Keep young and beautiful if you want to be loved

*The Cat*: formalist analysis and older women's reactions

Rina Rosselson

Thesis submitted for the M.A. Degree in Film and Television Studies,

University of Westminster

@ 1998, University of Westminster and Rina Rosselson
Abstract

The representation of the older woman in films has not been researched or theorized. This study analyses the representation of an older woman in *The Cat* and the reactions of a group of older women to the film. The formalist analysis and the perceptions of the women differ. Expectations, narrative comprehension, emotional investment, ambiguities due to acting style and mise-en-scene are explored to account for the difference. The need for further research into the way older women have been portrayed in films is stressed.
CONTENTS

Introduction ...................................................... p.1

Analysis ......................................................... p.5

Narrative ......................................................... p.7

Characters ....................................................... p.22

Mise-en-scene ................................................... p.25

Viewers’ reactions .............................................. p.28

Conclusion ...................................................... p.35

Filmography ................................................... p.39

Bibliography .................................................. p.41

Reviews ........................................................ p.43

Appendix I

Appendix II
INTRODUCTION

In 1995 the Education Resources for Older People Department of the City Literary Institute in London organised a five day Media Course. In the Press and Television sections, the role of old people as consumers and their representation were discussed at length. In the section on Film Studies and the Cinema only nostalgia was on offer in the shape of Brief Encounter and It Always Rains on Sunday.

Until recently nothing had been written about older people in films. Since there is a double standard operating in the perception of older men and women as discussed by Ginn et al.,¹ the discussion in this dissertation will concentrate on older women only.²

In The Women's Companion to International Cinema ³ the columns on Stereotypes do not include the stereotypes of the older woman: apple cheeked shuffling grandmother, frustrated spinster, wicked witch, senile victim or the Miss Marples character. In the entry about Crossing Delancey the older woman is described as an “uncomfortably sentimental grandmother”⁴ but it is not mentioned that one of the main characters in Rue Cases Negres is a grandmother.

The Whales of August appears under Lillian Gish but not under Bette

¹ Jay Ginn et al., 'Ageing and cultural stereotypes of older women' in Ageing and Later Life, p. 60.
² For the purpose of this dissertation I am using “older women” to mean menopausal and post menopausal women without upper limit of chronological age.
³ Annette Kuhn and Susannah Radstone eds., The Women’s Companion to International Cinema (Virago 1990)
⁴ Kuhn, Ibid. p. 368.
Davis. Ozu’s *Tokyo Story* does not feature at all in spite of one of the most touching portrayal of an older couple and their relationship with the younger generation.

*Gender and Generation*, a collection of papers, deals exclusively with youth in spite of its title. The melodrama would be the preferred genre to deal with ageing but in *Home is Where the Heart Is* the only mention of an older woman is the figure of Mrs. Vale in *Now Voyager*. Mrs Vale appears again in Kaplan’s *Psychoanalysis and Cinema* but only in her function as mother. Molly Haskell in *From Reverence to Rape* does address the issue of women and age. She considers mainly the cinema’s attitudes to the mature woman but her comments when she looks at *Sunset Boulevard* and *All About Eve* are apt for what is called the older woman:

“He [the director] projects onto her the narcissism, the vanity, the fear of growing old which he is horrified to find festering within himself. A grotesque mirror image of his own insecurity, the actress becomes the painting of the director’s Dorian Gray. He loudly hawks the myth that women are more devastated by aging than men...”

Kathleen Woodward argues that in our culture ageing causes anxiety and fear and is therefore denied and repressed. She further theorizes the absence of the older woman in feminist academic

---

5. Angela McRobbie and Mica Nava eds., *Gender and Generation* (Macmillan 1984)
9. Ibid. p.244.
discourse. According to her "there is another gender-specific content to identity- that of generation- which has not been elaborated by psychoanalysis." The generational component in identity is best left for psychoanalysts to debate but as far as film criticism is concerned it is true that:

"In feminist criticism and psychoanalysis the older woman - the woman of the third generation (and she - or we - may be older than this) - has not found a place."  

In her latest book Kaplan considers Rainer's *Privilege* and touches on the representation of older women in films. In a superficial overview she introduces and distinguishes between the concepts of the "menopausal" woman and "old aged women" without further analysis. She declares without evidence that *Shirley Valentine* is a menopausal woman and dismisses *Driving Miss Daisy* as sentimental.

Films featuring older women, menopausal or post-menopausal, deserve more academic attention than they are given. Brian Gearing stresses the prevalence of negative attitudes to older people in our society.  

*Alive and Kicking*, *The Lady Vanishes*, *The Whales of August*, *La Vieille Femme Indigne*, *La Vie Devant Soi*, *The Company of Strangers* and films where older women have small roles as confidantes or comforters do not present negative images of older

---


13. Woodward, Ibid p. 88. In a footnote she observes that Teresa de Lauretis generalises from 'older woman' to 'woman' in quoting an epigraph from Nietzsche: "Older women are more skeptical in their heart of hearts than any man".


women. However in films like *Arsenic and Old Lace*, *Now Voyager*, *Psycho*, *Tatie Danielle*, *The Old Woman Who Walked in the Sea* the older woman appears as threatening.

The *Cat*, the subject of this dissertation seems to illustrate Haskell’s quotation above. It is an intriguing film where the older woman has neither a ‘positive’ image nor a ‘threatening’ one. She is balanced between the two poles in a precarious position.

Feminist criticism has tended to look at the classic Hollywood text only and considered viewers’ reactions as resistance, complicity, or ‘negotiation’, without empirical evidence. To study the representation of the older woman in *The Cat* a formal analysis will be complemented by the study of the viewing reactions of a group of older women whose ‘competence’ lies specifically in the domain of ageing. The viewing conditions and the composition of the group were highly specific. This study responds to Mayne’s call for ‘more specific, local studies’ rather than being a conventional ethnographic study. The reactions of the reviewers of the French national press at the time the film was released will also be analysed and compared to the women’s group as a control for language and historical effects.

---

17 - see later under viewers’ reactions.
The approach to the analysis of the film is the aesthetic approach taken by Kristin Thompson and the analysis a neo-formalist one, which will assess the role of the older woman in the film as a whole.\(^{19}\)

*The Cat* was released in France in 1971. Directed by Pierre Granier Deferre, it features Jean Gabin and Simone Signoret and is an adaptation of a novel by Georges Simenon.\(^{20}\)

The concept of the dominant\(^{21}\) is the starting point of this analysis. The film is a melodrama which differs from the conventions of the genre by the use of silence and noise and by its theme. It fulfills Elsaesser's characteristics of the Hollywood melodrama. The mise-en-scene expresses the characters's emotional and psychological predicaments, repetitions and visual metaphors are paramount, the actions are futile and hysterical, the characters are their sole referents, their world is closed and they are acted upon.\(^{22}\) However the theme is not "concerned with the child's problem of growing into a sexual identity within the family"\(^{23}\) or "touches on sensitive areas of sexual repression and frustration."\(^{24}\) The theme here is ageing and death. Stylistically silence is an aggressive weapon rather than the

---

20. The novel is out of print. The film is subtitled.
21. Ibid., p. 43.
23. Geoffrey Nowell-Smith, Minelli and Melodrama in Gledhill op.cit. p. 73.
24. Laura Mulvey, Notes on Sirk and Melodrama in Gledhill op.cit. p. 75.
muteness of the oppressed. The noise of demolition is the background sound that underline the mood of desperation and music is reserved for the nostalgic past only.

The story is very simple. A retired typographer, Julien, finds it difficult to come to terms with ageing and the thought of death. He is cruel to his wife and only shows concern for his cat. His wife Clemence, an ex-trapeze artist, who likes drinking, kills the cat after a confrontation with Julien. He leaves home. She falls ill. He comes back but does not talk to her anymore. She dies of a heart attack. He commits suicide.

The time relationship of events is not clear on first viewing. The development of the relationship between the two characters is however crucial in understanding the older woman. It is characterised by different use of sound. Only a detailed analysis can pinpoint the elements that permit a reconstruction of the story and trace the relationship between the two protagonists.
First Section characterised by no communication between the protagonists, the noise of the demolition site and silence. Consequence of the initiative event. Lasts 17 min.

1- demolition racket: We are introduced to the name Bouin in the context of a hospital after an emergency. The nurse asks how to spell Bouin and an off screen female voice replies. The dissolve to Simone Signoret’s face leaving the grocers conveys ambiguous information. We know she is Madame Bouin since the shopkeeper addresses her as such but is she the person who spelt Bouin in the hospital? There is an immediate change in the focus of interest when Jean Gabin goes into the shop and is greeted as Monsieur Bouin. The two persons following each other so quickly one going in, the other going out of the shop without acknowledging each other or sharing the same frame introduces a tension that will grow steadily. The following long shots of streets where the two people follow each other at a distance with a background of incessant racket build up a feeling of unease and expectation. It is in the wine shop that Mme. Bouin looks directly through the window into Mr. Bouin’s face with an expression of defiance. He does not return the look but his eyes are cast down on the label of the bottle of rum that she is grasping. The two characters proceed separately through noisy streets with traffic and road works. They finally are seen walking towards a house at the end of dead end street. It is the house in front of which the ambulance
stopped at the end of the opening sequences. Whereas until now Mme. Bouin was in front, it is M. Bouin who is leading and she is hurrying to catch up, a limp becoming more and more obvious. Although she is getting nearer, Mr. Bouin closes first the gate then the house door in her face. The relentless noise of lorry traffic, diggers, bulldozers, dominates these scenes.

2- silence:

The sound of the works lunch siren and the view of workers leaving their post introduce the indoor sequences. Mme. Bouin descends the stairs wearing a wide-sleeved brilliant white embroidered top and goes to the kitchen. In the confined space the two characters each prepare their own meal. Mme. Bouin takes a drink before starting. At no time are they seen in the same frame. At no time do they communicate by touch, speech or looks. The cross-cutting between the two emphasise their physical closeness by extreme close ups, close ups and medium close ups. The complete silence indicate their estrangement. The tension is slightly relieved by Mme. Bouin who shows irritation at the smells of her husband’s cooking tries to open the window but is forced to close it because of the noise intrusion. This small sequence gives the distinct feeling of her being trapped between obnoxious smells and intolerable noise. Afternoon, evening and bedtime activities are similarly silent and tense. The couple share nothing. When they observe the demolition of a building from two different vantage points he from the street, she from the window the distance between them is made obvious. In the evening he goes to

---

25 - see later
the cellar to cut some wood she attempts childishly to provoke him by turning the light off. He shows no reaction at all. They sit by the fireside a picture of cozy intimacy but although they occasionally glance at each other the glances never meet and the silence is complete. After looking at the empty cat basket, he writes a note on a piece of paper folds it and flicks it on her lap and leaves. She opens it. It says "The Cat". The indoor silence is oppressive and the tension of the lack of communication increases with each scene until they go to bed.

Apart from the greetings of the shopkeeper, speech only occurs briefly in four subjective flashbacks to the distant past which are accompanied by nostalgic music. In the one which corresponds to Mr. Bouin's inner thoughts we see a lithe young woman running in an idyllic bucolic landscape and diving into a lake, while a crooner sings a romantic song ".... I have so many things to tell you....". It is during this sequence that we get to know their names as they call to each other. The other two flashbacks correspond to Clemence's thoughts. In one of them we learn that she liked to have a drink and that Julien actually enjoyed her loving mood. In this scene a motorbike is prominently present. In the other a relaxed and happy Julien calls from the street to Clemence at the window to show her a cat that he has found.

The fourth flashback is barely perceptible and the source of confusion. In the dark of the bedroom, the beds which were at different ends of the room are suddenly together and a cat is seen on Julien's bed. A brief hostile conversation about the cat snoring occurs.
What do we learn about Clemence and Julien, from these scenes where noise or silence dominate the present and brief moments of nostalgic music and words accompany the past? They were once in love. She did not limp. She liked a drink. He wanted her to be loving.

