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ABSTRACT

This paper outlines the fourth-year film appreciation course at Rand College of Education in Johannesburg, South Africa, designed to develop a greater critical awareness in students so they are able to distinguish between good and mediocre film and video material. Some attempt is made to establish what qualifies material to be regarded as "art." The paper discusses soap operas; television films based on a Barbara Cartland novel and on Sydney Sheldon's "Memories of Midnight"; and the films "Lethal Weapon 2," "Lorenzo's Oil," "Baghdad Cafe," "Howards End," and "The Remains of the Day." (RS)

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## 1. PURPOSE AND CONTENT

David Attenborough has described cinema as " the people's art form ". This paper outlines the fourth year film appreciation course that is designed to develop a greater critical awareness in students, so that they are able to distinguish between good and mediocre film and video material. Some attempt is made to establish what qualifies material to be regarded as 'art'.

Education is, above all a preparation for life. The youth of today spent many of their leisure hours watching films on television, and so it is essential that they learn to distinguish between good and mediocre programmes.

The course was introduced with a broadly based discussion of genre and the expectation set up by for example, a thriller or a horror film or science fiction. After a generalised feedback session and informal conversation, a more structured approach was adopted.

## 2. FORMAT : PAPER PRESENTATION

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## 4. AUDIENCE SIZE : 20 - 30.

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## **DEVELOPING A CRITICAL RESPONSE TO MEDIA VIEWING WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO TELEVISION AND FILM - VIDEO DEMONSTRATION**

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David Attenborough has described cinema as "the people's art form". This paper outlines the fourth-year film-appreciation course that is designed to develop a greater critical awareness in students so they are able to distinguish between good and mediocre film and video material. Some attempt is made to establish what qualifies material to be regarded as "art".

Education is, above all, a preparation for life. The Youth of today spend many of their leisure hours watching films on television, and so it is essential that they learn to distinguish between good and mediocre programmes.

The course was introduced with a broadly-based discussion of genre, and the expectations set up by, for example, a thriller or a horror film, or science fiction. After a generalised feedback session and informal conversation, a more structured approach was then adopted.

The class examined the following article from the Sunday Times Magazine, 14 March 1993.

*"Bubble, Bubble, Sex and Trouble - by Sharon Chetty"*

Love them or loath them, soap operas have become a staple of this country's television and radio diet.

And we in South Africa have followed an international trend of getting hooked on the ongoing sagas that have as many convolutions as a spaghetti dish.

However, a soap opera is not a diva singing in the bath. According to a specialist on the subject, Rand Afrikaans University Lecturer Stephan Bouwer, this genre of TV programmes has a special formula that has captured and held a large following over the years.

The "soapie" started in the United States in the 1930s when radio commercials advertised soap products between shows. The programmes became associated with certain soaps, hence the jargon. "Opera" was added as the plots are always over-the-top and outrageous, while still being believable.

But perhaps the best way of describing a traditional soapie is with the Afrikaans term for the style: "stroofstorie".

Literally translated, it means "scattered story": and all the successful soaps have definitely been of this genre.

According to Stephan Bouwer, who is researching this aspect of TV for a PhD, a soap can be defined as an on-going saga that never gets resolved. Usually the series is shot in a studio and is broadcast daily.

The plot is always complicated and the subplots tend to deal with love, marriage, power and intertwined relationships. There is always a teaser at the end of each episode that hooks the viewer into watching the next one.

"The viewers become intimately involved in the characters' lives," says Stephan. "Therefore, whatever the actors do off-screen is followed closely. Also, the plots are current - if it is exam time, that is shown in the series. Significant days like Christmas are also included in the lives of the characters," he explains.

*Loving, The Bold and the Beautiful*, and the locally-made *Egoli* are traditional soaps that follow the formula.

Other series that have the style and feel of soap operas, although they may be shot on location and be aired once weekly, are *Dallas, Dynasty* and the soon-to-be-screened *Die Glaskasteel*.

The latter are more classy, with emphasis on costumes and glamour.

In South Africa, the soapie tradition started with commercial radio in the 1960s. Here too the series were sponsored by soap manufacturers, and products such as Lux soap and Surf washing powder came to be identified with listeners' favourite programmes, especially on Springbok Radio.

