Orson Welles and Rouben Mamoulian: Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde?

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At first glance the mention of these two directors in the title might sound preposterous or even blasphemous. Orson Welles has been enshrined in cinematic history as the child prodigy, as the genius who both epitomized and revolutionized the American cinema in the 40s. On the other hand, Rouben Mamoulian has been acknowledged as an innovator who, sadly enough, suffered the tragedy of running out of innovations eventually (Sarris 160). The verdict of the film historians as regards the importance and the status of these two filmmakers is so far remarkably clear and incontestable. My goal in this article is to begin to challenge some of the widely held assumptions regarding their work and bring to the surface an aspect of Mamoulian's contribution to cinema that remains to this date entirely overlooked.

For Welles' *Citizen Kane* made in 1941 any comment is bound to be redundant. It is the film that consistently tops all "best films ever" lists and constitutes a staple in the academic curriculum, so that students can marvel at the stylistic and technical innovations of the film that amount to a discourse on method. Admittedly, what has earned this film the label of the "masterpiece" is not its subject matter, it is not the Hearst controversy that it stirred and it is certainly not its depiction of the American social values; instead, its admirers have focus almost exclusively on Welles' use of technique. As Peter Wollen has noted, "The truth is that the "content" of *Citizen Kane* cannot be taken too seriously. Yet it had an enormous impact - largely because of its virtuosity, its variety of formal devices and technical innovations and inventions" (Wollen 15).

One of the most influential theoretical formulations regarding Welles' style came from André Bazin who regarded *Citizen Kane* as the cinematic equivalent of a realistic novel in the tradition of Balzac (Bazin 61). The innovative and persistent emphasis on the depth of field and the sequence shot that are employed throughout the film were interpreted as an attempt for a greater ontological realism, stemming from the spatiotemporal homogeneity and the dramatic unity of the scenes. Viewed through Bazin's eyes, Welles' genius shone through his ability to master, on the one hand, all the technical possibilities that were available to his predecessors, and, on the other, to take them a step further by materializing the higher goal of classical realism, namely to open up for the spectators a transparent plate-glass window to the world.

As a young film theorist and historian, I was well-acquainted with Bazin's ideas and felt comfortable with the way he and his peers had plotted the history of film style, until I accidentally came across Rouben Mamoulian's *Love me Tonight* (1932) at a screening in New York while on holiday. Having recently completed my book on Post-classical narration, I could not help being struck by Mamoulian's stylistic and narrational choices, which seemed to me eerily misplaced in a film made in the early 1930s. Was it possible that all the principles of post-classical narration that I had identified in films like Lars von Trier's *Europa* (1991), David Fincher's *Fight Club* (1999) or Tom Tykwer's *Lola Rennt* (1998) could appear already in *Love me tonight*, even if in an early form? Could it be that another genius had prefigured the post-classical cinematic language nine years before the genius of Welles mastered and perfected the classical Hollywood cinema? All this was merely a first impression or rather a hunch that I felt I had to look into, starting with some research into Mamoulian's work.

Mamoulian, born in Russian Georgia, was trained at the Moscow Art Theatre and made an impressive directorial debut with an all-star cast in London at the St. James' Theatre at the age of twenty-three. Soon afterwards, he moved to the United States and had his first breakthrough on Broadway in 1926 with the production of Dubose Heyward's *Porgy*. The play featured an all-Negro cast and opted for extreme stylization, at a time when Broadway was "completely in the throes of realism," as Mamoulian notes (Silke 9). With the advent of sound in the movie industry, Mamoulian was invited in the filmmaking business by Paramount to direct dialogue scenes. He refused the studio's offer right away and demanded a contract for only one film with no options. He was determined to direct his first film entirely on his own terms and against all the filmmaking practices that applied at the time. He received a training of sorts in the moving pictures by observing the shooting of two other films at the Paramount studios in Astoria and thinking

"that's not the way I would do it. It's wrong. I would do it differently" (6). And indeed, *Applause* (1929) came out rather different from anything that was done before. Both in terms of sound and image the film broke several barriers, not without the resistance and the incredulity of the crew and the technicians. Every time Mamoulian wanted to try out a new technique, the answer would be "it's impossible." The peak came when he asked for a low angle shot of the action and ordered his cameraman, George Folsey, to bring in some electric drills and dig a four-foot-hole in the concrete floor of the studio. Even though he eventually saved everyone the trouble, the filming of *Applause* inaugurated several cinematic elements that cannot be praised enough.

