studios, and that's a lot. Six great films every year is a wonderful harvest.

Forman expects his audience to find what is valuable under all the trash and what is ugly and absurd about the superficially beautiful and orderly as well. This attitude relates to the relevance of his most recent film, Amadeus, winner of eight Academy Awards.[2] In an era of religious fundamentalism not only in America, but in the mid-East and other parts of the world as well, and its equivalent, communist orthodoxy in Eastern bloc countries, Forman demonstrates in Amadeus the difference between form and substance and questions the true nature of spiritual reality. In doing so, Forman does not place himself above fundamentalist thinking. He indicates instead that artists, ideologues, and political and social rulers of all types must have a sense of reality or risk establishing empty forms without the substance to uphold them. Similarly, audiences must be able to recognize the differences between the two or submit themselves to the constant repetition of vacuousness in culture, politics, and life.

Milos Forman first saw the stage version of Peter Shaffer's Amadeus at one of its initial London public previews and immediately decided to try to make it his next film after Ragtime. The strength of the main characters, Forman says, attracted him to the story:

> the personality of Mozart was definitely intriguing. When you have as strong a story as I inherited with the play of Amadeus and characters as colorful and exciting and interesting as Mozart and Salieri then you know that there must be a film there. If you do not make some radical mistakes.

Amadeus is the story of Antonio Salieri, court composer for Emporer Joseph II of Austria, and his jealous rivalry with the young and talented Wolfgang Amadeus Mozart. Salieri, after methodically working his way into a prestigious position by producing popular, but decidedly unspectacular music feels slighted by God for not being granted the talent to create the great works that he would like to. Because the vulgar and unconventional Mozart does possess such skill, Salieri seeks revenge against the Almighty by attacking his servant. Music is Mozart's very being: his blessing and also his curse. He composes great works as easily as breathing, but spends the rest of his time pursuing the sinful pleasures of a world from which he feels alienated. In the end, both composers achieve their goals, but only at the cost of losing everything they had while gaining nothing in the process.

In transferring the work from stage to screen, Forman was fortunate in getting Peter Shaffer's assistance. Forman realizes how challenging this process was for the playwright, but at the same time, Shaffer's own experiences justified the director's philosophy of re-adapting all material to formulate his own vision:

> Shaffer was very courageous, but only thanks to his past experiences. He wrote several plays. He wrote four before Equus that were made into the film by a screenwriter who wrote the screenplay and a director, right? And he was always very, very disappointed. So to protect Equus against the

> same fate, he decided to write the screenplay himself, just to be sure that the result will be to his satisfaction. To his great surprise, he was again very disappointed. So he realized, Shaffer, that there is a little more to it than just to try to be faithful to the original. That it needs a real radical approach, to take the play apart and start from scratch and to build a totally new vision out of it, a film vision. So these past experiences made him much more open and gave him the courage to step into this risky business to write a total new vision of the work.[3]

Forman makes his own presence in Amadeus obvious, but he uses it ironically. The fates of the two composers reflect on the status of the film director, who must reject both the flippant self-assurance of Mozart and the lifeless pragmatism of Salieri, and yet learn also to combine them somehow.

Ragtime spoke only to the responsiblities of the audience, but Amadeus also addresses the position of the artist. Forman's standard themes about individual responsibility, the need for self-knowledge, and the human basis of spirituality still persist, but this time he uses them to comment about his own role, and that of other artists, to a far greater extent than in any of his other films. The conclusion, the most negative of Forman's career, represents a warning to himself, to other filmmakers, and to society. Like Larry Tyne, Salieri and Mozart both attempt to completely transform themselves, and unfortunately they succeed, thereby wasting all of their talent. Salieri goes insane because he cannot be satisfied with his own limitations, while Mozart dies because of his constant physical indulgence.

Their fates are mutually appropriate to each man's state of being. Salieri (F. Murray Abraham) is totally devoted to form, feeling that he will somehow achieve divine recognition if he lives according to the right patterns. Naturally, the complete attention to style and disregard of substance can only produce emptiness. Salieri therefore ends his life in an insane asylum with his mind full of nothing but self-tormenting

memories. By contrast, Mozart's fate results from his complete over-indulgence in physical pleasures in total disregard for abiding by any guidelines that can control his intake and make his creativity practically rewarding as well as aesthetically. Just like a river that becomes too full can only lead to destruction, Mozart's sole concern for substance without a strong enough form to contain it finally kills him.[4]

Forman demonstrates the true nature of each man in the scene where Salieri first sees the gifted young composer. Mozart (Tom Hulce) has come to Vienna to play at the home of his employer, the Prince Archibishop of Salzburg. Salieri is standing in a room full of food, guiltily picking at a large dessert, when Mozart's fiance Constanze (Elizabeth Berridge) rushes in and hides under a table. Salieri secludes himself to watch as Mozart, who comes in shortly afterward, totally violates everything that he associates with being blessed with great musical talent.

Instead of holding himself uprightly, Mozart chases after women and rolls around on the floor with Constanze. His physical position and his words both show that he desires not to serve God, but to lower himself to the level of the earth. Mozart tells Stanzie, his nickname for her, that in Vienna, "Everything goes backwards." So they play a game in which he makes backwards statements and she interprets them. His statements, "Kiss my ass," "Marry me," and "Eat my shit," indicate his regression towards the grossly physical. They also symbolize his alternating tenderness and disregard for Stanzie. Ultimately, she suffers for his sinking into depravity and waste. Mozart's adeptness at stating things backwards parallels the pattern of his life. He moves from spirituality to sensuality and begins to place his physical desires ahead of his music. While the two of them are on the floor, the performance begins and Mozart walks in late to take over the conducting.