The state of their present relationship however is not easy to define. At the beginning of the outdoor sequence the woman appears to be the dominant person. She walks ahead and she looks straight into her husband’s face while he follows and does not meet her gaze. At the end of the outdoor sequence however Mr. Bouin’s slamming of the gate and the door asserts his authority.

By the end of the first 17 minutes of the film the tension initiated by the unrelenting street noise and the indoor silence has risen to such a point that the curiosity about the reason for this situation of non communication is overshadowed by the desire for it to end. There is no indication for the motivation of this state of affairs and neither of the characters as shown above seem to be dominant or oppressed. If the fourth flashback is not detected as such, it can be surmised that the cat was present at the time depicted by this first section of the film.

**Ambiguous bridge to objective flashback**

In bed Clemence is looking at the curtain where a spotlight picks up a high wire walker and the full sound of circus music explodes. Cut to Clemence busy organising circus photos and notices into frames and albums. This bridge is very ambiguous. The circus shots do not belong to either the previous section or the following one and can be interpreted as Clemence’s dream placing the next scene as the morning after. In effect it is a flashback to the recent past.
Second section characterised by speech and conflicts lasts 40min. It is an objective flashback to the near past and contains the initiative event:

It is useful here to chart the confrontations and the role of speech in the following section:

First confrontation:
1. Clemence is busy organising circus photos and notices into frames and albums.
2. Julien derides Clemence's interest in her past and humiliates her. He taunts her by aping a circus act with vocal accompaniment of the circus fanfare. He throws her two glances of cruel contempt and leaves the house after affectionate words to the cat.
3. She takes a bottle and goes to the cellar followed by the cat. She talks to the cat while drinking and in what seems a drunken mounting anger slashes Julien's newspapers, intending to blame the cat. During this monologue we learn that Julien was a typographer and she accuses the cat of being a quitter like his master. The whole of the event is filmed in one sequence with only shots of the cat for punctuation.

During this time:
1. Julien in the street is reminded of his age by a young couple on a Japanese motorcycle who demonstrate no interest in his experiences of a Harley-Davidson.
2. Julien goes into a hotel and talks to the young woman owner Nelly in an obvious familiar and friendly setting. This exchange ensues:

   Nelly: "what are you interested in"  
   Julien: "nothing"

...Nelly advises him that it is time that he separates from his wife...
Julien: "you cannot escape 25 years of marriage, might as well go on to the end"
Nelly: "the end of what"
Julien: "the end"

3- On these words he gets up and leaves without drinking the glass of wine that he had asked for to go back home with the excuse of worrying about Clemence drinking.

4- At home he calls the cat and when he gets no response he calls his wife whom he discovers in the dark cellar.

5- He does not take any notice of his torn newspapers or of Clemence but shows affection and concern about the cat.

The following highly emotional altercation takes place on the stairs with Clemence higher than Julien. She complains of having nothing in her life while he has the cat and informs him that she will not tolerate the cat in the bedroom any more. His attacks are vicious “You are too old to be playing the drama queen” “You are just a joke” “You are not a pretty sight” “You get uglier everyday” “Temperamental trapeze artist” “Delirious drunk.” She makes only one remark in the same register :” so the retired typographer who thinks he is Zola -the armchair anarchist who has only a fat cat to love” but otherwise her answers are ugly shouts of wounded anger. He tries to go away, she stops him the positions are reversed. From the lower stair she pleads with him to tell her what he wants: “a new life, a new wife? “ He shouts :"For God’s sake when will you realise that it is oxygen that I need. I want to go to sleep and wake up with a young heart that is all.”26 He calls the cat to go up with him. She tries to stop him trips and falls. Cut to a fall in the circus and the clown’s face which looks at the fallen acrobat turns into the doctor’s. Outside the sick room he informs

26 - This sentence is mistranslated. He actually says:"I want to go to sleep with a young heart and wake up with a young heart..."
Julien that Clemence has a weak heart and says: "It is not easy to grow old". "No, it is not" replies Julien.

While in the first part of the film the indifference and lack of recognition seem mutual and the relationship equal, these sequences indicate that Julien is the initiator of discord. Unprovoked, he humiliates Clemence. Her recourse to the bottle leads her to the drunken futile destruction of what should be important to him: his papers. But this attention-seeking gesture will not succeed. Julien's depression about ageing and the thought of death is conveyed in a fragmented way in different scenes and locations but increase in intensity. The incident with the young couple and the motorcycle reminds us of the earlier flashback and conveys hurt and nostalgia. The ambiguity of the status of the hotel and its owner: lover or friend? divert the focus of our attention but the dialogue conveys indifference to his wife, deep depression about ageing. The inability to face up to the thought of death is demonstrated by his sudden departure after the word "end".

The climax of Julien's emotional outburst is the rage against age the impossible wish to live again with a young heart. However he directs this against his wife and his final insult is the kind, soft words addressed to the cat. The heart motif is taken up by the doctor who talks about the difficulty of ageing and Clemence's weak heart.

The second verbal confrontation is again initiated by Julien. As Clemence all ready to go out limps down the stairs, he is on his way out. He stops and proceeds with an aggressive, jealous interrogation
about her contacts with her friends from the circus. However she
remains calm, dismisses the absurd accusation and reminisces
nostalgically of how jealous he was in their youth and how she had to
give up career and family. Simone Signoret's acting here does not
convey any resentment. But Julien's response is extremely
provocative "I was wrong". When she states that she still could go out
to work, he is again intent on humiliating her: "as a clown or
usherette?". She turns round and passionately enumerates all the
circus skills she possesses. Futile exercise that he dismisses. By then
she is deflected from her initial project of going out and starts climbing
up the stairs observing that it is only accident that stops circus people
from working. He shouts in reply that her fall was not his fault. She
turns back and dares him to deny that he was happy that she could
not walk straight anymore. He does not deny it. He also does not deny
that he resents her not working. "Are you mad or stupid"? she asks in
frustration. He dismisses her, opens the door and after affectionate
greeting to the cat goes out. Clemence climbs the stairs to the
bedroom and the theme music is heard very faint and nostalgic. The
tension of this encounter is not resolved but leaves Clemence
disempowered and frustrated.

The following scenes affect their relationship indirectly but advance
the narrative. After a union meeting, Julien confides in his friend that
he is not concerned by union matters anymore and that his problem is
his wife who "pisses him off". Meanwhile Clemence receives an

eviction order. She thinks back to how as a young loving couple they
visited the then pleasant suburban villa with a lease for life. She
fantasises aloud to the cat about the future and ironically describes Julien and the cat happily installed in a flat and her having to go back to her trailer. This unpromising future leads her to try and get rid of the cat. The scenes in the supermarket are the only lighthearted moments. But the atmosphere of tension is immediately resumed as we see her walking in the dark street, past a removal van to the accompaniment of insistent building noise. The tension mounts as Julien comes back and after failing to see the cat asks her about it. Cross cutting between her preparing the meal, eating it, putting his aside, lighting the fire and knitting and him restless looking down in the cellar, in the bedroom, the bathroom, under the bed, in the cupboard and then at the front gate, increases the suspense. Julien’s only words are about the whereabouts of the cat and his fear of children harming it. Otherwise he does not talk to her. Finally when the cat appears, Julien’s face lights up and for the first and only time he is seen smiling and happy. He gets up and feeds the cat in the kitchen all the time maintaining a flow of caring words. Clemence announces: “I am going up” in a soft and mild way but as he ignores her the tone of her voice becomes angry as she repeats the sentence again and again.

The final verbal confrontation starts in the bedroom where Clemence has carried her anger. We see her folding her bedspread which is as red and shiny as her dressing gown and at the sound of the cat meowing she ironically offers her bed for the cat. Julien ignores her, gets into bed and turns the light off. It is in the dark that she is
conciliatory and tries again to make contact with him by assuring him of her past fidelity, recalling the time when she was beautiful. She walks slowly towards Julien's bed and sits down. Her face is just visible whereas of him we only see a shape in the bed. The shot/reverse shot is therefore between her face and a vague form in the dialogue. "Why are you angry at me? because I have aged, because I limp\textsuperscript{27}, because we have no children?" He denies all these reasons. But when he admits that in the past her drinking made him laugh but not now she explodes, puts the light on and accuses him of getting his laughs at the seedy hotel with Nelly who he used to sleep with. He has his back towards her and only expresses irritation and contempt. His indifference exacerbates her anger: "I want to know why you suddenly started to treat me as a dead object? You love me less than a stray cat. What happened?" He replies: "Nothing happened I have changed that is all - I got older and I have changed like the whole world has changed". On these words he swears and goes downstairs to join his cat. She follows him, distressed, into the darkened sitting room. She turns the light on and confronts him again. The establishing shot is of her in the middle of the frame and him lying down with his profile in the right hand corner of the frame not looking at her. The shot/reverse shot of the next dialogue features her face to the camera and his profile as seen by her, obviously not looking at her. This break of the convention of shot/reverse shot where people talking to each other are presumed to look at each other is the same device as in the previous scene. It stresses his refusal to acknowledge her and her feelings that he expresses in

\textsuperscript{27} "Parce que je boîte" is mistranslated as "because I drink?"
words "I'd said I'd love you forever -wrong- I got old and I do not anymore". He turns and looks at her and his face has a chilling cold expression: "I do not love you anymore". She moves to the right, bends towards him. A close up of his face is followed by a close up of hers: "But I love you". His reply is cruel: "Please do not be ridiculous. Not at our age. We've grown apart with time and one day we'll be apart for good". She is bent towards him :" Why not now. ?" "Commit suicide then or I've got an even better idea ............". and while he gets up to get something in the drawer and puts a gun in her hand, he suggests she kills him and what a good tabloid title it would make: EX TRAPEZE ARTIST KILLS HUSBAND BECAUSE HE FELL IN LOVE WITH A CAT. " This is accompanied by a series of closeups: the gun in her hand, the impassive cat's face, his cold face, her distressed face and then his face again. "what are you waiting for, shoot " he says. After a silent motionless moment he goes out. She cries silently, looks at the mirror, has a drink from the bottle, then Julien dressed comes down the stairs and the front door is heard shutting. She goes to the window and utters a strangled 'Julien!', again a close up of her face shows her deep distress while she takes the gun. But the cat meows and her face changes expression from despair to determination and she shoots at it, follows it to the cellar and shoots it dead. A last scene in this part of the film characterised by dialogue is significant. Julien who has gone to the hotel after putting the dead cat in the dustbin is sitting at Nelly's table: "She should have shot me
instead... Dead before you know what's happened ... The more the years pass the less I understand." 28

A two minute sequence separates the previous conflict section from the next silent one. It has huge emotional power in that it marries two contradictory elements, the nostalgic music and the slow motion shots of the wrecking ball impacting on a brick wall. This is cross cut with Clemence first sobbing silently in her red dressing gown then devastated with grief in her day jacket intimating a long night of despair. The music is maintained for the next long shots of Julien in the middle of a building site observing numerous cats climbing and jumping on scaffolding.