In his subsequent films Mamoulian continued his exploration of the cinematic language, introducing elements such as "subjective" sound, subjective camera, non-realistic sound, fluid camera movements and dramatic use of colour, all by the year 1935! And, yet, he would never be revered by film historians as a genius or a revolutionary. He was never offered a place in the Griffith-Chaplin-Eisenstein lineage, a place that was be strictly reserved for Orson Welles. It is ironic that Welles embarked on his own career with an all African-American version of *Macbeth* in 1936 - ten years after Mamoulian's *Porgy*- and he would command Gregg Toland to dig a hole in the RKO studio floor in 1941 - twelve years after *Applause.*

And of course Welles would become famous for his own love-hate relationship with Hollywood that resulted in his artistic decline - just like Mamoulian. And, still, there was always something that made Welles' "tricks," "innovations," "experiments" or even his rebellions more legendary, bigger-than-life and one of a kind, even though, as my account shows, he rather came second. I believe that there are several sorts of explanations for Welles' privileged treatment that range from the way Welles marketed himself to the way critics and theorists alike regarded the nature and function of the cinematic medium.

My intention, of course, is by no means to diminish Welles' stature; it is to question why Mamoulian was not acknowledged just as much. Leaving aside all the other realms that subtend the institution of cinema and could be held responsible for this critical injustice, I would like to focus exclusively on the textual level and begin to explain why Mamoulian's work failed to receive the recognition that was due to him.

The premise of my article is that the analysts of Mamoulian's films failed to recognize the systematic narrative pattern that he began to formulate, as he explored his obsession with stylization and magical realism. Even though his career as a filmmaker was launched at a time when cinema was still struggling with the introduction of sound, he was already done with the classical realism that Hollywood had established from the late teens. As he confesses,

> (…) The reason I'm saying all this is to emphasize again that stylization, integrally and properly carried out, conveys a deeper reality to the audience that everyday kitchen naturalism ever can. My interest in the camera was in the fantastic and marvellous things you can do with it: angles, dollying, dissolves, the props and the framing etc. I felt that the sound also should become most flexible and be enriched by the magic that the screen is capable of. (Silke 9)

Unfortunately, the various stylistic devices that he tried out in his films were merely acknowledged as technical "innovations," a series of first-time "experiments," that conveyed no further significance for the cinematic medium. Film criticism tended to single out some fragments from his work but it never discerned the overarching vision of Mamoulian's filmic style. For instance, *Applause* is admired for breaking the sound barrier and using a two-channel sound recording, *City Streets* (1931) is mentioned for the use of subjective sound in the voice-over, *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* (1932) is remembered for its opening sequence which makes a sustained use of subjective camera, *Love me Tonight* (1932) is admired for its musically unified sequences and, finally, *Becky Sharp* (1935) makes an entry in film history for its deployment of colour for psychologically and emotionally symbolic purposes (Altman; Cormack; Lehman; Sarris). Anything that comes after *Becky Sharp* is generally consigned to oblivion, with the exception perhaps of *Summer Holiday* (1948), which is considered yet again as an innovative musical (Castello; Oloruntoba).

Even writers who were keen lovers of Mamoulian's entire oeuvre failed to offer any conceptualization of his filmic signifiers. Tom Milne, for example, declares his amorous feelings not only for all the films that Mamoulian made but also for every single moment in those films, as they all amount to a "coherent, developing whole" (Milne 12). He rightfully senses that there is a unifying principle underlying his filmmaking style

but his theoretical insight does not go beyond the following comment: "Witty, elegant, supremely stylish in the best sense of the word, Mamoulian films have as their real distinguishing mark their unerring sense of rhythm in exploring the sensuous pleasures of movement" (14).