While Salieri finds Mozart's actions disgusting, his own behavior suggests the most basic reason for his hatred. Salieri desires physical pleasures as much as Mozart, but feels that he has to hide his passions in order to maintain a proper image. Salieri follows all the prescribed formulas for achieving popular success but fails to create meaningful music, while Mozart produces powerful works from the most common materials precisely because he does not abide by the rules. He brings into the light of day all the buried qualities of the society, and strong desires emerging from the subconscious are always powerful. Forman adds to the modern significance of the story by making Mozart into a punk figure with his colored wigs and abrasive personality. He upsets all the musical and social assumptions of his day in the same way that punk rock musicians did in the late Seventies and the Beatles and Elvis Presley did in previous generations. Whenever music moves closer to the people and away from established institutions, it sends shock waves throughout society. People feel threatened by wild passions being let loose into the open. The reactions of Salieri and his supporters in the Emporer's court to Mozart suggests that those in power will turn with snobbish hatred against outsiders who dare to openly have fun while also doing something that is actually meaningful. Through their characterizations of Mozart, Forman and Shaffer apply this theme to contemporary reactions to punk rock music as well. Forman's choice of the young fresh-faced American Hulce to play the role and his updating of the slang (Stanzie calls him "Wolfie") also contribute to the contemporary feeling of the film.[5]

Associating Mozart strongly with the most base physical activities and materials, flatulence, eating, drinking, and fices, aids Forman and Shaffer in highlighting his music over his personality. In Amadeus, Mozart's music is not merely presented in bits and pieces throughout the

film. Instead, Forman uses distinct sections from several of Mozart's operas, The Abduction From the Seraglio, The Marriage of Figaro, Don Giovanni, and The Magic Flute, all unedited.[6] The camera may cut away from the stage during the performance, but the music continues on.[7] Whenever Mozart seems to have reached new depths as an individual, Forman presents another invigorating selection from his music. The most striking contrast occurs near the end of the film when Mozart's mother-in-law (Barbara Bryne) is lecturing him after Stanzie has left with their son. As the drunk and ragged composer stares at her, she becomes transformed into a singer performing in The Magic Flute. Contrasts such as this one encourage the audience to seek substance over form and fit Forman and Shaffer's oft-stated goal of wanting to get people to listen to Mozart.[8]

Mozart's tragedy is that, because he strongly relates physical baseness with great themes and pursues self-indulgence due to his lack of pleasure as a child, he is too committed to substance over form. Mozart never puts any effort into cultivating the relationships he needs to sustain his life and work. He constantly ignores and ridicules the people and institutions who have the power to get him the paying jobs that he needs. Despite his comparatively small amount of talent, Salieri is the court composer and advisor to the Emporer on all musical matters. Mozart's constant mocking of Salieri thus assures his rejection for many important income-raising positions and a short run for his operas. When he is finally out of money and must work constantly because of financial necessity, Mozart's physical decline begins in earnest. Because he has ignored the business aspects of his profession, Mozart lacks control over his own life.

In this respect, Forman most closely identifies with Mozart and finds a theme in the film that applies to both himself and his fellow filmmakers. Forman feels strongly about the issues that he presents in Amadeus. He believes that politics and economic necessity can be dangerous to art:

> I think it is the most important theme not for the audiences, but for everyone working in the creative field. Especially in an artform like film or music. Because, you know, if you write a book all you need is a pencil and paper and you can write a book. And if it's published today or tomorrow or in ten years or fifty years or a hundred years, it's still the book which you wrote and made. But if you write an opera and you don't have the means to hire singers, rent a theatre, hire an orchestra, director, build the sets, it will never be done. The same is with film. You can have a script, but if you don't find the millions of dollars to hire a cameraman, buy raw stock, hire actors, find locations, and pay everybody, and shoot the film and edit it, it doesn't exist. Your effort doesn't exist. So, especially in these areas, you are very much depending on the wide-open-mindedness of those who control the money. Who are willing and capable to finance your artistic effort. And that's never simple and never easy.

Mozart falsely believes that his talent will be enough to support himself when the greatest composer in the world cannot survive if no one supports his work. Because his music defies the dictates of polite society, Mozart ignores proper forms of behavior and suffers for his ignorance. His life proves that substance without form will be wasted.

When Mozart dies, his body gets tossed into a mass grave by sliding out the trap door on the end of a re-usable coffin. He has finally reached his unification with the common people and the earth. Mozart finds the basis for great works of art in the masses and the passions of physical existence. The spiritual aspect of his talent is actually temporally based, but he is blind to the fact that the world has its practical requirements also. His downfall thus undercuts Forman's stance: that of an omnipotent observer. The artist cannot assume an all-knowing position. He must give some deference to those who control

money and power. Mozart's failure invites the audience to again look through Forman's filmmaking to the deeper structure of film, great art, and spirituality. Behind each are the practical matters of money and power.

Salieri, of course, understands these matters very well and therefore enjoys great popular and material success. He does not understand spirituality, even though he claims to be seeking it. His struggle to achieve greatness by following all the proper social rules, and his interpretations of his father's death due to choking and the Emporer's boredom during The Marriage of Figaro as miracles, demonstrates his unenlightened nature. The Emporer he serves also desires artistic pleasure and cultural fulfillment. But, like all other administrators in Forman films, he actually seeks to control life and art within strictly defined forms. Large nature tapestries decorate the walls of his court, and he also goes deer-hunting on horseback in one scene. Forman demonstrates the devastating effect that this over-emphasis on form can have on the arts. One of the Emporer's laws states that no opera can contain a ballet. Therefore, Count Rosenberg, the Director of the Imperial Opera (Charles Kay), rips the pages containing the music for the wedding dance in The Marriage of Figaro out of Mozart's score during a rehearsal. When the Emporer attends a later one, the dance proceeds without music. The Emporer sees the absurdity of his decree and orders the music reinstated. For Forman, the ridiculous interference of politics with art was a very familiar theme.