Third Section: 20 minutes following chronologically from the previous section: Non communication at a distance but co-dependency of the two characters:

Both in similarity and contrast to the first section of the film the next one is marked by silent non communication but at a distance. The encounter in the park has a background noise of children playing. The Bouins are sitting on distant benches but in view of each other. He is reading a newspaper over which he casts three glances. She sustains a pained look at him but their gazes do not meet. When he later looks for her in the streets and the shops the nostalgic music is heard only to give way to the demolition noise again and long shots of

---

28 - Here the translation loses the feeling of finality. The literal translation would read: "The years have gone, now I am at the end of the road and I have understood nothing."
the demolition site when he sees the doctor's car at the house. Follow two parallel sequences. He rings her on the telephone hears her voice but does not speak to her. She does the same. Nelly carries the role of making Julien aware of his feelings by suggesting he misses his wife, that he should worry about her health and finally that he should go back to her. Clemence hears him come in and prepares herself expectantly with a hopeful expression on her face. A series of alternate close ups of their faces follow. At the foot of the bed he looks impassively and coldly at her and declares: "I have come back but I'll never talk to you again". The close up of her face show the change of her expression from expectant hope to despair. His face again: "Never". Her face, devastated.

**Last section: resolution, chronologically after first section lasts 18 mins.**

There is a time shift that is difficult to work out except that Clemence looks more tired than in the first section. It is introduced by lorries and bulldozers and incessant noise. Everything in the condemned house is vibrating. A man slips a letter under the front door of the house. The bulldozers have dug four square holes in the ground. Clemence and Julien come back separately from shopping. This time she is first and closes the gate in his face. She looks more tired than in the first episode and her cough that was only incidental is now more pronounced. She puts the eviction notice she found on the floor on the table for him to see. He writes down on it: "so much the better". This kitchen scene echoes the first kitchen scene and the next
scene is at the fireside. This time she coughs and he writes on his note "you should see a doctor" but close ups of the whisky tumbler, the cigarette and the empty cat basket indicate his change of mind. He writes "the cat" flicks the note onto her lap and leaves the room. She gets up and in pain grabs her left arm and goes upstairs, she retrieves a box from under the bed and gets out all the little notes he must have flicked to her over a certain time. How long? Most say "the cat" some "no", "I don't know" "there is no more...." She grabs her chest and falls down knocking the lamp in the process. In a scene echoing the one where Julien in the street hears the gunshots that killed the cat, Julien sees the light at the bedroom window go off. He rushes back and holding her cries: "Clemence! Clemence! speak to me! speak to me". Too late. She is dead.

In the bathroom he takes some pills from the cabinet and goes back and sits down in the armchair in the bedroom.

The closure scene takes us back to the hospital and the nurse announcing to the unseen person "his heart gave out".

In this narrative string there is no mention of the future except in two brief scenes. Clemence on receiving the eviction order talks to the cat and projects to the future. She can only see separation from Julien ahead. Julien sits outside Nelly's room listening to her recounting her plans for her future from which he is obviously excluded.

There are only few ambiguous moments open to personal interpretations. Clemence in bed blames the cat for her fall and Julien who was about to prepare her something to eat gives up on the
relationship. If he had softened towards his wife before her accusation Jean Gabin's acting style does not express it clearly. The relationship between Nelly and Julien is never spelled out and her repeated advances very subtle: "Have you nothing else to tell me?" 29.

This leads us to the analysis of the characters. Julien and Clemence cannot be seen as real people and are not fully rounded characters. They exhibit certain traits or seem to Thompson prefers to call them after Barthes: it is obvious from the dialogue that both Julien and Clemence define themselves as old.

Apart from Julien's words his grey hair is highlighted throughout the film. On his first appearance on screen a close up of the back of his head picks up his brilliant white hair between his dark cap and coat. At other times his white hair is often paired in a frame with dull colours or in the dark with another bright element: the light in the cellar, the street lights, Clemence's white jacket, the doctor's coat. Julien has no interest in his real life: the destruction of the newspapers that he has sold and kept leaves him cold. A long panning shot at the union meeting shows all the young faces of the workers and settlements on Julien and his friend older faces. He considers issues discussed at the union meeting as secondary to his problems with his wife. Another characteristic of his behaviour is that he is always leaving. He leaves the house to go to the hotel, he leaves the hotel after mentioning the end, he leaves the house after humiliating his wife, he leaves the bathroom in a middle of a row, he leaves his wife. The constant escape behaviour underline his inability to cope with the changes.

29 - translated as: is that it?
CHARACTERS

This leads us to the analysis of the characters. Julien and Clemence cannot be seen as real people and are not fully rounded characters. They exhibit certain traits or semes as Thompson prefers to call them after Barthes. It is obvious from the dialogue that both Julien and Clemence define themselves as old.

Apart from Julien’s words his grey hair is highlighted throughout the film. On his first appearance on screen a close up of the back of his head picks up his brilliant white hair between his dark cap and coat. At other times his white hair is often paired in a frame with dull colours or in the dark with another bright element: the light in the cellar, the street lights, Clemence’s white jacket, the doctor’s collar. Julien has no interest in his past life: the destruction of the newspapers that he has set and kept leaves him cold. A long panning shot at the union meeting shows all the young faces of the workers and settles on Julien and his friend older faces. He considers issues discussed at the union meeting as secondary to his problems with his wife. Another characteristic of his behaviour is that he is always leaving. He leaves the house to go the hotel, he leaves the hotel after mentioning ‘the end’, he leaves the house after humiliating his wife, he leaves the bedroom in a middle of a row, he leaves his wife. This constant escape behaviour underline his inability to cope with the changes

---

30 -Kristin Thompson, op.cit., p.40.
around him and the fear of ageing and death that his words express. It is worth remembering that Clemence in the cellar accused him of being a quitter. Of course Clemence constantly reminds him of his age. Two brief scenes further stress his inability to face up to the realities of life: he lies to Nelly when she asks him whether he has seen Clemence and that there was cause to worry and when he tells her that Clemence has tricked the doctor about her heart. His emotional outlets are his cruelty to his wife and his attachment to the cat. His only reason for living is the sadistic pleasure he gets from taunting and ignoring Clemence. Whether he feels for his wife as Nelly maintains is only shown when she is dead. That he depended on her is proven by his suicide.

Clemence does not seem to have a problem with her age. In spite of the way Julien rejects and humiliates her she does not behave as a victim. The dramatic colours of her clothes and the wide sleeves of her jacket give her presence and dignity. She looks at herself in the mirror on numerous occasions: in the bathroom before going to bed more than once, preparing for the funeral in the bedroom and again in the sitting room. She looks after her appearance and is not distressed by it. Simone Signoret’s acting does not convey any regret at the sight of her puffy and tired face. She does mention her past beauty when she recollects to Julien about their past love and a little statuette in front of the mirror in the sitting room does visually stress the point, but she does not express resentment of growing old, neither in the dialogue or her acting. She does drink and the destruction of the newspapers in the cellar show her drunk but her later angry outbursts
are not due to drink. Although she is desperate for Julien's attention and love, there is no pathos in her behaviour. Only one little incident in the park shows her as pathetic. She picks up the rake that a child dropped and offers it only to find the family group has walked away not even noticing her. Otherwise she is angry at his cruelty, tenacious in her need to understand the situation and rescue the relationship and infinitely sad over its final breakdown after she shot the cat. She is seen knitting, solving crossword puzzles, doing her nails, reading, arranging her photos. However the acrobat's wristband that she always wear, and her limp are a constant reminder that she is not what she used to be when younger and in a way they function like Julien's grey hair as a sign of age.
MISE-EN SCENE

Depression at growing old is the theme of the film and it is expressed in a visual form by the mise-en-scene. The light is misty or rather dusty and many scenes occur in the dark. The colours are faded except for patches of bright colours. Of these Clemence’s white jacket and bright red dressing gown indicate the vibrancy of her character. The yellow of the lorries is echoed by the ambulance light and Julien’s suicidal pills.

Two main visual devices underpin the narrative: the redevelopment of the neighbourhood and the similarity of Clemence and the cat. We have seen the role of the noise of the demolition in the analysis of the narrative. The redevelopment of the area has different functions but no social dimension. The condemned house, the notice of the eviction, the final notice, Nelly’s plans for departure form a parallel narrative. By providing a deadline it cues us to the issueless situation.

The opening shots start with the yellow light of an ambulance screeching through streets lined with derelict buildings, roofless houses, and vacant windows. It stops in front of a house at the end of a dead-end street. The credits then appear on stills of the same exteriors with a nostalgic tune playing throughout. The stills become animated with the music still going until the hospital sequence. Although a board shows the status of the site as being developed, high rise buildings are only seen in a few frames. The house at the end of a street is standing in the middle of a demolition site. During
the opening shots other images are repeated: empty flower pots in the rain, a dog scavenging in a dustbin and sparrows pecking in front of a frameless door. This long introduction establishes the mood of destruction and hopelessness and not of change. The pairing of Clemence and the cat is more ambiguous. Clemence talks to it often. At the beginning of the second confrontation a shot of the cat grooming at the window is followed immediately by Clemence in front of her mirror. After Julien gives Clemence the gun, a closeup of the cat’s face is followed by the closeup of Simone Signoret’s face which is remarkably similar. Finally the sequence of the cats jumping on the scaffolding observed by Julien do evoke the trapeze artist. Is there a correspondence between Clemence in her youth and the cat? Is Julien bestowing care and attention to Clemence’s youth? and finally does the way Julien disposes of the dead cat in the dustbin and the cruelty he shows to his ageing wife express one and the same feeling? This has to be left to individual interpretation.

The repeated motifs are all about rubbish, endings and death. The dustbin of the opening sequences appear again when Julien disposes of the cat, and when we see Clemence disposing of the rubbish. The dust cart follows the same imagery. In the early morning after the shooting of the cat it advances ponderously flanked by the dustmen and when it is seen again after Clemence’s death the association with hearse and cortege is inescapable. The wrecking ball function has been described in the narrative. Other motifs are repeated time and again. The gate and the front door of the house are opened and shut to escape, to shut the other one out. The window
motif is confined to Clemence who looks out of it, recollects through it, calls Julien through it. The three floors of the house and different rooms provide a certain rhythm to the conflict. There are bathroom scenes, bedroom scenes, sitting room scenes, kitchen scenes, cellar scenes and a ballet of conflict occurs between these locations up and down stairs with the major crisis occurring in the cellar. Time and again Julien goes out of these rooms while Clemence stays in. Time and again they walk along the street towards the condemned house. In the film we go from the young heart that Julien mourns to Clemence’s weak heart and finish with both Julien’s and Clemence’s heart failures.

Both narrative and style concur to convey feelings of hopelessness and despair at the thought of ageing and death. There is no ambiguity in the text about these feelings being Julien’s. He expresses them verbally on different occasions. Clemence’s style of dressing, her desire to be recognised and loved, her anger not resignation and even her defiant drinking and smoking as acted by Simone Signoret express a resistance to the depression of ageing. But this is only matched by details of the mise-en-scene. There is a contradiction between the documentary style of the redevelopment of the area and its function as expressing the inner life of the male protagonist. As Bordwell points out: “In short, a realist aesthetic and an expressionist aesthetic are hard to merge.” and this will pose problems of narrative comprehension.

31 - Jacques Siclier, _Telerama_, “Old age and death are present there, in a changing world”.

Viewers reactions:

The women are not representative of any particular social section of the population. They belong to a loose organisation called Growing Old Disgracefully who in local small groups and workshops explore and share feelings about getting older, the restraints made by the dominant culture and ways of resisting these restraints. The research group is formed of six members who met at a Growing Old Disgracefully residential week-end and continued to meet twice yearly. They gladly volunteered to see films on video and discuss them. The practice of spending the day together at members’ houses to discuss personal and general issues was not a new experience. The film was shown in the morning and discussed in the afternoon. As viewers, this group had a particular sensitivity to the issues raised by ageing. As participant/observer the writer had no privileged position in the group. Before Le Chat the group saw at monthly intervals Driving Miss Daisy, The Whales of August. Tatie Danielle was also viewed and the following discussion taped in order to accustom the group to be recorded.

Twenty one reviews of the daily and weekly national French press at the time of release were also analysed.

The women’s discussion is transcribed in Appendix 1, and a summary of the women’s discussion and the reviews are presented in Appendix 2.