My goal for the next few pages will be to attempt to atone for the lack of theoretical interpretation of Mamoulian's work, which has cost him a well-deserved position among the finest filmmakers in the cinematic canon. I believe that there are two films, both made in 1932, that could summarize his artistic sensibility and his filmic vision; *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* and *Love me Tonight*. I have chosen to look closely at the latter's narrative construction for purely economical purposes, as their overall narration adheres to the same principles.[1]

Love me Tonight
The story of the film is plain simple; a charming and carefree tailor from Paris, Maurice (Maurice Chevalier), goes to a chateau in the countryside to collect a bill from one of his insolvent clients, Vicomte de Varese (Charles Ruggles). Upon his arrival at Vicomte's family estate, Maurice is mistaken for royalty and decides to spend the weekend at the castle under false pretenses in order to win over the heart of the woman he falls madly in love with, Princess Jeanette (Jeanette Mac Donald). The other characters who inhabit the castle are the Duke (Sir C. Aubrey Smith), who is the head of the family and Jeanette's loving uncle; Count de Savignac (Charles Butterworth) who aspires to marry Jeanette; Valentine (Myrna Loy), who is the jaunty man-mad niece, and, finally, the three aunts who act as if they were the chorus in an ancient Greek drama, intermittently commenting on the action.

What is remarkable in the narrative setup of the film is the autonomy of the characters and the shared emphasis they enjoy in the development of the plot. Even though Maurice and Jeanette are in principle the main duet, all the others participate equally in plot, not only with their musical numbers but also with their diegetic interactions. In fact, the narrative is a loose string of episodes and witty repartees among the characters in different combinations, while the main thread, the couple's romance, unfolds in an episodic and unrealistic manner, which is partly - but only partly - motivated by the generic conventions of the musical comedy.

The opening sequence is the most celebrated part of the film, as almost all critics stress the sheer beauty and elegance with which Mamoulian choreographed the awakening of the Parisian city. Shots of the empty streets of Paris in the early morning hours slowly give way to the images of every day people who emerge from their houses and start their daily activities; a worker strikes the cobble-stones with a pickaxe, a woman sweeps her front stoop, the chimneys begin to smoke and street life gradually rises at full blast. This sequence could be regarded as the film's first musical number, since the sounds that are produced from every person or activity in the street all rhythmically blend in a symphony of noises.

However, from a narrational point of view, this opening is even more intriguing. It is an unusually long non-diegetic segment that lasts for three minutes with the sole purpose to set the place and tone of the film. Whereas a typical classical narration would have an establishing shot of Paris and a few shots strung together with analytical editing, Mamoulian delays the diegesis for three entire minutes in order to indulge in a self-conscious and playful exercise of style and rhythm that exceeds the needs of the musical. Indeed, the opening is Mamoulian's own city symphony documentary that not only re-works his own staging of *Porgy* but, most importantly, echoes Dziga Vertov's *Man with the Movie Camera* (1929) as well as Alberto Cavalcanti's *Rien que les heures* (1926).

As soon as this creative episode is over, the camera decides to slowly enter the story world by moving in through one particular window in the Parisian neighbourhood; once in the room, the camera turns fluidly towards a hat hanging on top of a drawn figure on the wall and then glides rightward to reveal Maurice's face coming through his turtleneck sweater. Before long, Maurice starts to sing "The Song of Paree," concluding the tribute to Paris, and then, as he goes out on the street, he switches to the tunes of "How are you?," cheerfully greeting all his neighbours on his way to his atelier. With these two musical pieces, the main protagonist's personality is quickly established; he is a joyful and sociable fellow with a flair for singing and flirting. The numerous encounters with the women of the neighbourhood, married or single, demonstrate a courting and promiscuous attitude that, nonetheless, appears to be socially acceptable thanks to his irresistible wit and charm.