Stephan says that soap operas are also popular with a cross section of people: popular soapies are watched by people of all races and classes.

The trend is also prominent in Europe, where, he says, academics describe the phenomenon as the "Dallasification" of culture.

The article explains the origin of the term "soap operas", and outlines some of the characteristics of the genre. The title "Bubble, bubble, sex and trouble" is itself of some interest, suggesting an analogy between soap operas and the witches' brew in *Macbeth*, but with a good deal of "sex and trouble" thrown in as well.

A further consideration in analysing soap operas is distinguishing between sentiment and sentimentality. One may regard "sentiment" as genuine feeling that is sincerely expressed. "Sentimentality", on the other hand, is oversimplified, shallow emotion, excessively expressed and intended to arouse an exaggerated response.

Van der Walt (*Crux*, October 1981) comments as follows:

*"Sentimental content releases emotion while non-sentimental content creates emotion, that is creates new insight as opposed to pandering to "safe" thoughts and feelings. Sentimental content makes it easy for the recipient, allows him to feel complacent about his experience, produces "nice, warm feelings". Non-sentimental content creates tension in the recipient, it disturbs him into thought as it moves him, making more demands on him".*

Van der Walt's views have relevance in assessing many of the popular soap operas. I refer particularly to an episode of *Santa Barbara* that was quite randomly selected, but which displayed many of the features so typical of the genre. In the opening sequence the camera moves through arch after arch, offering glimpses into the playground of the wealthy. The scenes depict polo games, yacht moles, tanned bodies and champagne parties. Characters are given exotic names such as Channing, Cruise, Eden and Santana.

The figures are generally plastic and lack depth. Relationships are unconvincing and the viewer is aware of a falseness in the interaction. Intense, intimate confrontations are a common occurrence.

The viewer listens to a conversation between C.C. and Sophia, who are soon to marry:

*C.C.: And Gina. Probably out of our lives.*

*Sophia: Is she?*

*C.C.: I'm counting on it.*

- Sophia: I'm not. I think it's very strange that after all this time the body hasn't been found.*
- C.C.: Well, not if the killer is very thorough. Now listen. Look ... let's ... let's not get morbid today, please. Listen, from now until the ceremony, all we think about is you and I. Our future as man and wife. And we're going to be together. That's what I believe with all my heart.*
- Sophia: I still have this feeling. This horrible feeling I can't get rid of that she's going to come back from the grave and get us is she has to.*
- C.C.: Well, I wish I could have identified the body, that's all. If she's gone, let's just hope she's gone for good.*

C.C.'s grammar leaves much to be desired. He is particularly confused in his use of pronouns: in the passage quoted, "you and I" is incorrect, and formerly he made an error in a reference to "you and me".

In soap operas these are always complications in the various relationships. In this instance there is the threatening presence of Gina, who is supposed to be dead. Predictably she returns to life, as it turns out, in the very next scene, where here resurrection takes place -dramatically- in a barn. She is the conventional villainess: nasty, spiteful, sneering and scornful. She looks for trouble and takes great joy in disrupting people's lives.

The inevitably hospital scene filled with trauma and deathbed confessions follows next. The flashbacks of one of the observers accompanied by appropriate sound effects warn the viewer that something is amiss and this adds

to the intrigue of the situation. Sentimental exchanges include lines such as: "There's so much I have to tell you. Guess there's not so much really. Just that I love you." This is followed by the eternal regrets: "Cruise, I'm sorry. I'm so sorry ... I made so many mistakes and I promise you I'll never do it again". Tears fall but mascara remains intact.

The camera then zooms in dramatically as Cruise, in his delirious state, calls out the name, not of the young woman beside him, but of a lover with whom he is having an affair. The addicted soap opera fan holds his/her breath and waits in anticipation to see how the dilemma will be resolved in the next episode.

The final scene switches back to Gina who becomes a caricature of the wicked stepmother, right down to the evil laugh. A clever touch is the mirror image, reminiscent of Snow White's evil stepmother and her "mirror, mirror, on the wall" exchanges. Interestingly there is another oblique reference to fairy tales and the goose which laid golden eggs. Otherwise the script is trite and filled with clichés. Again the scene ends dramatically as the two vixens, Gina and Santana fly at each other.