Forman's camera in Amadeus incorporates aspects of both composers' personalities. Like Salieri, the camera also acts as a narrator, and, matching his search for spiritual status, it seeks to maintain an omnipotent perspective. Forman demonstrates this desire by using a very free

camera style. In concert sequences, he looks at the stage from various parts of the auditorium, into private boxes, or at the conductor or audience whenever he wants. He also reveals facts about Salieri that the old man himself would not reveal to the priest, such as his love of food over God and his seductive intentions towards Constanze when she comes to ask for his help in obtaining a position for her husband. Like Mozart, the camera also indulges in the food and brightly colored costumes of the era, the architecture of Prague (representing eighteenth-century Vienna), and Elizabeth Berridge's breasts, which are always pushed up high towards the top of her dress.[9] Typically, Forman establishes this dual nature to his camera right at the start of Amadeus.

The film opens with silent shots of dark empty streets on a cold winter night. In a voice-over, Salieri calls out Mozart's name, accompanied by the sound of majestic chords. Salieri also cries out his confession of Mozart's murder and begs the dead composer for his forgiveness. The cause of his madness is present in his words. He mistakenly believes himself to be responsible for Mozart's death, an act designed to gain revenge against God. By also believing in the blessedness of Mozart's spirit, Salieri thinks the dead composer can still grant him forgiveness. The picture shifts with each haunting cry of Mozart's name, as if searching for its source. Forman cuts to the inside of a large and elegant hall. Two servants (Philip Lenkowsky and Vincent Schiavelli), looking like Abbot and Costello, enter carrying a silver tray laden with sweet rolls and a large bowl of whipped cream. The tall, lean servant calls through a closed door to Salieri and receives no answer. He takes a roll, dips it in the cream, and takes a bite, calling to his master about how good it is. The short, fat servant, holding the tray, takes a bite of the cream, getting some of it on his

nose. Though the servants can hear Salieri's moans, they wait outside the door, calling for him to open it, and the camera remains fixed on them. It patiently watches the two, recognizing their comic value, until they finally discover the real drama taking place. Despite the serious subject matter of the film, indicated by the high culture status of Mozart's music, Forman's camera cannot forget the basic images natural to the cinema. Throughout the film, it thus undercuts its own lofty pretensions. In many ways, Forman's camera style is similar to his use of the camera as a believeable observer in Black Peter. The difference is that in Amadeus the camera establishes an omnipotent presence, but Forman eventually expects the audience to realize its actual limitations. Forman's style thus complements one of the film's themes: that creativity and art are based in reality and not in a spiritual vision. But the story also comments on the camera style.

The servants, like everyone else in the film, are a part of the temporal world of practical necessity, common activity, and rich sensual delights. The three main presences in the film all face the same problem of relating to that world. Like the camera in this scene, all of them indulge in physical pleasures until almost too late. Salieri nearly kills himself before servants and camera finally enter his room. Mozart, Salieri, and the omnipotent narrator all believe themselves to be above the carnal pleasures they partake of, and all are eventually proven wrong. Physical reality, practical necessity, and ordinary people finally have as much importance as each creative individual. In the end, each artist must realize his own humanity and limited sphere of influence. Mozart and Salieri fail to do so, but the presence of the director is redeemed through his ability to laugh at himself, and in that laughter is the film's message of hope. That artists are not

particularly blessed, but dependent upon the physical world and formed by human influence and accidents of nature means that man is not depraved and that any individual's actions carry potentially profound significance.[10]

Appropriately for the film's dual focus, Forman defines reality by emphasizing the symbolic value of two colors, brown (or red) and white. Brown represents earthiness and is associated with Salieri, while white stands for spirituality and is closely related to Mozart. Forman demonstrates the symbolism of each in the scene where Salieri first sees Mozart. At the beginning of this scene, a group of servants dressed in white coats with brown trim bring huge platters of food into the room. Their dress indicates the combination of spiritual uplifting and physical fulfillment involved in the upper class's pursuit of high culture. Salieri's problem, as well as that of Vienna's official cultural spokesmen, is in attempting to deny physical pleasures while secretly indulging in them. Because they self-righteously attempt to include only grand ideas in their music, their culture is as bombastic and stagnant as Salieri's work until Mozart infuses it with life. The large brown door to the room closes, blocking out the hallway light, and when it opens again, Salieri is standing there. He sneaks into the room and begins to pick the brown candies off a large white desert. Throughout the film, Salieri uses food and money to try to get what he wants. He attempts to seduce Stanzie by giving her a confection known as "Nipples of Venus" and bribes a servant girl with cookies and money into spying for him at Mozart's home. Even Salieri's music and spirituality are associated with the earth. The scene on his brown piano is a country one, and he prays to a brown cross on the wall. Because his concept of God was never very lofty anyway, he shows no emotion later when he announces his rebellion by throwing the cross on the fire.

Forman uses the colors early in the film to demonstrate how domination by either temporal or spiritual concerns can obstruct a person's view of reality. In scene's from their childhoods, Salieri plays blindman's-bluff with his school friends, while Mozart's father has him playing blindfolded for the crowned heads and church leaders of Europe. Their blindfolds symbolize how their lives have been set. Salieri's is red, indicating his blindness to the true light of creative artistry, while Mozart's is white, symbolizing his ignorance about the ways of the world. Therefore, what Salieri calls a blessing actually results from a well-intentioned father's persistent domination in guiding his son towards greatness and security and away from anything base or ugly.

Mozart therefore takes the exact opposite path through life from Salieri. He never loses love or respect for his father, but he constantly strives to move away from the church and spirituality and towards earthly and physical pleasures. Later in the film, Forman again uses a white mask to symbolize his identity, this time one of a large horse's head. Mozart wears it when he goes to a costume party with Stanzie and his father, Leopold Mozart (Roy Dotrice). The mask represents the young Mozart's association of virility with spirituality and a subtle rebellion against his father. Stanzie's mask is a large white swan, indicating the nature of her relationship to her husband. His all-consuming passion for physical pleasure, whether in the form of sex or alcohol, ravishes her until she finally takes their son and leaves him.