Narrationally, this double musical number is quite striking for the way it is integrated with the plot since it transmits crucial story information about the hero and offers a quick tour into his daily life. Stylistically, the filming of Maurice's stroll is also remarkably bold; a tracking camera laterally captures his forward movement, while being interrupted by a pioneering zoom-in shot on a woman on a balcony followed by a swish pan that brings the camera back to the street level. On both counts, the narrational and the visual, Mamoulian leaves his predecessors far behind, using technical devices and developing narrative functions that not only broke new ground at the time but would also remain dormant for years to come.[2]

After Maurice's introduction and the instigation of the problem in the story, Vicomte's debt, we are transferred to the other locale of the action, the family chateau, with the help of a musical number called "Isn't it romantic" that ingeniously unites the city with the countryside and creates "musically unified sequences out of shots which have little spatial unity" (Altman 152). From Maurice's lips to Jeanette's we cover a long way that is meant to indicate the social distance between the two main protagonists. Once Jeanette finishes her singing on her balcony, there is a diegetic scene that acquaints us with the leading lady and her suitor, Count de Savignac. Once we are given sufficient information regarding Jeanette's fainting spells and the Count's ardent wooing, Mamoulian begins an impressive navigation into the vast castle using the following scenes:

a. A long shot of the castle in the night allows us to catch a glimpse of Jeanette on the left, as she leaves her balcony to go to bed. The camera slowly cranes up to a small window on the upper floor and a dissolve takes us into an eyrie where the camera continues its movement towards the three aunts who prepare a potion for Jeanette's fainting spells and make wishes for her to find love. The take remains static for a few seconds and, as soon as the wishes are completed, the camera makes the exact reverse movement and exits the room from the window.[3]

b. the crane shot continues drawing away from the upper floor and moves downward towards another window on the first floor. With a dissolve we enter the room and watch a conversation between the Duke and Valentine, which is classically edited and is designed to reveal some of their characteristic traits. Valentine eventually leaves.

c. in the same space the Duke discusses with his butler the guests' schedule for the following day, which mostly comprises of playing bridge. The dialogue ends with the Duke asking what the guests are doing at the moment and the butler saying that they are playing bridge. The Duke exclaims in delight.

d. dissolve to the dining room where the guests are playing bridge. The camera makes a long wandering movement around the tables showing some old people playing bridge on the verge of falling asleep out of boredom. The entire scene is in slow-motion and the soundtrack plays a mourning tune in order to transmit the dullness and monotony in the atmosphere.

e. dissolve to the entrance of the castle where the Vicomte arrives in taxi and gives instructions to the driver to wait for him. Inside the chateau, he runs into Valentine and then the Duke. The witty and playful dialogues among the three characters are very illustrative of their relations and the feelings they share for each other.

f. dissolve to the eyrie where the aunts carry on stirring the potion in the dark underneath their oversized shadows, praying that a prince will come to bring romance to Jeanette.

g. slow dissolve from the aunts to the image of Jeanette sleeping in her bed. The two images remain superimposed for four seconds while we hear the prayers, on the one hand, and see their referent, on the other. Jeanette's image remains in the frame for a few seconds and then the camera retreats from the room, exits from the window, draws away with the same craning movement and stops on the same long shot of the castle, with which the navigation began.

In this string of scenes, framed by the shot of the castle, Mamoulian constructs the narration in a particularly self-conscious manner, handling the characters as well as the spatiotemporal coordinates with remarkable ease and freedom that loosens the classical rules of tight cause-end-effect logic and releases the cinematic signifies from their strict causal function. His role as a narrator becomes prominent, as he shifts from room to room and manoeuvres the camera in a way that makes the viewer aware of its dynamic presence. Moreover,

the scene with the guests playing bridge is not only inserted autonomously, as it does not feature any of the characters and is not motivated by the plot, but it also plays in slow-motion to transmit the energy of the moment or more precisely the lack thereof. A similar treatment of time is witnessed later on in the hunting scene when Maurice rides a wild horse and starts a crazy race in fast-motion. Furthermore, when the hunting ends and Maurice orders the huntsmen to return to the castle quietly and slowly, we see the horses turn and depart in slow-motion. The choice to defy the passage of natural time and to manipulate the image track goes against the principles of classical realism only to contribute to a heightened realism and create a greater emotional involvement to the viewer.