Although I have referred to a specific episode, the points mentioned would probably have relevance in many instances. *A Heart of Soap* highlights how difficult it is to take this type of programme seriously.

I could not resist including a discussion of Barbara Cartland's *A Hazard of Hearts* in my programme. M-NET offered a series of her films in February, the other titles being *The Lady and the Highwayman*, *A Ghost in Monte Carlo*, and *Duel of Hearts*.

Cartland's titles are in themselves a cause for mirth, as the following excerpt from the Natal Mercury indicates.



Title Tales

*This discussion of passion from Barbara Cartland was sent me by Heather Moran of the Durban Municipal Library, who was given it by one of her staff. Readers may like to try their hand using other authors. Send your efforts to the Idler, The Natal Mercury, PO Box 950, Durban 4000.*

*Poor Governess - Pure and Untouched - Wish for Love - Night of Gaiety - Nightingale Sang - Miracle in Music - Tempted to Love - Duke and the Preacher's daughter - Saint and the Sinner - Caught by Love - Who can Deny Love? - Poor Governess - Hungry for Love - In the Arms of Love - Dreams do Come True - Money, Magic and Marriage Made in Heaven - Incredible Honeymoon - Moonlight on the Sphinx - Passions in the Sand - Little Adventure - Complacent Wife - Problems of Love - Bitter Winds of Love - Disgraceful Duke - Ruthless Rake - Lies of Love - Heart is Broken - Lost Laughter - Punished with Love - Kneel for Mercy - Love Wins - Again this Rapture - For all Eternity - Never Laugh at Love.*

To return to the film in question, the names of some of the characters are: The Vulcans of Mandrake, Lord Rooten, Serena and Udora. These point to the Gothic element in Cartland's work. The first-year UNISA study guide (1994) defines "Gothic" in the following way:

*"Gothic" was used to refer to a certain genre (type) of novel, what in contemporary times we might call "horror stories". The Gothic novel was thus one of terror, in which the characters invariably inhabited semi-ruined castles in whose shadows incorrigible villains lurked, harbouring unspeakable desires, poised always to pounce*

*upon innocent maidens, who would, against all odds, be rescued by a fearless, young gallant. The villain being thwarted, the "heroine" would swoon into the arms of her knight in shining armour, they would fade into the sunset, and live happily ever after.*

If we look closely at the Gothic heroine we shall see that the portrait painted was extremely condescending and patronising. The Gothic heroine was always at the mercy of a chauvinistic male hero. He saved her; she was in his debt.

The first sequence shows us Serena, abducted by the villain of the piece - Lord Rooten. There is something vampire-like about his behaviour and the coach-ride through moonlit forests has Draculaen overtones. Even more dramatic is the highwayman who comes to Serena's rescue and carries her back safely on horseback to the Vulcan estate. The music is particularly significant.

I must mention that Lord Vulcan won Serena in a wager between himself and Lord Rooten. Needless to say, Lord Vulcan, who initially had a reputation almost as bad as that of Rooten, turns out to be honourable as the plot progresses.

The duel is a popular convention of romantic fiction, and true to form, Vulcan challenges Rooten for compromising the honour of the lady in his care. He is apparently seriously wounded but it turns out to be only a scratch.

His mother is the stereotyped villainess and is involved in a smuggling racket; she resents the affection her son feels for the young woman residing in her castle and holds Serena responsible for her son's death.

Serena saddles Thunderbolt, the most dangerous horse in the stable and rides to London to find her Lord. Notice the music and the flashback techniques that

are obtrusively used during her death-defying ride to remind us of earlier scenes, such as when Vulcan hinted at his true feelings for Serena, declaring that hers was "such a little hand to hold the whole of Mandrake in its power". Alas, upon her arrival in London, Serena stumbles upon her Justin flattering another woman, and in spite of her daring escapade, now faints as the shock has been too much for her.