33 - The Hen Co-op: Growing old disgracefully: New ideas for getting the most out of life (London Piatkus 1993)
34 - The film was not analysed by the participant/observer before the viewing.
Viewers reactions:

The women are not representative of any particular social section of the population. They belong to a loose organisation called Growing Old Disgracefully who in local small groups and workshops explore and share feelings about getting older, the restraints made by the dominant culture and ways of resisting these restraints. The research group is formed of six members who met at a Growing Old Disgracefully residential weekend and continued to meet twice yearly. They gladly volunteered to see films on video and discuss them. The practice of spending the day together at members’ houses to discuss personal and general issues was not a new experience. The film was shown in the morning and discussed in the afternoon. As viewers, this group had a particular sensitivity to the issues raised by ageing. As participant/observer the writer had no privileged position in the group. Before Le Chat the group saw at monthly intervals Driving Miss Daisy, The Whales of August. Tatie Danielle was also viewed and the following discussion taped in order to accustom the group to be recorded.

Twenty one reviews of the daily and weekly national French press at the time of release were also analysed.

The women’s discussion is transcribed in Appendix 1, and a summary of the women’s discussion and the reviews are presented in Appendix 2.

---

33 - The Hen Co-op: Growing old disgracefully: New ideas for getting the most out of life (London Piaktus 1993)
34 - The film was not analysed by the participant/observer before the viewing.
Jealousy or Frustration?

One of the differences between the two groups is the perception of Clemence's attitude to the cat and her motivation for killing it. All the reviewers but Chauvet, who wrote about Clemence's motivation for killing the cat ascribed it to her jealousy. Chauvet, felt that the director did not stress enough the deep increasing distress that led Clemence to kill the cat.\(^{35}\) The women found that "she had reached such frustration that...she was not being vicious to the cat... so that her husband would turn her attention to her."\(^{36}\) They remembered the words: "Julien thinks I do not like you but I do."\(^{37}\) They enjoyed the supermarket scenes for the caring way Clemence was trying to lose the cat: "the best scene in the film" which showed Clemence's "ambivalence"\(^{38}\) towards the cat. This difference in interpretation can be reasonably assumed to be the result of the different life experiences of the two groups. The older women were more sympathetic to Clemence and the cat. They did not equate the cat with a rival. After all, there is a younger woman whose subtle advances Julien refuses to accept. The reviewers group however saw in the situation the usual triangle of man, older woman and the cat as younger woman. Of course this difference of interpretation is linked to the different perceptions of the relationship in the two groups.

\(^{35}\) Louis Chauvet, *Figaro (Le)*
\(^{36}\) Line 75.
\(^{37}\) Line 274.
\(^{38}\) Line 95, Lines 91-97.
Mutual hatred, indifference or sadistic dependence and resistance?

What needs to be explained is the fact that both groups fail to perceive the dynamics of the relationship which is revealed by close analysis of the film and described by two reviewers. Chauvet, writes that the man blames his wife for having aged, and that she does not understand his disgust and his spite. Garson states that Julien is persistently nasty to his wife so that he does not have to face his mortality. Siclier is more contradictory and in spite of calling Julien an inveterate egoist and somehow sadistic, perceives the relationship as one of mutual hatred and the fear of ageing and death as being the same for both partners.

Three reviewers briefly described the film as the death of love. Four found no interest in the story of the sour old couple. The rest of the reviewers all talked of mutual hatred between the two protagonists. And a few interpreted this hatred as love. The words hatred or indeed love did not appear once in the women's discussion. The relationship was seen as dependant and there was puzzlement as to the film is considered as the state of affairs, the second section the other part.

---

39 - Figaro (Le)
40 - Aurore (L')
41 - Telerama
42 - Jardin in Aurore (L'), Chauvet in Figaro (Le) and Cassin in Europe.
43 - Aubriat in Journal du Dimanche, D.D. in Canard Enchaine, Unsigned in Minute and Murdore in Nouvel Observateur. One of these, the anonymous reviewer of Minute used a definite gerontophobic language: Clemence is "a stocky, limping, sour, cantankerous shrew who disgusts Julien". Julien is as "deaf as a post" and the couple are "two empty vessels who do not communicate."
the reason for its deterioration. But Julien's indifference and Clemence's efforts to reach him was mentioned more than once.

Julien's active cruelty to Clemence was not perceived by either group. His comments about the meaningless of life, his distress about the world changing, his anxiety about death, his motivation were not registered. To explain the disregard of the information so explicitly expressed by Julien and supported by the mise-en-scene we can invoke three factors.

**Narrative comprehension**: Because the fourth subjective flashback and the objective flashback are ambiguous, the sequence of events is not clear. There is evidence in both groups that the first section of the film is considered as the state of affairs, the second section the initiating event and the third the outcome. The women articulate this confusion. When Chauvet accuses the director of a "narrative slip" it is evident that he considers the first section of the film as the initial situation. The same applies to Rabine and Jacob. The other reviewers demonstrate in their description of a long-standing silent non communication the same impression. If indeed the first section of the film is considered as the state of affairs the breakdown of the relationship is not explained and there is a symmetry in the relationship.

---

45 - Line 38.
46 - Lines 32-4, 249, 296, 312-14.
48 - Line 134-5-6 when asked by R.
49 - *Figaro (Le)*
50 - *Croix (La)*
51 - *Express (L)*
Psychoanalytical factors: However, the lasting effect of this first impression would not be as pronounced were it not for its extraordinary emotional impact. Bordwell's says: "I am assuming that a spectator's comprehension of the films' narrative is theoretically separable from his or her emotional responses." The word theoretical should be stressed here. The impact is probably due to psychoanalytical factors which are augmented by the stressful effects of the demolition site, unpleasant noise and oppressive silence. We have to go outside the Freudian/Lacanian framework and the Oedipal scenario to explain the emotional effects of seeing two people intimately connected who do not communicate. Benjamin's concept of recognition and mutual recognition may help. She describes the effect of failure of recognition in the mother/infant relationship:

"The unsuccessful interaction is sometimes almost as finely tuned as the pleasurable one. With each effort of the baby to withdraw from the mother's stimulation to avert his gaze, turn his head, pull his body away, the mother responds by "chasing" after the baby. It is as if the mother anticipates the baby withdrawal with split-second accuracy and can only read his message to give space as a frustration of her own efforts to be recognised." 

This description fits absolutely the pattern of communication between Clemence and Julien in the second part of the film. However in the first part even this schema is violated. There is a complete breakdown of recognition, a mutual dismissal. In the symmetrical roles of the two characters (as analysed above), there is a state of

52 - David Bordwell, op. cit. p.30.
‘mutual non recognition’, which is difficult to bear. If as Woodward argues, the analogue in adult life of mother-infant mutual recognition is a ‘reciprocal sociality in its many modes’ this first part of the film may correspond to a denial of our identity as social beings. Whatever its psychoanalytical basis, the impact is so profound that in the confrontations between the protagonists the relationship is still perceived as equal despite the verbal information provided by Julien about his motivation. In this dismissal of verbal information there may also be an element of genre expectation. Elsaesser notes about the melodrama: “...speech in the American cinema loses its semantic importance.” So the verbal explosions of Julien are taken on their sound value alone. They function as a release of tension. Their semantic content is not perceived or committed to memory.

Having dismissed Julien’s despair at getting old and his cruelty to Clemence the two groups react differently to the relationship. The women with their personal experience recognise Julien’s indifference and Clemence’s frustration. It may be that because this information is conveyed as much visually (see shot/reverse shots described above) as verbally that it is registered by the women who recognise the situation, and not the reviewers. For the majority of the reviewers the words used for the relationship was mutual hatred and

54 - line 8, G. Jacob (L’Express) ... the first situation which had an... “amazing dramatic impact”.  
55 - Kathleen Woodward, Tribute to the Older Woman, in Images of Aging p.92, n2.  
56 - Edward Branigan, op.cit. p. 15 “Thus the perceiver will strive to create ‘logical’ connections among data in order to match the general categories of the schema.”  
57 - Thomas Elsaesser, Tales of Sound and Fury, in Home is Where the Heart Is, p.52.  
58 - line 476: “who do you think you are Jean Gabin?...next time my husband ignores me I’ll say it I will.”
dependance and for some this was equated with love.

**Acting:** Another visual factor inextricably linked to the others and likely to lead to a dismissal of Julien's cruelty is Simone Signoret's acting. She does appear sad in some scenes but not pathetic. Simone Signoret has written in her autobiography about her feelings about being an ageing actress\(^59\). She describes wrinkles as: "scars of laughs, tears, surprises and certainties, that your contemporaries have also lived through."\(^60\) Wrinkles for her are allies. She argues that to accept the signs of age shows no courage but pride and vanity to be recognised for what one is.\(^61\)

Apart for the acceptance of ageing, the actress invested her personal experience in the scene where she enumerates all her talents.\(^62\) The director explains in an interview that in order to render one of the protagonists sympathetic to the public he wanted the woman to be an aggressive and provoking victim.\(^63\)

It is therefore difficult to reconcile on first viewing the impression of an assured, angry woman with a woman being abused.

---

60 - Ibid., p. 313. Translation by the writer.
61 - Ibid., p.314.
62 - Simone Signoret, *op. cit* pp120-121 and p.363. She recounts how when married to Yves Montand at a time when she had given up her career to be with him, he blamed her rather harshly for a triviality. She found the situation unacceptable and phoned immediately Robert Hakim the producer and obtained a role in Therese Raquin.
63 - Granier Deferre in an interview with Vera Volmane, *Nouvelles Litteraires*
Conclusion

Against expectations, what seemed obvious after a detailed analysis of the film was not perceived by British older women sensitised to ageism, anymore than by French reviewers twenty seven years previously. Woodward's thesis that the fear of ageing is repressed does not apply to *The Cat*. The fear and the consequent abuse of the older woman is not repressed in this film. It is clearly articulated but not registered by the majority of the viewers studied.

Contrary to art narratives as defined by Bordwell there are no major ambiguities in the film that cannot be resolved by a second viewing or by analysis. The slight ambiguity resulting from the acting and the mise-en-scene can only be assessed by empirical means. Viewers' reactions enlighten the way a film 'works' practically with a particular audience. In this case questions of perception, of memory, of comprehension, of emotional load have arisen. They had to be addressed by other tools than ideological theory.

The formal analysis of *The Cat* reveals to us an older woman derided and rejected time and again by a husband who projects onto her his fear of ageing and death. But this woman is not the mild, comforting, wise woman. Neither is she the meek, passive victim. She is full of angry despair, passion and tenacity. She demands to be seen, heard, recognized and even loved. In this process she disturbs our expectations of the behaviour of older women because in the
expression of strong emotions she does appear ugly and aggressive, without becoming the malevolent ‘old witch’.

As with other melodramas this film can be seen as the personal expression of a social problem. It symbolizes the general gerontophobia of western societies, the invisibility of the older woman, the pressures to appear to be young in order to be loved. In the resistance of the older woman to victimisation, in the demands for her right to be recognized, it anticipates publications about the ageing woman: Greer’s The Change 64, Friedan’s The Fountain of Age. At least two television programmes explore the same theme: Fullarton’s Madame Montand and Mrs. Miller 65 and Greer’s Youthism.66

There is an interesting progression in the representation of the older woman in French films. Clemence is half way between the gentle dogged old lady of La Vieille Femme Indigne who

“... lived two lives in succession. The first one as daughter, wife and mother; the second simply as Mrs. B, an unattached person without responsibilities and with modest but sufficient means.”67

and the obnoxious Tatie Danielle who uses frailty, incontinence, disablement and the prejudices of younger people about old age to humiliate and manipulate all around her. This progression may be socially significant but requires further research. Whether or not there

65. Morag Fullarton, Madame Montand and Mrs. Miller ENCOUNTERS, BBC Scotland, 22.8.92 on BBC2
66. Germaine Greer, Youthism WITHOUT WALLS Ch.4, 12/10/93 Bad Ideas of the 20th. Century Dir Stephen Lennhoff.