The young priest who Salieri tells his story to (Herman Meckler) is another character associated with white, the color of his robes, who has a limited vision. The world around him offers a denial of the empty doctrine that he spouts. He tells Salieri, "All men are equal in God's eyes," yet he has just passed through a corridor of lunatics and

severely retarded, enchained men to whom he pays slight attention. These men are all equal and the same as anybody else in the sense that they have all the same bodily functions and physical necessities as people of normal intelligence. Neither God nor man expects anything of them or seems to pay much attention to them. But the rest of humanity has talents by which each individual is judged according to his or her use of them. This doctrine is certain in terms of both worldly acclaim and Christian parable. Salieri has a small amount of talent and feels cheated because he originally desires to use it all for God's glory, but recognizes that his popular acclaim is hollow beside Mozart's actual achievement. Both Salieri and the priest, in their quests after God, forget their basic nature of flesh and blood, despite the evidence all around them. Man, though always striving to rise above that level, cannot forget his true nature. When he does, his works become meaningless, ungrounded in reality. Therefore, when the priest tells Salieri "I can offer God's forgiveness," his statement rings hollow. By the end of Salieri's story, he is speechless, having realized his own physical limitations.

By contrast, Salieri, although looking like a priest because of the white bandage around his neck, wears a brown coat as he tells his story. His belief in being personally responsible for Mozart's death allows him to imagine that he has achieved his long-sought-for spiritual transformation, but he is still limited by his earthly nature. The failure of his plot to steal some of God's glory by passing off Mozart's final work as his own has left him in torment. He now feels trapped in the temporal realm, his former fame constantly diminishing, with no hope of redemption. He is, therefore, an earthly priest, meaning that he has no spiritual power at all. By the end of the film, an aide pushes him down the hall of lunatics as he says "Mediocrities everywhere, I absolve

you all." The emptiness of his words reflect back on himself.

The men in the hall, of course, are not even mediocrities. They are not able to function properly in the world, which makes them in some ways symbolic of both Salieri and Mozart. Like Salieri, they can be considered as completely form with no substance. They are physically human, and some of them do perform certain forms of activity, but it all has no meaning. But, like Mozart, they can be considered as examples of substance lacking a proper form. They perform all the normal physical bodily functions, but they completely lack a system of thought to guide their actions. In either case, they represent the future of a world determined by devotion to either of the two principles to the exclusion of the other.

Forman establishes the film's most important symbol in the opening sequence as the wounded Salieri is carried on a litter through the streets. He hears music coming from a second-story ballroom. Briefly, the camera moves into the well-lit room where people are dancing to a Mozart waltz. The setting and the gaity symbolize Mozart's work as fulfilling the highest functions of art: to bring light and happiness into a cold, dark world. The camera's searching in the opening shots represents the director's similar desires. Light symbolizes the contributions of each of the three main presences in the film. The comparative stature of Mozart and Salieri is again evident when Forman cuts from the ballroom back to the small lantern next to the wounded composer on the litter. The camera stops on one side of a lawn as the servants carry Salieri into a hospital. The scene changes from dark to light, indicating a passage of time, but also marking the beginning of the real story that the camera wishes to tell.

Similarly, Salieri is in an all-white room when he begins to narrate his story and there are candles burning in the background as the camera moves into the close-up on him that it will maintain throughout the film. As the old Salieri continues to talk, the candles burn low and are completely out by the end of the story, symbolizing his inability to interpret events properly. Thanks mainly to his own efforts, Salieri can only bring a small amount of light into the world. Salieri's jealousy combined with his insane belief that God has somehow turned against him cause his desire to kill the very music that he loves. Salieri had other alternatives in his life. He could have used his influence to help Mozart and thus keep the great composer out of poverty. He could have questioned his own approach to music, and possibly created some notable works capable of standing the test of time. He chooses instead to try to dim Mozart's light rather than increase his own. After Mozart mocks Salieri at a party, the old narrator states what his thoughts were at that moment: "Go ahead, laugh at me. Before I leave this earth, I will laugh at you." The aged composer then leans over and blows out a candle. At the end of the film, Salieri tricks Mozart into working all night long despite his deathly illness as the candles next to his bed completely burn themselves out. In the morning, Mozart dies, his work unfinished. The old Salieri tells the priest he is talking to, "Your merciful God killed his own servant rather than let a mediocrity partake in the smallest part of his glory." Salieri completely fails to realize man's responsibility for creating his own significance. Rather than make the best use of his talents, he revels in mediocrity.

Mozart, of course, cannot tolerate mediocrity. The constant presence of lighted candles around him and huge chandeliers behind him when he is conducting symbolize his gifted nature. Salieri also has the

chandeliers behind him when he conducts his tremendously successful but highly bombastic opera, but the candles in his apartment are never lit. Only when Salieri burns his crucifix to begin his rebellion against God does a well-lighted chandelier appear behind his head. Salieri's only two creative acts in the film, his opera and his tormenting of Mozart, are both mockeries of great art. Furthermore, in the climactic sequence, when he is writing down the ailing Mozart's Requiem Mass from personal dictation, Salieri has four candles burning by him while Mozart has five. The extra candle symbolizes Mozart's special gift that Salieri can never obtain. Mozart must remain true to that talent and the world now possesses in his works the proof that he did. Forman faults Mozart because of his arrogance and impracticality. Any artist who devotes himself totally to his personal vision in place of commercial success cannot be disappointed at not receiving material rewards for his work. The artist whose work depends on the money and good will of others must be able to compromise in some way so that he can continue to work and live.

The most ironic aspect of Mozart's light is that it comes from a dark source. In Leopold Mozart, Forman and Shaffer create a character who is basically evil, even though he is genuinely self-sacrificing towards his son, because he cultivates substance in order to serve form. In any Forman film, becoming more devoted to institutions than to individuals is one of the greatest sins possible. For his son, Leopold represents the supreme figure of guidance in life. Mozart's father is an intimidating God-like figure in whose pleasure his talented son can find eternal peace, but who also promises everlasting guilt if he is not satisfied. His place at the top of the stairs when the young composer comes home and greets him and the dominance of his portrait in his son's home, looming there in the manner of Salieri's crucifix, symbolize the relationship between the two.