Towards the same end, Mamoulian uses the screen not merely as a window but as an opaque surface - today we would call it a monitor - where a combination of images can appear simultaneously forming a significant cluster. The first case is found in the second half of the film; the camera enters Maurice's room in a prowling manner and gradually stops at a medium close-up view of him sleeping. Suddenly, we begin to hear his conversation with Jeanette, which apparently takes place in his dream. In this imaginary realm, he reveals the secret that tortures him so much and she reacts enthusiastically, singing "Love me tonight." As soon as she finishes her lines, Maurice turns leftward and joins the singing, while still asleep. Soon, a diagonal wipe on the left brings Jeanette into the frame and unites the two lovers in a figurative non-diegetic space. Finally, the two split-screens are superimposed onto an image of the sky, adding to the oneiric dimension of this visual cluster.

The second case of spatial montage[4] is even bolder; for a whole minute and thirteen seconds we simultaneously watch the separate trajectories of the two heroes after the revelation. The scene begins with a standard point-of-view editing, which joins the shot of Jeanette looking out the window with the object of her look, Maurice walking down the winding path that leads to the exit of the family estate. However, the two images shortly become superimposed, allowing us two see them both on the same screen. During the course of this sequence, we watch Jeanette, on the one hand, dithering about her decision to let Maurice go, while, on the other, we see the latter walk to the station and board a train that will take him back to Paris. The shots that are superimposed are very diverse in composition, resulting at times in a very disturbing effect.

Mamoulian's flair for juxtaposition and visual conflict is subsequently demonstrated in the final sequence, which is a blend of Eisenstein's montage and Griffith's last moment rescue scenes. Parts of the steaming train are rapidly juxtaposed with parts of the galloping horse to create a graphic conflict that can only be regarded as a parody, given the appropriation of the Eisensteinian method for pure Hollywood dramatological purposes. On a parallel note, the last-minute rescues, which were so popular in the works not only by Griffith but also by other silent filmmakers, are echoed in these closing minutes with a significant difference in the very heart of similarity;[5] it is the woman who rescues the man with her extreme persistence that even bends the laws of physics, with the filmmaker's aid, of course, who so knowingly plays once more with the fast-motion button to help her stop the train.

Overall, the scenes I have analysed and the aspects I have underlined in the film's narrative construction show how Mamoulian sought to consistently explore a set of rules that distinctly diverge from the classical Hollywood norms. This does not mean that he radically broke the established principles of classical continuity editing or classical mise-en-scene; in fact, a large portion of the film employs the standard techniques of analytical editing, shot-reverse-shot cutting or staging in depth. However, the heart of the film lies elsewhere; it lies in the moments I highlighted above, which give away a different sensibility and a new prospect for the cinematic language, which could not make complete sense in its own right at the time.

An early post-classicism?
The close analysis of *Love me tonight* from a contemporary point of view reveals not only Mamoulian's innovative filmmaking techniques but, most importantly, a pioneering mode of narration that was so far ahead of its time that it could only begin to be appreciated several decades later. All the aforementioned stylistic devices, such as flamboyant camera movements, subjective sound, stylish editing and rhythmic tempo, were rightly pinpointed and praised by the critics but the overall underlying pattern remained elusive to them. By the year 1932, Mamoulian had beautifully mastered the classical rules of narrative construction that were practised in Hollywood and felt that he needed to take them a step further; not to abolish them altogether but to imbue them, on the one hand, with a sense of knowingness and narrational freedom and with the

energy of a "heightened" realism, on the other, that surpasses the function of the screen as a window to the world. On both counts, the result was a multiplication of the uses of causality, time and space, as the excerpts I discussed above showed.