36
is in Hollywood a new trend to portray older women to attract an ageing audience as Kaplan suggests, need to be researched too. Kaplan's distinction between menopausal and old age women can be challenged. Her view that the films she mentions are about menopausal women needs the supporting evidence of detailed analyses of these films based on other studies about ageing. To call *Driving Miss Daisy* sentimental is to dismiss the fear and fantasies about ageing that are widespread.

We do not know how older women have been and are portrayed in films, we do not know how ageing is embodied in the cinema, and finally we do not know how older women react to their representation on screen.

The aim of this dissertation was to study the representation of one older woman in *The Cat* and analyse the reactions of two groups of viewers to the film. But as Len Ang points out "Our curiosity about the audience is never innocent" and it may be that in this case the motive beyond this dissertation was to recapture the experience of going to the cinema of the 1950s. It involved the social sharing of viewing and discussing films as mentioned by Sorlin. The conditions of viewing of this study were more akin to a book reading group than an ethnographic study. With the availability of films on videos and the possibility of recording films from television, viewing practices have altered. There is no doubt that the women derived pleasure from the viewing in a group and the subsequent discussions. The women requested to see *The Cat* again in order to

make better sense of it. What was the pleasure derived from seeing a harrowing film? It was expressed by the women as the pleasure of being intellectually stimulated, of trying to understand the behaviour of the people and the use of the different filmic devices, as well as the thrill of being emotionally engaged. They also enjoyed the discussion and the sharing of different perceptions of a communal experience.
FILMOGRAPHY


Arsenic and Old Lace (Warner, 1942 released 1944, prod. Frank Capra, dir. Frank Capra.)

Brief Encounter (Eagle-Lion/Cineguild, 1945, prod. Anthony Havelock-Allan/Ronald Neame, dir. David Lean.)

The Cat (Lira Films/Gafer/Cinetel (Paris)/Ascot Cineraid (Rome), 1971, prod. Raymond Danon, dir. Pierre Granier-Deferre.)

The Company of Strangers (Electric/Contemporary/National Film Board of Canada, 1990, prod. David Wilson, dir. Cynthia Scott.)


It Always Rains on Sunday (Ealing, 1947, prod. Henry Cornelius, dir. Robert Hamer.)

The Lady Vanishes (Gaumont British/Gainsborough, 1938, prod. Edward Black, dir. Alfred Hitchcock.)

The Old Woman Who Walked in the Sea (Gala/Blue Dahlia/SFC/A2/Little Bear/JM Productions, 1991, prod. Gerard Jourd'hui, dir. Laurent Heinemann.)

Roman Scandals (Samuel Goldwyn, 1933, dir. Frank Tuttle.)

Rue Cases Negres (Artificial Eye/Orion Classics/Su Ma Fa/NEF

*Shirley Valentine* (UIP /Paramount, 1989, prod. Lewis Gilbert, dir. Lewis Gilbert.)


*Tokyo Story* (Shochiku, 1953, Yasujiro Ozu.)

*La Vie Devant Soi* (Lira Films, 1977, dir. Moshe Mizrahi.)


*The Whales of August* (Circle/Nelson, 1987, prod. Carolyn Pfeiffer, Mike Kaplan, dir. Lindsay Anderson.)

*Encounters* Episode: Madame Montand and Mrs. Miller: An imaginary meeting between Monroe and Signoret (BBC Scotland, dir. Morag Fullarton, first transmitted 22 Aug. 1992 on BBC2)

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Ang Ien, Living Room Wars: Rethinking Media Audiences For A Post Modern World (Routledge 1996)


Benjamin, Jessica, The Bonds of Love: Psychoanalysis, Feminism and the Problem of Domination (Pantheon, 1988)

Bond, John, et al. (eds), Ageing in Society: an introduction to social gerontology (Sage Publications 1993/94)

Bordwell, David, Narration in the Fiction Film (Routledge 1986/88/90/93/95)

Bordwell, David and Carroll, Noel (eds), Post -Theory: Reconstructing Film Studies (University of Wisconsin Press, 1996)

Brecht, Bertolt, Collected Short Stories, (Minerva 1983/1992)

Branigan Edward, Narrative Comprehension and Film (Routledge 1992)


Claude-Jean, Philippe, Simone Signoret (Hachette/Gamma Press, 1985)

David Catherine, Simone Signoret (Bloomsbury 1992)

Featherstone, Mike and Wernick, Andrew, (eds), Images of Aging (Routledge 1995)

Gledhill Christine, Pleasurable Negotiations in E.D. Pribram Female Spectators.


Kaplan, E. Ann, (ed.), *Psychoanalysis And Cinema* (Routledge, 1990)

Kaplan, E. Ann, *Looking For The Other : Feminism, Film, and The Imperial Gaze* (Routledge 1997)

Kuhn, Annette with Susannah Radstone (eds.), *The Women's Companion to International Film* (Virago, 1990)

Kuhn, Annette, *Women's Pictures: Feminism and Cinema* (Verso, 1982/94)

Macdonald, Barbara et al., *Look Me in the eye: Old women, Aging and Ageism.* (The Women's Press 1983)

Mc Robbie Angela and Mica Nava, *Gender and Generation* (Macmillan 1984)

Mayne Judith, *Cinema and Spectatorship* (Routledge 1993)


Pribram Deirdre ed., *Female Spectators* (Verso 1988)

Signoret, Simone, *La Nostalgie n’est plus ce qu’elle était* (Editions du Seuil, 1975/78)


Press reviews of Le Chat

Anon., *Echos* (Les) 7 May 71
Anon., *Minute* 12 May 71
Anon., *Temoignage Chretien* 13 May 71
Aubriat M., *Journal du Dimanche* (Le) 03 May 71
Baroncelli, Jean de, *Monde* (Le) 05 May 71
Cassin Yolande, *Europe* 12 Oct. 71
Chapier Henri, *Combat* 03 May 71
Chauvet Louis, *Figaro* (Le) 03 May 71
CH. G., *Nouvelles Litteraires* (Les) 14 May 71
D.D., *Canard Enchaine* 05 May 71
Flurer Jacques, *Paris Jour* 04 May 71
Garson Claude, *Aurore* (L') 04 May 71
Jacob Gilles, *Express* (L') 09 May 71
Jardin Pacal, *Aurore* (L') 30 April 71
Lacheze S., *Humanite-dimanche* (L') 05 May 71
Martin M., *Lettres Francaises* 12 May 71
Maurin Francois, *Humanite* (L') 05 May 71
Murdore M., *Nouvel Observateur* (Le) 26 April 71
Quinson Rene, *Combat* 30 April 71
Maurice A, *Figaro* (Le) 14 May 71
Rabine Henry, *Croix* (La) 19 May 71
Siclier Jacques, *Telerama* 9 May 71
Volmane Vera, *Nouvelles Litteraires* (Les) 08 May 71

---

70 - References to newspapers use the French format. Translations in the text by the author.
APPENDIX 1

Transcription of the recording of the discussion of the women's group after seeing The Cat

It is odd to see your idols of the past getting old and you don't know that you've done the same thing.

R: Yes, you said you did not understand why they were behaving in this way.
S: No but I have seen it happening in real life so it was not that the situation was strange it was rather that so much of it was implied rather than stated and it was done visually for example in the opening when the two of them shop separately, walk separately went into the house separately and so on you felt that the gulf between them and that without music which was very potent I think, the silence was more potent I think, the silence contrasting with society outside each time it was impressed on you wasn't.

R: Very much so, yes.
V: It seems that the film was showing you the contrast of how deep the silence between them in contrast with the hustle and bustle.
A: It was almost as if the demolition around them destroying the whole world in a sense it had a life of its own and... it was almost a character - all the demolition the noise, the dust they were the last human survivors in that area - it was almost a documentary I felt, killing off destroying the whole area and the camera focusing on the huge wall particularly towards the end in slow motion destroying the brick work....
V: The big ball was there right at the beginning - the main destruction was going on at the beginning. By the end of the film they were sweeping up the debris - taking it away - all being taken away - the whole thing had ended - and the big ball to me represents the breaking down that has been going on their relationship the destruction of their relationship which was happening in big lots at the beginning, by the end they were sort of almost punch drunk and the lorries were taken the whole life away all being removed all that was ripped down destroyed around them and it was like a sort of bad tooth this one house standing there. I thought how on earth did they find that house in the middle of all this and maintain it while it all was.... and it was a lovely little house I mean although it was dark and horrible inside the house - you could see that at one time it had been loved and created out of a loving relationship. There were nice things in the house for me there was nice things about the house that was getting engulfed in this darkness of silence and non... er... er... communication and the destruction was the music of the film. The sound of the destruction going on around them was the sound track - it was what other people have for music and then you get the nice song by the river... exceptionally... credits.
V: There is the parallel between the buildings and the destruction outside and the destruction going on in their lives....
A: Buildings... with emotions as well... all that anger... body language...
R: In fact during the first part of the film they did not speak to each other and when they did start to speak I was startled for a moment.
V: They spoke through the cat - the first time... yes... and when the film ends... its gone full circle and the police car siren... rounds it off... and the scene at the hospital rounds it off.
V: Yes that was interesting. At the beginning you have obviously a heart examination or something because the nurse asks her her name in my head that is how I worked it out because you see her... she says as it sounds but at