Wolfgang loves his father very much, but Leopold's dual nature keeps his son forever anxious about his wishes. The picture of Leopold with his black cape and hat on, arms outstretched, used to advertise both the play and the film emphasizes his split personality. The elder Mozart strikes this pose in greeting his son when he arrives in Vienna for a visit. Wolfgang accepts it as a gesture of love, though his father is also a clearly intimidating figure. Trying to please him constantly bewilders the younger Mozart. After Leopold arrives, he goes to a costume party with Wolfgang and Constanze because, as the young composer states, "Poppa loves parties." Each selects a mask that reflects his or her personality. Wolfgang and Constanze wear their white masks, while Leopold chooses a black one with a sorrowful face on one side and a cheerful expression on the other. The party includes a game of musical chairs, and when Constanze loses out she must lift her dress and show her legs as a penalty. Young Mozart laughs and feels encouraged when he sees the cheerful mask on his father, but Leopold lifts it to reveal a dark scowl across his face that immediately subdues his son. The young Mozart complains, "It's only a game, Poppa," but Leopold does not take matters of social decorum lightly. Salieri, who is also at the party, later uses Leopold's mask in his attempts to torment Mozart.

Leopold's critical attitude towards Wolfgang throughout his life shows that he is clearly not primarily concerned with the quality of his son's work. He seeks only to establish his son in a secure position among high society, but instead the young Mozart became fully involved with his music. Leopold's begging of the Archibishop (Nicholas Kepros) to accept Wolfgang back into his graces after the churchman's embarassment at Mozart's Vienna premiere demonstrates his pandering attitude towards those in power. Yet, the Archbishop's red robe and the dark

brown room he sits in indicate his actual commonness. Similarly, Leopold deplores anything but moral uprightness, but he pushes Wolfgang into the arms of the church for entirely secular purposes. In the church leaders, Leopold, and Salieri, therefore, Forman presents figures who all bring the church and religion to a level somewhat below sacredness while the young Mozart creates music of eternal quality from the most secular sources available. Amid these contrasts, determining exactly what is sacred becomes very difficult. A priest sprinkling holy water on Mozart's grave during a rainstorm further emphasizes this point.

During the film's final scenes, Forman naturally pulls all of the film's dichotomies together and completes his own identificaion with both Mozart and Salieri. Near the end of the film, both composers walk through the same streets that Forman's camera was wandering during the opening shots. Although it is light out in both cases, each has lost touch with reality and with himself. Salieri wears the black costume as he makes the journey while Mozart is drunk. As Salieri rolls down the hallway at the conclusion, the sound of Mozart's hysterical laughter that has shocked polite society throughout the film rings out once more. That final overwhelming laugh is not only Mozart's, but also Forman's and God's, mocking the pretensions of any mortal towards divine status, and, more importantly, the idea that artistic creation has a spiritual basis. The identical clothing of Mozart and Salieri, brown suits with white shirts, and also their very collaboration as they work together on the Requiem Mass symbolizes the blending of practical and aesthetic elements needed for true artistic creation. The character of the servant girl whom Salieri pays to spy on Mozart also indicates the artist's limited capacities. None of the story could have been told without her. Forman holds a long close-up on her as Mozart's hearst pulls away to indicate

her importance. Thus, in the end, Forman is actually laughing at himself.

The most sensible character in the whole film is actually Constanze, who initially appears to be completely witless. Constanze knows little about music or politics, but she does understand that comfortable living depends upon earning money, and so she pushes Mozart to get in touch with reality and earn what they need. More than anyone else, she most adequately combines the emotional and the practical. At the end, she returns to Mozart's bedside where their son (Milan Demjanenko) wakes him up by playing with some coins spread out over the sheets. As important as Mozart's music is, the boy also needs to learn about the significance of money as his father never did. This simple shot thus demonstrates the important implications of Forman's theme. Though people might desire to build a future based on spiritual notions and philosophical ideas, practical necessity will always play just as important of a role. Governmental figures and the financially powerful may be inept but they must be coped with. For the sincere artist to make truly meaningful contributions to society, he must relate as much to reality as to his own artistic, moral, and spiritual concepts.[11]

ENDNOTES

[1]Forman comments,

> Misoslav (Mirek) Ondricek is perfect in this way. He has his own opinion, his own eyes, and they are strictly his own; yet he always tries to harmonize them with mine. But from the minute we start to work, there's a certain tension between us too. (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 142)

Concerning the idea of stylized reality, Forman notes,

> When one is operating the camera, just as when one is guiding one's actors, there are lots of things that must be handled with sensitivity, situations that call for intuition. There's a sequence in Taking Off in which Buck Henry goes around the East Village looking for his daughter. I thought we could do it in a documentary style. So we started out, searching around like documentarists. We didn't use one of those shots in the movie. Fortunately, Mirek already sensed we were on the wrong track while we were shooting; he said so, and we started to argue, finally he got his way. We agreed that he could stylize some of the shots the way he felt they ought to be. In the end, those shots of his were the only ones we used in that sequence. (Liehm, The Milos Forman Stories, 143)

[2]Tom Shales and Gerald Clarke report on the film's success at the Academy Awards presentations. Ivan Passer gives the following explanation for Amadeus' victories:

> The Academy members are fans of people like Milos who take chances and succeed. . . . They like Cinderella stories, and they like to make them come true. That was in their power this year, and they did it. (Clarke)

Clarke comments on the unlikliness of Amadeus' success because of its length (2 hrs, 38 min.) and theme: God's granting of genius to an obnoxious self-indulgent man and mediocrity to a devout servant. Predicting high success for a film featuring a great deal of classical music would also be risky speculation, but Amadeus has defied conventional wisdom in that respect also.

[3]Shaffer confirms this account of why he decided to work according to Forman's method in Roland Gelatt's article. Shaffer believes he learned something about writing filmscripts from the experience (49). Michiko Kakutani gives a detailed description of the work's transformation from

stage to screen and the reasons for some of the changes. Forman also discusses the process of working with Shaffer with Henry Kamm, Chris Hodenfield (20), and Joyce Wadler.