Later, Lord Vulcan points out that her honour is compromised in her public demonstration of her devotion to him and uses this as the excuse he has waited for to propose marriage. But the pouting Serena does not wish him to feel under any obligation, and then comes the line for all for all the feminists in the audience:

"Come here, Serena. You're going to have to swear to obey me when we're married. You may as well start now."

The final scenes have all the ingredients of the Gothic novel.

- There is a drugged potion.
- Bodies are strewn everywhere.
- The villainess appears in a bright, red dress and chases the heroine, pursuing her down dark passageways with a rapier in her hand.
- The music alternates between sinister and romantic as Lord Vulcan speeds on his way to rescue the lady in distress.
- There is the final confrontation between good and evil.

Sentimentality is beautifully demonstrated: the hero and heroine declare their undying love for each other in the closing scenes. The evil doers are punished and, unrepentant, die with a joke on their lips, which illustrates Cartland's complete lack of understanding of the reality of death. Whatever feelings are

portrayed in the film are emotions for emotions' sake. The film draws to the inevitably happy conclusion and climaxes on the usual clichés: "Oh Justin, I love you so much", and Justin replies: "And I've loved you from the first moment I saw you". The romantic music builds to a crescendo and "The End" appears on the screen. Hopefully, not too many viewers are left wiping away the tears with the corner of a lacy handkerchief. Cyclops in *The Mercury* wrote the following commentary on the film (The article is followed by an example of an examination question that could be set on the material).

T.V. Guide to the Natal Mercury, Friday, February 10, 1995.

*"Romancing the Dame"*

*I once fell asleep in front of the TV set - an occupational hazard for critics.*

*Waking up much later, I was confronted by an ostrich with a face-lift, lashings of makeup and a voice that the upper class English usually reserve for foreign waiters.*

*The voice belonged to Dame Barbara Cartland - she looked like an ostrich because she was festooned with feathers. She was telling Sky-TV why the marriage of her niece, Princess Diana, to Charles somebody or other, had failed.*

*"Romance," trilled Dame Babs, "is everything".*

*In the Cartland marriage guidance manual, a wife is advised to keep blowing on the embers of romance to rekindle the flame. Diana was blamed for letting her flame go out.*

*Dame Barbara is no feminist, but at least she's consistent. If nothing else, her heroines are romantics, as you'd know if you'd watched "Hazard of Hearts" (M-NET), the first of four Cartland adaptations to be screened this month (one appropriately on Valentine's Day).*

*Serena (all Cartland's heroine's are called something like Serena) was the victim of aristocratic child abuse - her father wagered and lost her in a dice game to the wicked Lord Rooten (I'm not sure of the spelling but it rhymed with rotten).*

*He in turn forfeited her to the mysterious Lord Vulcan, who looked like that other Vulcan, Star Trek's Mr Spock (without the ears).*

*Serena was packed off to Vulcan's countryseat, where she was at the mercy of his Lordship's wicked mama, who boozed, smuggled goodies from France, and ran the equivalent of the Wild Coast Casino in her back room.*

*The plot was standard Cartland - an abduction, a duel, a hectic ride on an untamed stallion and even a murder - very genteel, her Ladyship used a shooting stick.*

*There was the inevitable happy ending, with his Lordship, as we knew he would, offering to make Serena his Vulcaness and she, as we guessed she would, accepting.*

*Even famous actors must work to eat, but it was sad to find the likes of Edward Fox, Diana Rigg, Anna Massey and Helena Bonham Carter singing for such a syrupy supper.*

*Sad too, to see the once-dashing Stewart Granger trotted out for what was probably his final performance, wheezing his way though the role wearing particularly ill-fitting false teeth.*

*There was a moral to the tale ... if Diana had listened to her aunty and blown more enthusiastically (on the embers of her romance) she and Charles could be riding serenely off into the sunset, instead of heading for the divorce court.*

## Question

By taking careful note of the content and tone of the article above, outline what criticisms are directed against Barbara Cartland films. Refer to the passage to support your answer.