1 - Only personal and general digressions irrelevant to the film are edited out. Lines with a line a full stops indicate general overlapping undistinguishable speech. Empty lines indicate a silence.
the end of the film the nurse comes to the door and asks how to spell the name but she is not talking to the woman she is talking to another nurse
18. R: what did we see? did we see the nurse talking to her? did we see her actually talking to her
19. ... she was in the shot wasn't she..... it was the same at the end as the beginning .... I thought that too. Except that at the end he dies, he had a heart attack..... his heart gave out yes
20. A: now whether that was due to the overdose of pills
21. ...yes...definitely ...yes...  yes...
22. V: but at the beginning you saw the nurse come to the door ask her her name and then you saw her face Simone Signoret's face
23. ...no... no...no
24. V: in the shot
25. ...yes ...yes
26. M: but you did not see the face of the nurse . I assumed at the end it was the woman where he went to stay
27. ...the woman of the hotel
28. J: the end is the same as the beginning
29. ........
30. S: his character he seemed much older, partly because he has grey hair, partly and he was still trying to have... I mean she dressed herself she.... her hair and so on and he seemed stuck and fatalistic ..he did not seem to care at all except for the cat
31. ...except for the cat
32. J: I just wondering about the plot whether the person who do the plot -the director- no he comes later -if he saw the destruction going on and this house and thought that would make a wonderful film about comparing the destruction around and these two people it was painful just being with them wasn't and... It was his total indifference that was really really the bottom of it. I mean she was desperate she was trying to- and his indifference all the time ..... inability or would not say anything and all the time when she was longing for him just to look at her or ... just pass and say hello - nothing.
33. ...nothing...
34. J: and the indifference right till the very end I will never speak to you again and then speak to me
35. ........please please... wonderful... yes... yes... yes...that was wonderful ...I imagine cut and everybody saying: yeah!
36. M: I wonder what the story teller had in mind about him as a character because I thought... perhaps there were hidden depths ..... but he was the same with the other woman remember she said he said to her you are just like my wife I was thinking that it was the same thing that he could not communicate he did not care
37. V: he was totally disillusioned - a disillusioned man in his work they had a meeting or something he seemed to me when he came out of that was saying the right thing but he did not expect anything from it and he did not expect anything from his marriage now, that now he was disappointed in that he just, to me, represented his life has gone sour and old- he was still clinging on the marriage he could not let go of the marriage, he could not let go of her in a way...even though they were destroying each other. But she still tried
38. A: if it was actually explained as a character as to why he fell out of love ....
39. ...why he was so cynical about work and the world that would have been a very interesting/....
40. I think they were apart......
41. R: would you think it is saying something about the difference of attitude about ageing. That he really cannot come to terms with his ageing whereas she still had some zest for life, some go and some feelings ?
42. J: the silk stockings hanging up separating them he was in the vicinity
43. A: But at the same time she was drinking herself to death
44. ...but why....
45. J: I did not think she was excessively drinking
46. A: she was never sober
47. Vi: she always drank
48. M: they were also terribly isolated. They did not have children or family. I mean what was going through my head was well if that was me I would join Growing Old Disgracefully. I'd go to adult education doing all these things... so the society at the time. They were totally enclosed they were all on their own in the world whether that was the idea of the film...
49. A: Yes I thought of that as well they did not seem to have friends or people who came to see them they didn't. They rarely went out of their neighbourhood.
50. Vi: I was interested in the bit... where they were talking about the time... about her when she falls she... off this trapeze and she said you were pleased about that and her analysis of their relationship where ... I cannot remember too well but it seemed very significant. If I saw it again I would...
51. A: he did not want her to work. She gave up her family and her career and he said: I was wrong.
52. Vi: but by that time... but she still suffered from it...
53. M: why do you think that he was pleased that she has fallen off?
54. V: she was helpless then and depended on him while she was flying high she had her independence then she and... ☐ ☐
55. Vi: and he was pleased that she fell
56. ..............
57. R: do you need to know why? it is so common place... the wife leaves her family and her job and then when they grow older he is not interested anymore, you leave for a newer model
58. ..............
59. M: it is not about old age it is about relationship between sexes more
60. V: that was part of the explanation for what was going on and the way he was interpreting his... she was always trying to get some response out of him all the time, working even through the cat...
61. M: I imagine in some situations she would be declared insane as a manic depressive and he would be the same one
62. V: he loved the cat because of his dependence
63. ..............
64. Vi: all their lives she had been... she then falls the more
65. ...whereas he was a routine job. Maybe he was jealous of her although he was attracted by it he became very jealous of her
66. ..............
67. R: yes that is obvious when he tells her maybe he is phoning you everyday...
68. Vi: so when she says you were pleased that I fell he said yes because that stopped her from...
69. R: that's right. Well I see it more like a thing about ageing and relationship because I think it is very difficult men ageing losing any interest in anything around them I think it is not general but often the case...
70. A: but also generally, men older men cannot express their feelings certainly diminished men... I want to mention something different... something visual. There were about seven cats.
71. ..............
72. M: I thought that was pushing it a bit
73. A: I loved this because I love cats and it is true that the camera lingers it was an optional extra if you like
74. R: what did you think of her killing the cat. What did you feel what did you think
75. Vi: I think that she had reached such frustration that she was not being vicious to the cat..... so that her husband would turn her attention to her
76. A: and she thought in her drunken state that it would leave the husband just for her
77. ........
78. R: he tells her go on kill yourself
79. ........insane with rage
80. V: I did think that cat would not last. I thought the first time in the cellar when she scratched all the papers
81. J: any normal person would have taken any notice of that and he had all these mementos nothing was said, now any average person
82. A: or express anger with her
83. ........yes... yes...
84. A: something dismissed it as if he was emotionally stunted.
85. he was... so he... was... he was burnt out
86. M: but we don’t know whether he’d ever had it he may have fallen in love but we did not know whether
87. ........LAUGHS ....
88. S: she was doing all the emotional expression I’ve heard of that often enough and I want to mention the isolation ... you never saw anything
89. R: No I would disagree with that because the launderette noticed she hadn’t come, the grocers, the prostitute down the street yes
90. ........yes...
91. A: and before she shot the cat she tried to get rid of him
92. ........
93. M: one of the best scenes in the film
94. V: that was very thoughtful wasn’t it.
95. M: it expressed her ambivalence.
96. V: she did not put it at the milk counter because she could not get at the milk
97. J: she worked out....
98. V: when he found that she had shot the cat I expected him to explode but he did not. He did not at all...
99. R: no he left
100. V: I expected him to really lose his temper
101. show some emotion........
102. A: and even when the beloved cat was shot he put it in the dustbin I expected him to do something more
103. ........yes... it was so important in his life
104. A: maybe he grieved inside him but the viewer did not see this.
105. R: I laugh because I find this emotion about cats and animal very foreign to me
106. ........
107. V: it would have been very different had the woman had the cat I think
108. ........yes...
109. M: can I get back to my isolation thing you saw him with his friend with his lover,
110. yes she was there
111. A: she was putting her dressing gown
112. S: she
113. A: she ran a hotel
114. R: it was more like a brothel
115. ........yes... yes.
116. M: he was the one. You never saw her you knew that the launderette woman worried about her and the wine shop but she was not talking with anyone else.
117. V: her life was all tied up with her battle with him so anything else was not very important
118. A: they needed each other
119. V: yes that is why he could not leave her
120. A: because he said he could no leave his home. The woman who ran the hotel said why don’t you stay here and he said no that’s my home he wanted to go back
home also because... this dead relationship

121. ...yes
122. V: this cat when he flicks the note you see him going back and forth the first time he flicks the note. The second time he flicks the note this is when she is ill isn't it?
123. A: when she has the heart attack
124. V: and she has kept all the notes
125. J: and other things and he says you ought to see a doctor
126. V: what does he mean by that
127. ...
128. V: why he put the cat on the note.
129. R: because he says I wont talk to you remember the cat
130. V: she had not said anything to him had she?
131. ...
132. A: was he referring to the killing of the cat
133. ...yes... yes... I am sure...
134. R: all the time he was speaking to her. The bit when he does not speak takes place after he comes back to her having decided not to speak to her ever again.
135. I do not know whether you found the time sequence confusing. I know I did the first time I saw it
136. ...yes... yes... yes... yes...
137. R: because there were no signs that you were flashing back
138. S: you did with the little flashback insets
139. ...yes... and the romantic......
140. R: in their relationship the progression is a bit confuse at least it was for me the first time
141. A: I would like to see it a second time... I do not think it matters that much
142. R: no non The thing is that they are talking, they have some sort of relationship, she asks for his attention his love his affection he does not give it to her the cat gets it all, she kills the cat, he leaves, she fall ill, he comes back to her and they live quite a while like that. That was not their original relationship Their original relationship we see her and they share, they are talking to each other
143. V: but at the end of the film when he flicks that note with the cat on it he writes you should see a doctor he screws it up and throws it away and when he flicks the cat thing it means I am not going to talk to you ever again. Don't give me this shit about coughing and... I do not want to know
144. V: they were by the fire one sitting at either side and as you say she was smoking and drinking and she starts coughing and then he writes the note saying you should see a doctor
145. ...yeh....
146. V: and then he looks up and you see a picture of one of the whisky bottles and then he looks at the note and throws it as if he saying to himself you are doing it to yourself and then you see a picture of the cats empty basket
147. ...yea... yea...
148. V: so he looks up see the cat's empty basket you can see him thinking oh sod you remember the cat
149. V: and then he leaves does he?
150. R: no no he doesn't leave
151. J: that's when he went down ant the lights started flashing
152. V: he walked out of the house
153. R: yes he walked out of the house
154. ............he goes out for a walk...I assume
155. J: it is typical of some women who cannot let him go or be indifferent to him
156. ...... most of us... you must be joking etc... here is the door go
157. ...LAUGHS...
158. M: that was going on all the time I thought thank god I am living in a different age
159. J: she went to him and pleaded for
160. M: I think that there are couples
161. A: I think it is still an age a generational thing. Younger people women and men are less likely to stay in such a destructive relationship at least in the West.
162. M: recounts a personal experience of a similar situation.
163. J: for a start it was a reasonably big house it had a cellar there must have been a room so you would not tolerate to sleep in the same room. He turns the lights out and she did not have the lights
164. M: I would have gone to see a counsellor
165. ....LAUGHS....
166. V: they had a very active relationship in their negative way
167. ....destructive power...
168. V: I mean they were both actively engaged in non communication. They were watching each other all the time, all the time. They were no questions of it even his attempts to get out of it did not work because he had to get back to her. Their struggle, one of them had to go as he said I am staying here till the end she said, you can see it as some grand destruction going on. George Simenon wrote the story he was a crime writer.
169. M: I was waiting for the crime.
170. R: no he was not always a crime writer. It was always sort of very seedy scenes sort of tawdry, sad relationships.
171. V: this was hopeless though.
172. M: I mean in a way in a lot of relationships it is the same thing when partners quarrel they have been saying the same things for five years.
173. ....LAUGHS...
174. V: I thought they are now presumably what happens when couples are forced to accept the fact that they are just the two of them in this house the two of you and you go mad
175. ....they did... yea
176. V: the logical conclusion don't live together. When I saw them going down the road separately, he was looking at her, she opens the window doing her seaweed while he was frying up his own. In so many places it is so
177. J: she watched every move. So uninvolved
178. V: all he was thinking about is when he was young now he is old.
179. A: what happened in the years in between?
180. V: he went to work and she stayed at home by the sound of it
181. A: she could have tried to have a life for herself despite
182. V: she had all these skills
183. M: it is an exaggerated example of how
184. V: you can see in Johnny Speight series what's it called Till Death Do Us Part?
185. Dandy Nicholls .......
186. ...she was the indifferent one... yea
187. A: nevertheless she is still doing all the cooking and cleaning and shopping and he is reading the paper so he is.... she gives as good as she gets and she still
188. it is the ageing process
189. R: do you think it is about ageing?
190. V: you see it at a time when things are being knocked down things are being replaced with the new ... and he remembers his own youth and he looks at this bike the pair of them are
191. M: kill themselves at the age of forty if they'd seen that film it that is what happens to you when you get older
192. ....but she tried....
193. V: they did not look like the hell they were going through, on the outside. She looked like a respectable woman
194. R: that is not what Stella was saying
195. S: it is difficult to see as they were. In fact she still had this desire to dress up and
to prepare herself