[4]Some critics, such as Robert Craft, objected strongly to the characterizations of Mozart and Salieri. Craft, for example, wants a more "accurate" depiction of Mozart's life. But he admits that when he saw the film, the audience was captivated enough by the music to stay in the theater all the way through the closing credits. Craft excuses Forman and Shaffer for making some understandably difficult dramatic choices, but criticizes the costuming, music editing, and modernized dialogue. Eva Hoffman finds the film weak in attempting to simultaneously actualize and romanticize Mozart's life without the safe distancing of seeing him only through Salieri's eyes, as was true in the play. Hoffman mistakenly feels that the film equates sexual and creative liberation when actually these aspects of Mozart's life are kept entirely separate; they do not have the same source and are moving in entirely opposite directions.

David Denby ("Mozartomania") insists on the truth about Mozart: he knew how to behave around aristocrats. According to Denby, Forman makes the Mozart's so ordinary, he travesties his own material. Denby believes that the film does show Mozart as the voice of God. Denby also interprets the film as saying that Mozart's society was unworthy of him, but the modern age would have had the taste to accept him and accuses Forman of trying to evoke "tearful breast-beating" over his death. The present analysis will show Forman's purpose as trying to reveal Mozart's suffering as a result of his own impracticality. Forman makes no assumptions as to how Mozart would be received now. If anything, Forman's comparison of Mozart to modern punk musicians indicates the exact opposite of what Denby implies.

John Simon ("Bizet's Carmen") finds the film improbable and crudely Freudian and the direction heavy handed. David Edelstein condemns the film as nothing more than a standard, but kinky, biographical film. He criticizes it mainly for simplifying the process of creation, showing both composers as men who never look inwards. He particularly dislikes the final scene where Mozart and Salieri work together in writing down the Requiem Mass, not understanding how Salieri could suddenly love the man he is trying to kill. Edelstein forgets that Salieri is trying to steal the work as his own. Pauline Kael again finds Forman's work confusing because she again misinterprets it. Kael thinks that Forman and Shaffer agree with Salieri's idea of genius being a gift of God, which denigrates Mozart's talent.

Other critics, such as Vincent Canby ("Film: 'Amadeus'"), Peter Travers, and Joy Gould Boyum disagree, praising the film as a work that explores and celebrates genius. David Thomson ("Salieri, Psycho") provides the best response to Amadeus' attackers, working through his own problems with the film until finally finding its justification in the last scene. Until that point, Salieri appears as the more intelligent man, but Thomson finds in the conclusion Forman's theme of the differences between form and substance:

> Salieri reminds me of Hollywood people. He's a deal-maker, a cynic, a gossip, a connoisseur, a manipulator advertising his love of the instant 'sizzle' in the medium. He has made personal arts out of sarcasm and loathing, and he serves them up like nouvelle cuisine. He passes for the intelligent man

> of feeling; he is called a class act, and he is a lean aerobics sensualist and a killer at pun charades. There isn't a tune he can't whistle backward, or one he could write that wouldn't play as well in reverse. And he is drowning out genius, substance, his very medium with works he despises. One day a Mozart may kill him. We will all of us have to watch out. Genius is a dangerous thing, always wanting us to think and feel instead of gorge ourselves. (75)

Forman passes off complaints about the film's historical inaccuracies lightly: "We didn't do a biography. This is not a scholarly account for high school students" (Stark, 117). Forman and Shaffer, however, do have some historical grounds for their portraits of Mozart and Salieri:

> Mozart himself came to believe, in the last days, that he was being poisoned by his rival Salieri, who was the favorite composer of Joseph II. He was very fond of dancing, ninepins, and billiards, of good cheer, and of the society of pretty women. The frail little body seemed to be in need of constant motion; observers noted that when he was talking his hands were always moving or playing with some object such as his watch, or a ring, or part of his clothing. His tongue, on occassion, could be sharp, and we gather that his frank criticism of some of his contemporaries did not help to endear him to them; he could be very satirical when he liked. But the basis of his character was gentleness, cheerfulness, honesty, and the desire both to love and to be loved. (Newman, 44)

[5]Casting Hulce and Berridge and Americanizing the dialogue were probably the biggest chances that Forman and Shaffer took. Forman discusses the major reasons for his selection of Hulce, his status as an unknown and his believability, and his interview with Hodenfield (20). Most critics feel that the decision was correct. Joy Gould Boyum, Vincent Canby ("Film: 'Amadeus'"), Richard Corliss ("Mozart's Greatest Hit"), and Bruce Williamson ("Movies," Nov. 1984) all give Hulce high praise. Mark Czarnecki, though, finds Hulce the only dislikeable aspect of the film, and Michael H. Seitz ("School Daze") calls the film exciting and the music excellent, but dislikes the Americanization. F. Murray Abraham paid Hulce the highest compliment while accepting his Oscar when he said, "There's only one thing missing for me tonight, and that is to have Tom Hulce standing by my side" (Shales, 8). (Hulce was also nominated for Best Actor.) Diane Haithman discusses Hulce's career and the attractiveness of the role to him. He liked the combination of extremes in the character and the idea of Mozart as just an average person.

[6]Conductor Neville Mariner was surprised at being allowed to record Mozart's music uncut for the film. Forman then inserted large sections of the score into the film and worked around it. The audience thus receives a strong indication of Mozart's magnitude and Salieri's reason for jealousy (Sasanow).

[7]The film once again uses choreography by Twyla Tharp, who expresses her approach to the dances in Charla Krupp's article.

[8]Forman remarks, "What does matter is that the film excites people about Mozart's music" (Stark, 117). Peter Shaffer comments, "Amadeus is, first and foremost, an entertainment. But I hope it may also open up Mozart to a large new public" (Gelatt, 52). Jack Mathews, in particular, highly praises Forman's use of music.