More precisely, the compositional motivation of the narration consists of the basic classical plotline - the formation of the heterosexual couple - but it becomes noticeably loosened as each and every character in the castle has the opportunity to pursue their own agenda when it comes to the core themes, i.e. love and money. Moreover, another traceable narrational characteristic is the presence of parody, particularly in the opening and closing moments, which deliberately reworks cinematic elements from other cinematic traditions. Furthermore, the spatial system in the film adds to the classical conception of photographic space the dimension of a graphic space that comprises fluid camera movements, extreme camera angles and, above all, spatial montage that employs split-screens, superimpositions and optical tricks to break the transparency of the frame and build figurative configurations that, nonetheless, sustain their causal function. Finally, the temporal manipulations of the image track enrich the palette of the temporal system of classical narration with the qualities of reduction, expansion and simultaneity for expressive purposes.

Behind the narrational and stylistic devices with which Mamoulian grappled in *Love me Tonight* - and to a large extent throughout his entire oeuvre - lies his deeper vision of a cinematic realism that is not contingent upon the stable, unified and continuous correspondence of the frame to the outer world. Instead of the path of transparency, favoured by the classical tradition, Mamoulian discovered the path of hypermediacy, which multiplies the signs of representation and materializes the cinematic signifiers in order to reproduce the "rich sensorium of human experience" (Bolter and Grusin 34). This type of realism, a hypermediated realism,[6] would become the keystone of the post-classical mode of narration around the world from the late 70s onwards (Thanouli 183), but Mamoulian was the first to sense the potential of the cinematic tools to serve realism in an entirely different manner than the established Hollywood classicism. Sadly, his fundamental discovery and contribution to cinema would never be acknowledged as such by the film historians and theoreticians.

On the contrary, the standard version of film criticism carved Orson Welles' place in stone for his innovative use of the depth of field and the sequence shot to achieve an ontological realism that constructs the frame as a transparent window. Like Dr. Jekyll, Welles became cinema's legitimate genius who reached the summit of classical narration and served the teleology of the cinematic medium towards classical realism. Mamoulian's foresight would remain repressed, like Mr. Hyde, for several decades until the possibilities and virtues of a post-classical narration and hyper-mediated realism were discovered by contemporary filmmakers, finally opening up a more vibrant and exuberant side of cinema.

Notes

1. There are two detailed textual analyses of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde* that offer useful observations and measurements, even if they do not reach a broader theoretical perspective for the significance of the narration and style of the film. See Lehman, Peter. "Looking at Ivy looking at us looking at her: the camera and the garter." *Wide Angle* 5.3 (1983): 59-63 and Cormack, Mike. *Ideology and Cinematography in Hollywood, 1930-39.* New York: Macmillan, 1994.

2. One of the most discussed aspects of *Love me Tonight* is the way it revolutionizes the musical genre. Rick Altman has extensively analyzed the innovative aspects of the film's generic identity, especially within the fairy tale musical tradition. See Altman, Rick. *The American Film Musical.* Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987.

3. Orson Welles uses the same technique in *Citizen Kane* to open and close Susan Alexander's interview at the club where the camera cranes in and out of the skylight.

4. For a description of the concept of spatial montage see Manovich, Lev. *The Language of New Media Cambridge.* Mass.: The MIT Press, 2001.

5. I am relying on Linda Hutcheon's work on parody. See Hutcheon, Linda. "An epilogue: postmodern

parody: history, subjectivity and ideology." *Quarterly Review of Film and Television* 12. (1990): 125-33.

6. For an account of the concept of hypermediated realism, see my article on post-classical narration, Thanouli, Eleftheria. "Post-classical narration: a new paradigm in contemporary cinema." *New Review of Film and Television Studies* 4.3 (2006): 183-196.

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