196. V: she was very French she was also very ...
197. S: I think he was very depressed.
198. V: I did not think she was full of vitality. She did not strike me as full of vitality. She
was still struggling not with the world in general, she was struggling
199. ...he was depressed
200. S: at the time when they had an argument an exchange you know it relieved the
tension for us you watch this balance of... But I think there was not enough
background implied as to what happened since the accident how they ....
because it may not have been a sudden thing ... you had no there is no background to their
201. community true their but there were houses before that that neighbourhood, the shops and the
202. A: there is a gap. We do not know
203. S: the characters were not
204. R: but you see it is impossible in films to explore every motivation for me...
205. S: and then they become symbols.
206. R: no they are not symbols for me......there is a man who is a typographer he has
married her and the relation seem to be perfectly all right she said it was a happy
house, he retires all he has got left about his life and the meaning of life is in his
207. cellar. Herself since she had the accident and gave everything up for him there
208. ...she said something about men and he said ...
209. M: when did you stop loving me and why and he says I suppose I am a man like
210. any other man it just happens
211. R: it just happened I have changed
212. ....I changed... I changed ...
213. R: what has changed he lost his job or he has retired
214. ...............
215. V: because their job, they do not have time to have anything else
216. M: as you say when their job is gone...
217. S: I think it is of its period because since then if it is only in verbal terms people are
encouraged to think about retirement what they are going to do so it is less likely to
218. you know it can still happen but not quite with...
219. A: I think it still happens they have been married to their job all their lives. but they
220. need to make relationship even with their family
221. .... married to their jobs...... I speak from experience...... yes
222. ...discussion about the differential lives of older men and women
223. A: but in this case in the film as M and others have said we do not know what
224. happened they were first happy and then her accident what happens after except
225. a lot of nothing
226. R: no I do not agree with that except that he has changed
227. A: he has a job
228. ...no... no...
229. R: before his retirement you can imagine that they can have quite a working
230. relationship and suddenly he changes. She keeps asking him what have I done
231. M: I must admit I see ...
232. V: I think he was losing it before he retired
233. ...how would you know ...
234. R: by the time they got to the discussion in the workplace
235. V: the workplace was not his workplace, the meeting was a union meeting
236. V: a union meeting, he was sitting there with his other friend in the meeting was
237. he retired then
238. ...yes... yes...
239. M: I did not know that
232. A: that was not clear
233. R: that was not clear, no
234. S: he said that does not concern me anymore
235. ...yes...yes...
236. A: how do you know he was a typographer
237. R: she says that when she is talking to the cat and she says look at this you cannot do that it is his work
238. A: I assumed he was a journalist
239. ...no...no...
240. A: it is not that it matters that much he was saving all his precious newspapers which she then proceeded to destroy and then he did not react
241. V: it was all so sad all his life he had dealt with words
242. ...he was a craftsman... he did not compose the words... a typographer
243. V: he just put the words together they did not have much meaning for them
244. .....other people words .....not his own....
245. R: I do not know whether that is significant but what I find interesting we have spent a lot of time discussing him and his motivations what about her?
246. ...........
247. V: in my head she is the active one she is the one who is doing all the actions
248. .....she is trying all the time......she is trying to improve the relationship .... it was a reaction of anger
249. A: in a way I hoped for her that she would somehow resolve their differences so she would be in less pain because there was the most frustration er in her, she could not get any reaction
250. R: did you identify with her
251. ...yes... yes ...
252. R: the relationship between the man and the animal is very interesting one. I'll tell you a story. Recounts the story of Leo Ferre
253. M: was that before this film?
254. R: No
255. A: so this may be more common than we think?
256. R: exactly I just wonder what is this about
257. A: jealousy
258. S: when you get, er you are the ruler the in control...
259. M: and I suppose you get love from it I suppose the soft bit comes out. That is not a sufficient explanation I think I mean you saw his face that showed it
260. ...... he smiles.... when the cat is dead..... no when he comes back... he smiles..... the only smile in the whole film
261. VI: would you say that animals do not make demands very much. You put down their food and clean up their cage but there is that small thing so when that is done that's it
262. ......they clean your ...and..
263. A: they do not demand a relationship
264. M: I do know people who have been devastated by the death of an animal but I do not know why that man I do not understand it
265. V: it is a childless marriage
266. R: yes there is that as well
267. A: yes I thought of that as well
268. A: recounts a story about an estranged husband and wife where the husband came to visit the cat on regular hourly visits.
269. ...........................................
270. V: it is very odd another story about cats...... a pet cannot hurt you a cat cannot hurt you as a person can the only way a pet can hurt you is by dying
271. VI: do you think if that woman in this film if she had showed affection to the cat, made a fuss of the cat would have broken through her husband indifference
272. ......interesting..... that occurred to me .....yes..... □ said at one time I want one I
want a pet

273. ... yes...
274. M: she actually said to the cat: Julien thinks I do not like you but I do
275. A: having a pet of her own would have been different it would have two separate situations
276. V: she said as M said she could not admit to her husband that she liked the cat
because that...she could not get to him that way she was not going to do it that way she was not going to humble herself
277. M: it was not her fault
278. J: it is the psychology
279. V: there were lines made up and we are not going to go past that line
280. A: they were frozen in their roles
281. V: when she wanted so much to get through to her husband you would have thought that going through the animal would have been one way
282. A: there was one scene where she said the cat can have my bed
283. ....that was ironical......
284. A: I took it literally I thought that was a breakthrough
285. ......laughs... innocent ....
286. S: on the other hand had she shown affection to the cat it is possible that he
would have become extremely jealous you do not know ..........
287. A: it is a sad story. They needed each other in all kinds of ways and could not
show it or move away from it. They could not live with each other and they could
not move away, and they did not have other interests in life.
288. J:........
289. R: I feel that you do. It is all to do with this indifference, inability to communicate
more that having your own life and .... for me it is about getting old that is why I
chose it because I thought it showed an aspect of getting old. For me it is about
the demonisation of the old woman. He still gets more sympathy in the film that we
do he does...
290. ...he gets more attention
291. S: it is more a man who had a wife rather than the other way round
292. V: I thought they had as much time both of them. I would not have cheated on
either of them or their time or their exposure
293. R: but she kills the cat...
294. M: but we understood...
295. R: it is this act that we take on board without even discussing it.
296. M: we understood for me that something was the indifference was so
enormous.,
297. ...why she stayed....she was semi drunk...she still loved him...respect for herself
298. R: could you say that the film expresses the indifference of the film world or the
world in general towards older women and that Tatie Danielle is the revenge of
the older women?
299. .........................laughs laughs.... who is Tatie Danielle
300. V: what we have not mentioned is the fact that in the end this bad tempered goes
and kills himself when this wife that he does not love and does not want die ...
she dies naturally but he goes on and kills himself
301. ...yea... yea...
302. R: that is exactly what me he actually makes her suffer willingly he is a sadist
303. M: he is in a way
304. V: but for someone who is in acute depression as this man is actual living is an
effort a struggle and she is the one who symbolises what he once was and still is
and once she goes he has no reason to carry on I mean that is it
305. A: and he is going to be a victim
306. yesss that what makes him.........
307. A: so he loses the partner and he
308. V: it is easier to give up than

9
309. ... and he loses his cat

310. A: I was also interested in Jean Gabin the actor who I saw as the heartthrob in the one that is being revived now......yes Cin Grande Illusion.......and here to see this sour old man old in a way before his time soured by life and disillusionment and frustration maybe they should never have got together

311. ......a good game of football I thought ......most take up pigeons...... boules ..

312. J: it must be said that indifference does kill a relationship as long as somebody is having a go at you or argue at you or ..

313. ... you are engaged

314. J: you are engaged and they know that you care. Because women do care. You do not just pass somebody or do not care whether they turn up or not where are they or when that indifference takes over that sort of things or and you do something he does not want to know about anything anything the film really signifies for me the breakup and and the destructiveness in a relationship even if one of you still want to interact or say something or even be around for your own sake you want to get something going in the other person raise some emotion raise the hackles just a little to get a response and when they don't... whah .... you are asking for trouble in that case you go...

315. R: in that case you kill the cat

316. S: she could not kill him so she said right I'll get him all over the house till she gets the poor bastard

317. M: but he gave her the gun to shoot herself

318. ...yes ... yes

319. R: it is cruel I mean the cruelty of this man is just ....

320. ......cruelty...... shooting the cat ..

321. M: honestly in that period a lot of women were put in mental hospitals

322. R: but there is cruelty in this man however depressed he is I do not think it is an excuse

323. S: no...recounts the story of an elderly woman whose husband was hospitalised in deep depression after stopping work etc...... and who manipulated people etc.....

324. ......that is illness....... sad cannot go off ..... guilt ..... all responsibilities.... indifference......whether you can control it or not

325. M: I think the cruelty

326. ......the cruelty ...to be sent to Coventry it is the worst thing it is the worst way of punishing somebody is to ignore them ........as a child they try and stop it happening ... not speak ........although there was eye contact at times ...

327. they did look at each other... checking up on each other.... in the park .... he might just say something ..... he got up and then you get a long shot ...... and she sat.....yeah yeah.... it was a beautiful park..... yes I thought that

328. A: at that point I was struck by her dependence on him I wanted to shake her 'get a life'

329. ...yes ...at this age really

330. M: that kind of dependency is like the rabbit in the headlights with men who are cruel to the women who cannot get away, it becomes a terrible dynamic you do not have to be old

331. R: we are presented with a situation. the situation is obviously not long standing because there would not be the drama at this point shooting the cat it is a change that is fairly recent otherwise there would be no point in having this resolution

332. when she asks him in the end it shows a new situation "what have I done?" "I have changed " He has changed now not years ago

333. ......... I was not sure about that ... I was not sure..... years ago love grew cold whatever ....... that was the change .......

334. R: she says first of all is it because I am old that you do not love me anymore, is it because I limp? ..... is it because I drink?

335. M: I felt that was a repetition of what happened for a long time
336. V: when she is in the cellar with the papers talking to the cat; she says people who fall out of love should separate... whereabouts is it in that in the story
337. R: it is at the beginning when things started when she did not to get a response from him anymore
338. S: and then it goes back he found the cat.
339. R: because then the relationship was fine He is calling her Clemence I have found a cat. Is it the cat who started it?
340. M: that would even explain more
341. A: the cat became the catalyst
342. ...cat list a catalyst ....indifference ......trigger .... could express affection and physical contact and then push her away..... the relationship may have deteriorated before that ..... there is not any indication that ..... my feeling is that it had been going on for a while but then I had forgotten bits ....
343. A: it is hard to discuss things confidently seeing a film only once or listening a story or reading a poem being read aloud once
344. R: yes but that is the condition of most film viewing until nowadays when we have videos. but video is fairly recent that we recently
345. M: I was trying to work out. I found I was in tears at the end it was a very heavy film. I felt a black cloud come creeping over you I mean it was very well done that feeling of destruction both outside everywhere human
346. S: are firearms allowed in France
347. R: He kept the gun from his time in the army I imagine
348. ...
349. S: I expected her earlier than that to hit it or squash it or suffocate it or something
350. ............... ..............................
351. ..............................
352. A: I wanted to go back to the film I was thinking about the end of the characters in a sense their methods of destruction... no no... she uses the gun on the cat the kind of weapon that men traditionally use and he takes tablets to kill himself which is traditionally what women do. I suddenly thought of that reversal
353. ............... ..............................
354. M: it did go through my mind .... you never see a man shaving in the pills
355. A: and he knew just where they were and so whereas in a sense it would have made more sense in a realistic sense
356. J: had taken the gun
357. R: what do you suggest she do with the cat drowned it or something
358. A: the gun was there it was almost as if she was shooting him he handed it to her and said shoot yourself. so she shot the cat the cat represented him of course
359. V: but she knew that it would hurt him more to shoot the cat than it would to shoot him. He could not care less if she shot him
360. ... Laughs
361. J: where would she get a reaction the next day?
362. ...laughs
363. A: when she first tries to get rid of the cat and she is unsuccessful she feels guilty because the cat knows in a sense I was waiting for the next attempt
364. V: can somebody remind me what triggered her shooting the cat ?
365. A: he had put the pistol down and said
366. V: he went to get the pistol wherever it was kept and said shoot me and put it down
367. shoot yourself .... shoot yourself..... she said I might as well not be here ..... ..............................
368. ...but I cannot remember the argument that started it
369. V: something must have triggered ..... she did it in a moment of anger did she?
370. ..............................
371. R: no he walked out. He asked him something or other. Do you want to see this bit again?
372. ..............................
373. R: what started her shooting... the argument that started the shooting
374. ...kill myself .....he said go on shoot yourself ..........
375. V: she did not at that point take the gun and shoot the cat
376. R: no he went out. He keeps going out doesn't he. He keeps going to that
younger woman he has sex with her we presume
377. M: was it after she sat on the bed .she sat on his bed at one point and asked him
why don't you love me
378. ....................
379.
380. R: what did you think of the film as a whole
381. V: riveting
382. the acting was superb
383. V: brilliantly done
384. J: you really wanted to shake him and say say something
385. ..........depressing ..... black
386. A: the relationship and the destruction all around them broken turn to the dust
387. J: it was clever to have the last scene first and come back to it at the end
388. yeah yeah
389. V: I do not identify so much now, I look at a film it is like reading a book and there is
a distance between me and that screen I am not all that I admit I was glued to what
was going on and I could see where things were going the set up of a relationship
and its dynamic and there would be a resolution, I was fascinated to see how it
was going to go by the scenario of the action the two, the opposing scenes of the
action and the destruction outside and the house which was like a cocoon of
activity. The two characters were so well played with a minimum of script and so
forth. The whole thing was just visual and intellectual somehow and much more a
mind game going on all the time- fascinating- something I could identify with
because it was a couple it was two people and their struggle.
390. ...powerful... very powerful...
391. M: I thought it was excellent excellently acted. I think its portrayal of relationship
was amazing ..... the film catches that ..... whatever it is ..... but if you say what do
you say to your friends go and see it ..... to depress them...
392. ...LAUGHS...
393. .... it is like seeing Shakespeare .....but I do think it a very good film .....very slow
394. S: I found it fascinating you ask yourself why is that and what is it doing there and
sometimes it if very dim and you think is it going fuzzy and you realise that it is
there for you to ..... therefore it was stimulating as well as very ..... It was very tense I
felt dreadful a lot of the time for god's sake say something
395. R: in spite of it being very slow, did you find the tension going through
396. A: yes it was sustained
397. J: it did typify the relationship between one is trying and the other not. There are
not so many available men ..... 
398. A: men want younger and younger women
399. ....powerful..... so powerful ....absolutely believable characters.
400. S: except the suicide at the end I mean intellectually I can understand
401. R: well he was very depressed he did not have anything to live for, he was being
evicted maybe the wife does not come into it.
402. M: the tenacity ..... of.... remaining in that relationship
403. J: she is staying put . He had something to hang on to she had nothing. She
could not get any response. You have to put in a Nelson and say :'Are you going
to listen or what?' * Please- speak to me please
404. ................................................
405. ... recounting the relationship of mother and father who used sulking as a
weapon, they could go for ever a long time without speaking to each other and
children very aware of the battle that went on very painful way and very
destructive. Sharing of knowledge of this weapon, understand the characters...