[9]David Thomson comments on the look of the film, "what a surface! Breasts, keyboards, masks, nipples of Venus, wigs, pens, papers, a billiard ball, even the last shower of lime turned into paste by the rain. Good enough to eat" ("Salieri, Psycho," 70). Forman discusses the deals made with the Czech government to allow him to work there again and the advantages and problems of shooting there with David Ansen and Edward Behr, Chris Hodenfield (23), and Richard Conniff (12, 14).
Peter Shaffer explains,

> The wonderful thing about Prague . . . is that it came through the war unscathed and has been spared the dubious benefits of modernization. You can turn the camera 180 degrees without seeing television aerials or plate-glass windows or neon signs. It's the most perfect eighteenth-century city in Central Europe, and in a natural and unself-conscious way, it is exactly where the story should be filmed. (Gelatt, 49)

[10]Richard Corliss concludes his review by stating, "In real life, we may all be Salieris, but we can respond to a movie that tells us we are really Mozarts" ("Mozart's Greatest Hit," 75).

[11]Among Amadeus' other reviewers, Stanley Kauffmann("Divertimento") discounts the historical inaccuracies and judges the work as a romance. He finds it to be Forman's finest effort, with an effectively ironic ending. Guy Flatley seems to like the film, but is not clear, and David Ansen calls it "enchanting," especially when it stays close to the music. He sees no point in Salieri's plot against Mozart, but fails to understand that as part of Forman's point. He finds Forman's directorial style "monumental," but misses the irony in it.

CHAPTER NINE

THE MESSAGE OF MILOS FORMAN

Milos Forman's concern in the late Sixties about his ability to fashion a career based on a gradual evolution of his talent and themes is now far behind him. Through a combination of vision, skill, persistence, and luck, Forman has developed in a manner enjoyed by few other directors in world cinema. Each of his films, despite occassional failures with the public and critics, is an intellectually challenging and basically entertaining work that demands serious attention. The recognition of Amadeus at the 1985 Academy Awards guarantees that Forman will continue to be able to make exactly the kinds of films that he desires for some time to come.

Forman's ability to shape his own career has certainly been an admirable achievement, but it does have its disadvantage also. The danger of critics looking for the same qualities in each film and not feeling very excited by them always exists. Vernon Young, for example, considers Forman a particularly uncreative director, who "filmed virtually the same movie three times in Czechoslovakia" ("Film Chronicle: Trash," 414). John Simon has always considered Forman exploitative of his characters, and therefore bases his review of each new film on this assumption, showing no concern for the relevance of the theme or its relationship to style. Other reviewers have followed Simon's lead.

Stanley Kauffmann expresses a grudging admiration for Cuckoo's Nest, but still suspects Jack Nicholson as having a hidden responsibility for it. He surprisingly likes Amadeus. Colin L. Westerbeck, Jr. never bothers to look for Forman's theme.

Other reviewers have occassionally strayed from their general opinion of Forman to take an objective look at one of his films and produce an intelligent review. Richard Schickel gave a perceptive analysis of Taking Off ("Parents and Kids"), but has since retreated into criticizing Forman's films for what seems to be missing from them, rather than what is present. Since, in Hair and Ragtime, Forman consciously altered traditional forms of film structure for thematic purposes, criticism of this nature is particularly ill-considered. Pauline Kael gave a very intelligent review of Cuckoo's Nest ("The Bull Goose Loony"), but did not like Forman's work even there. Since then, she has done nothing but attack Forman. She disliked Ragtime mainly because, as she admitted, she could not understand it ("The Swamp"). David Thomson has been the most consistently perceptive. His analysis of Cuckoo's Nest (America in the Dark), Ragtime ("Redtime"), and Amadeus ("Salieri, Psycho") provide insightful comments about the films' relevance and Forman's style.[1]

Nevertheless, not even Thomson has fully expressed the significance of Forman's themes. No critic, for example, noticed Cuckoo's Nest as a film about the struggle for social power and individual responsibility or Hair as a comment on the deep spiritual divisions in the country left by Vietnam. The themes of Ragtime and Amadeus have been similarly underappreciated, and not one scholar yet has adequately noted Forman's declining sense of optimism in his Czech films. Most importantly, no other analyst has yet revealed the evolution of Forman's style, or his

use of film techniques to enhance the themes of each of his works. Forman's consistency in complementing content with style in a manner that makes understanding both essential to realizing his films' true meanings is the basis of his excellence. His camera work in Competition (1963) is very different from Amadeus (1984), but each film reveals a conscious consideration of the camera's role and develops its theme from that basis. From his earliest film to his most recent, Forman's style has evolved gradually. The openings of Why Do We Need All Those Brass Bands? (1963), One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), and Hair (1979), for example, are remarkably similar. Yet, in each of his films, Forman's style has changed to match the relevance of his theme, and he always establishes the legitimacy of his camera movements at the beginning of each work. Despite his success, these aspects of Forman's career have never been adequately appreciated. The goal of the present study was to fill this gap in contempoary film scholarship.

Every filmmaker naturally risks suffering from shallow criticism, but in Forman's case there are some specific reasons why it would be unfair. Although he seems unlikely to do anything radically different, Forman is not entirely predictable either. Each Forman film speaks specifically to the social and cultural contexts in which it is released. Forman has obviously reached into his past at times to repeat certain themes and techniques, but he does not see any two films as being alike:

> Every product of artistic effort is a prototype, never done before in the same way and never will be repeated in the same way. It's not like when you invent an automobile and you manufacture thousands of them. If you write a book, it doesn't mean that you'll be writing the same book again, right? So it is impossible to limit art with something that is a final accomplishment. There is no final accomplishment in art. Everything can be different and nobody knows it better or worse, and you never find out. But it's true that the moment you, either as a director or an actor or as a writer, you think you've found a formula based on one successful result

> of your work again and again in little different variations, that's where the art turns into craft. You are gaining ground. You are becoming a better craftsman, but you are losing some of the excitement and depth of what art can give you.