406. LAUGHS ... and all sort of stories about frustration about attracting the attention of partners etc...... have you gone crazy?

407. R: comparing Tatie Danielle
408. general agreement about this film being better than Tatie and Driving Miss Daisy.
409. S: we have known these two.
410. ...we have all known these two
411. A: they were not glamorised
412. ...they were ordinary people.
413. A: they kept themselves clean and tidy.
414. S: she looked after her appearance
415. A: who did the washing.
416. R: I mean when we discussed Tatie Danielle that she did not have any wrinkles and she did not look old enough, now you say in this one that they looked fairly healthy

417. ...........
418. A: they kept themselves together clean and tidy
419. M: I thought when she put her coat on how did she look so respectable
420. ........... who did the washing.
421. she went to the launderette twice a week... he did not.... who did it when they were not speaking
422. He looked very old
423. ...........he looked old... very old....
424. V: I thought he looked old but not very old.
425. A: older than she did
426. yes... yes... yes
427. V: she made an effort with the hair and the face and the mirror and she went again to have another look ...she was always...
428. R: I just wonder whether her limping is a physical characteristic that attract the attention to a non sexual body...... it focuses on an imperfect body

429. J: what does
430. R: her limp
431. M: it was a symbol
432. ..............
433
434. Vi: you are told about the circus accident etc.. and her not working this is what happened to her
435. V: her limp was not particularly disfiguring it was only slight
436. M: it does draw attention to...
437. A: I thought as the film went on that the limp increased
438. R: often older women limp because a bad hip or a bad knee that's not unusual
439. Laughter of recognition
440. R: because she says to him is it because I am old ? is it because I am limping
441. A: she is trying to understand his indifference
442. V: and that it must be physical because that is what the relationship rested on she lost the attraction that she once had
443. J: but she says I can train horses and she played instruments
444. Vi: she also says : I was beautiful when I was young,
445. J: when she lent over him in bed she turns the light on after he puts it off he says to her you are ugly
446. ...did he?...yes ... that was the hight of cruelty......yes....
447. A: that is the worst thing a man can say to a woman you are old and you are ugly.
448. R: now you come to the film and the physical portrayal of older women not being loved because their bodies are not sexy
449. A: old people are ugly... old equals ugly
450. R: old and ugly implies no love
451. M: you cannot have a relationship with an older person
452. R: an old woman because with a man you can men become more lovable as they
grow older
453. A: and more attractive
454. V: he had a younger woman didn’t he
455. R: she slept with him ....
456. M: haven’t you been in stores for example.... when young men completely ignore
you
457. V: yound women too .... not as much but you do get cases where young women
ignore you
458. oh yes... yes
459. ....... but younger children are attracted to older people because they have the
time are more interested in young people
460. R: some some
461. M: there was a lot of pressure on women for a perfect body now there is some
pressure on men to keep a fit body
462. R: yes but let men cope with that
463. A: the pressure on women of all ages to be young and attractive and sexy for
ever and ever and once a woman looks over the age of forty she is considered
less important less valuable less worthy, less necessary....
464.
465. DIGRESSION ABOUT EXPERIENCE OF OLDER WOMEN AND MEN AND THEN
ABOUT WHALES AND WOMEN AND THE MENOPAUSE
466.
467. R: in the film he says that it has nothing to do with her he says I have just changed
myself .......
468. V: there is no reason behind it he says to her he has changed
469. ..... ....
470. R: I experience the film as much nastier because it actually says an older woman is
not worthy of affection I mean that is the end of the line. It is not this older woman
she is not specially bad or anything it is in his head that he changes and he has
not to give any reason for this change he cannot love her anymore and he does
not know why . I find it incredibly black and not because of the relationship.
Because you cannot love an older woman
471. A: by definition
472. ..........   
473. S: you imagine that it has taken some time. The relationship is getting stale. They
have not done anything to widen their horizons individually or together
474. ............
475. J: another woman would have said who do you think you are
476. ..... who do you think you are Jean Gabin ... laughs... next time my husband
ignores me I'll say it, I will
477. ... laughs ...
478. R: he was punishing her
479. M: it is a seminal film in a way
480. R: recounts Simone Signoret experience with Yves Montand
481. .......questions about Simone Signoret
482. ....how older men feel about ageing
483. ..... older women are seen on the stage much more frequently
484. ....Joan Collins Zsa Zsa Gabor plastic surgery, the Queen Mother,
485. R: how do you find these cinema sessions
486. J: it stretches one
487. ...very stimulating
488. A: the interchange of ideas and all the things I did not think of...........
489. I am shocked that I did not really relate to his cruelty. Now that you have pointed it
out .. we take it almost for granted... Or am I speaking for myself ...
APPENDIX 2

VIEWERS REACTIONS

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

THE WOMEN

GENERAL COMMENTS:

Riveting - superb acting (anger, body language) - brilliant - depressing (young people would commit suicide at 40 if they saw the film and thought that is what happens in old age) - black - engaging - glued to it - powerful - excellent - fascinating - stimulating (why is that? what is this doing here? very dim you had to concentrate on what was happening) - very tense (for god's sake say something) - seen this happening in real life - of its age (now adult education, women groups - retirement advice - women now would say : here is the door go) - Visually implied rather than stated and no music. Silence very potent (startling effect of first words heard).

CONFUSION:

All women thought Julien was still working. Some women did not know that he was a typographer - confusion about the flicked notes and when they happened in the story - Nobody was sure what triggered the shooting of the cat - in trying to recollect there was a confusion between the first and last verbal scenes between Julien and Clemence - The need to see the film again to understand it fully was expressed and the fact that bits were forgotten was also mentioned - The hospital scene being the same at the beginning and the end took some debate to sort out - Why was he glad that she fell?
a discussion followed.

OTHER REMARKS:

The supermarket scene was thought to be by some the best scene in
the film and it was discussed with a lot of laughter and humour - She
uses a gun on the cat, traditionally a man's weapon and he uses pills
a woman's way out - The demolition as a character it had a life of it
own - The demolition symbolised the destruction of the relationship.
They were isolated. They had no friends, no family.

ANTICIPATION:

I thought the cat would not last - I expected him (Julien) to explode
after she slashed his newspapers - I expected him to show some
anger when she killed the cat - I was waiting for the crime

HOW WAS JULIEN PERCEIVED:

grey hair therefore old - motivation is not clear, why cynical about
work and the world? hidden depths? - he did not care- he could not
communicate, older men cannot express their feelings - disillusioned
- life has gone sour - clinging to the marriage - loved the cat because
of its dependence - jealous of her - put the cat in the dustbin, if he
grieved inside him it was not shown - emotionally stunted - burnt out -
depressed - bad tempered - sour.

HOW WAS CLEMENCE PERCEIVED:

smart, looks respectable - she tried, she was struggling - she was
drunk- she did not drink to excess - isolated - not vicious about the
cat - ambivalent about the cat - thoughtful where to leave it
insane with rage (on shooting the cat) - expressed all emotions - she
gives as good as she gets - active one.
a discussion followed.

OTHER REMARKS:
The supermarket scene was thought to be by some the best scene in
the film and it was discussed with a lot of laughter and humour - She
uses a gun on the cat, traditionally a man’s weapon and he uses pills
a woman’s way out - The demolition as a character it had a life of it
own - The demolition symbolised the destruction of the relationship.
They were isolated. They had no friends, no family.

ANTICIPATION:
I thought the cat would not last - I expected him (Julien) to explode
after she slashed his newspapers - I expected him to show some
anger when she killed the cat - I was waiting for the crime

HOW WAS JULIEN PERCEIVED:
grey hair therefore old - motivation is not clear, why cynical about
work and the world? hidden depths? - he did not care- he could not
communicate, older men cannot express their feelings - disillusioned
- life has gone sour - clinging to the marriage - loved the cat because
of its dependence - jealous of her - put the cat in the dustbin, if he
grieved inside him it was not shown - emotionally stunted - burnt out
- depressed - bad tempered - sour.

HOW WAS CLEMENCE PERCEIVED:
smart, looks respectable - she tried, she was struggling - she was
drunk- she did not drink to excess - isolated - not vicious about the
cat - ambivalent about the cat - thoughtful where to leave it -
insane with rage (on shooting the cat) - expressed all emotions - she
gives as good as she gets - active one.
HOW WAS THE RELATIONSHIP PERCEIVED:

destroying each other- he did not want her to work needed her to be helpless not independent - not about old age, more about relationship between the sexes - needed each other - actively engaged in non communication - watching each other - What happened between their love and falling out? - frozen in their roles - they could not live with each other and they could not move away - long standing situation - typical of some women who cannot let go of a relationship - should not have married in the first place.

REVIEWERS

All reviewers mentioned Simone Signoret and Jean Gabin as stars and many called them 'Monstres Sacres'.

GENERAL COMMENTS:

heavy atmosphere - destruction - devoid of any interest - sinister - sad - difficult to bear- no narrative - elicits discomfort - tragedy of old age - old age and death are there in a changing world

CONFUSION:

first section is the initial situation - narrative slip

OTHER REMARKS:

amazing dramatic impact of initial situation - symbol of demolition too obvious , too easy, not good enough - house as character- beautiful visual metaphor of demolition site -

HOW WAS JULIEN PERCEIVED:

odious - despaired - bored- egoistic- sadistic- cold - indifferent- hostile nasty
HOW WAS CLEMENCE PERCEIVED:

jealous - pathetic - does try - hates the cat - pitiful - despaired - drunk-alcoholic - timidly tentative

HOW WAS THE RELATIONSHIP PERCEIVED:

mutual hatred - resentment - jealousy - hardened - marital scenes

with equal roles - love story - dependance - unexplained breakdown

of the relationship - no communication - secret tenderness -

unbearable co-habitation - passionate - not indifference