Despite the many similarities in his works, Forman does not strive for consistency but for a totally open approach to each new project. When asked whether or not his method of scriptwriting removes some of the uncertainties of creation, Forman replies,

> First, let me tell you one thing. I will not be very helpful in analyzing myself because I am consciously avoiding it. I even don't want to analyze myself because I don't want to discover anything disturbing for me, right? It's like when you discover too much about how your body functions, you become paranoid and you start to feel every disease that is around, right? Before I knew that chest pain signals heart attack, I was never uncomfortable with any pain anywhere. It just depends. The moment you learn that chest pains indicate a heart attack you get paranoic. You get depressed. You get panicky. And especially in the world of the film business, that's not a good thing to do, is panic, you know. So I don't know very much about myself.

Because Forman rejects the idea that he can become or is now a complete artist with an established method, he remains flexible and unpredictable. The only accurate statement that can be made about Forman's future films is that they will also probably be significant documents of their times.

At fifty-two years old, Milos Forman looks and acts at least fifteen years younger. He is constantly in motion, even when sitting still. While giving his interview for this study, he started the session with a cigar and a beer and finished with some gum, which he kept working steadily. He very graciously took two hours out of his very busy schedule, allowed an unknown student into his apartment, and answered all questions fully and thoughtfully. Like his films, his friendliness is not false. His demeanor is casual and serious. His artistic accomplishments have not given him the attitude of having and flaunting a high social status.

Forman's task has always been difficult because he attempts to show people themselves. Forman's films include what is comic about human

existence as well as what is tragic, but people are not always eager to laugh at their own folly. Filmmakers with artistic sensibility also face the constant problem of the general public wanting answers, happy endings, and a feeling of security. People tend to stay away from films that make them leave the theater feeling insecure. Forman gives his audience a reason for optimism, but within a world of dominant oppressive forces that has the potential for disaster.

Forman's vision is evident in both the small details of his films and the outcome of their plots, which indicates their tight structure. Beginning with One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest (1975), a recurring image in Forman's films has been framed pictures of nature. Forman makes sure the viewer notices Dr. Spivey's picture of the fish he caught when McMurphy makes a direct reference to it. In Ragtime (1980), a number of gold-framed nature protraits hang in several rooms, and in Amadeus (1984), large wildlife tapestries are on the wall behind the Emporer as Mozart explains his plans for The Marriage of Figaro. Real wildlife does appear in Amadeus, but then it is being hunted. Hair (1979) did not offer any opportunities for including such pictures because the film takes place almost entirely outdoors. Instead, the music in Hair becomes enclosed as the film progresses: limited to mechanical reproduction, tightly defined spaces, or a lack of movement. These pictures define what Forman sees as a basic tendency in man: to enclose freedom and impose his own strictly defined order on nature. Each of Forman's American films since Taking Off examines the clash between a free-spirited individual and a highly structured society. In every case, social institutions are unable to adequately respond to the individual and he eventually dies. In Forman's Czech films, these pictures of nature do not appear because the young people in Competition (1963), Black Peter (1963), and Loves of a

Blonde (1965) simply accept restrictiveness as a fact of life and attempt to define themselves within it.

Although Forman's vision of the world is negative, his message is still optimistic. Forman's main theme is the opportunities for freedom within limitations, which relates to his concern about individual responsibility. All of the characters who die in his American films would survive if they were more rational and responsible. Ragtime and Amadeus are particularly strong in showing how individuals who do not understand their world, for whatever reason, are doomed to suffer. By contrast, all of the main characters in Forman's Czech films grow into a sense of personal responsibility. The one exception is The Firemen's Ball (1967), where Forman focuses on the men who already have responsibility and create a disaster by trying to flaunt it. When Forman attempted to create a similar character in Taking Off's Larry Tyne, he found out that it did not work. Larry creates disaster every time he ignores his responsibility, and finds happiness in the end by accepting it. The problem with Taking Off (1971) is that America does contain limitless opportunities for personal growth and Larry only appears foolish and insecure for not finding them.

Larry Tyne makes Taking Off an atypical Milos Forman American film because he reaches a state of equilibrium at the end, but the work is similar to the ones that have followed in the ambiguity of its conclusion. Forman uses the structure of popular film to support his message about the possibility for freedom within limitations. The ending of each film relates back to the beginning, thus creating a neatly enclosed form, but Forman always leaves a sense of ambiguity as well. He is able to do so because the basis of his hopefulness does not reside with the hero, but that character's story is the only one to be finished within

the film. The future belongs to the other characters, who are generally silent and powerless throughout the film: Jeannie Tyne and her boyfriend, McMurphy's fellow patients, the couples looking at Berger's grave, Coalhouse Walker's men and the new family, and the group gazing at Mozart's hearst as it leaves the city. These characters demonstrate Forman's compassion. The Grandfather and little boy in Ragtime and Mozart's son in Amadeus have no lines, but they are all important. In Forman's Czech films, the main character always has a future still ahead at the end and has usually matured during the course of the story because each one is a young person. Also, none of them arrogantly demand their rights. Each already realizes that he or she has social responsibilities and seeks merely to fulfill them while also attempting to find his or her identity.

Much to the opposite, Forman's American films seek to remind viewers about their individual responsibilities while also hoping for the growth of humanitarian consciousness within society's formal institutions. Forman's repeated theme that individuals need to actively search for their own answers is a central part of his philosophy. His films reflect his personal statements of refusing to impose his answers on anyone, but encouraging everyone to search for ones of their own: "Somebody once said, 'Follow those who are seeking the truth. Run away very fast from those who found it,' and I cannot agree more" (Personal letter). Perhaps, if enough people did follow this advice, formal institutions and therefore society itself actually would become more humanitarian. Reaching that goal will require a great deal of individual effort. The need to continue pursuing it is the message of the films of Milos Forman.

ENDNOTES

[1]Forman responds, "I haven't found one critic yet whom I really would dismiss as garbage. Except John Simon, of course. He's one hundred percent prejudice. It's all snobbish showing off" (Conniff, 14).

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