Briefly, Sydney Sheldon's *Memories of Midnight* may be used to pinpoint further devices of melodrama and some of the 'Whodunit' conventions. Catherine Alexander suffers from loss-of-memory, a technique often used in this type of film. She is under the care of Spiros ( Omar Sharif ), who is an extremely powerful man. Spiro's wife, Melina, gradually realises that her husband has given orders for numerous deaths and sets trap for him. While she is in the process of setting him up, there are the usual red herrings leading us to suspect that Catherine's life is in danger, and the potential killer could be any one of a number of characters. This is purely a device to create suspense and each time the viewer feels that Catherine is about to be murdered, the suspect turns out to be innocent. What is of interest here are the stages and details of Melina's plan. One recognises devices used in many similar films.

### MEMORIES OF MIDNIGHT

- 1 Fingerprints are obtained on the weapon. ( She asks Spiros to use a knife to open a parcel for her. )
- 2 Melina visits a detective, saying she needs protection.
- 3 She has a telephone argument ( there is no-one on the other end of the line ) in front of a witness in order to incriminate Spiros.

### Clues pointing to the murderer, found at the scene of the crime.

- 4 A button from a suit sleeve.
- 5 A watch stopped at a significant time.
- 6 Arrangement of an alibi that would not hold.
- 7 Home in disorder.
- 8 Detective's card found.
- 9 Bloodstained clothing.

The film *LETHAL WEAPON 2* is useful in identifying the conventions of the cop/detective thriller.

### With reference to the protagonist :

1. He is a rebel who defies the system and often clashes with his boss.
2. He and his partner have a bantering relationship that fits in with their 'tough guy' image , but there is a strong underlying bond.
3. The hero-cop has close shaves with death but he is fearless. He jokes about danger and ignores pain. He is constantly alert of any threat.
4. He is a skilled driver.
5. Beneath the tough veneer there is a really a lonely figure with a personal tragedy that has left him broken-hearted.
6. He is vulnerable, but covers up with his casual attitude and is always ready to face the challenge.

The Villians are sterotyped

In the case of the film, they are stupid, racist ( incidentally with an Afrikaans accent ), and they have absolutely no regard for life. The Language includes a great deal of swearing ( 4 letter words are obviously assumed to go with the tough image). The emphases is on action; car chases, crashes, helicopter rescues, explosions and violence are the order of the day.

### LORENZO's SOIL

The film begins with the following quotation:

*Life has meaning only in the struggle*

*Triumph or defeat is in the hand of the Gods...*

*So let us celebrate the struggle!*

Swahili Warrior Song

The epigraph encapsulates what the film is all about. The director has made all these sentiments the goal of his film: he celebrates the courages, but very human struggle of Michaela and Augusto who refuse to give up, and pit themselves against all odds that line up against them. In their refusal to accept the defeat they become the hero and heroine of the story.

I am not claiming that this is necessarily a film with deep aesthetic value, but I regard it as good film, because the director has consciously set about to present an unsentimentalised portrayal of what it means to be human.

The opening scenes of the film introduce a note of strangeness and prepare us for the fact that we are coming into contact with the unknown. The music adds to the effect. The visuals show us an East African tribe, with



customs that are foreign to Westerner : faces are painted white in token of some ritualistic experience that we cannot share or understand.

The focus is also on Lorenzo, who has fitted into this world so well. He is depicted as a warm, well-adjusted, creative little boy, who relates well to others and makes his mark. he is friendly and has won the respect of the older boy introduced in the early scenes. He is a normal, talented child who enjoys life and finds it a great adventure. The happiness of the children is emphasized, and Lorenzo is shown to have a close bond with his parents. One may well consider how a less skilled director may have chosen to deal with the subject of a child soon to be mentally as well as physically crippled by an incurable disease.

The scene next shift to Washington D.C. It is there that the first hints of strange behaviour begin. The two worlds of Africa and America are dramatically juxtaposed. Home does not present the familiar and the secure, but instead the mood becomes taut with the sense of a threatening presence.

Rapidly the viewer is drawn into a scenario that is soon to become so distorted that nothing will ever be normal again.

There is the last Christmas where that family will gather, as they gathered in the past. But already Lorenzo is separated, and we see him through the window, playing outside in the snow.

The original definition of sentiment was that it creates emotion and tension. No scene does this better than when Lorenzo stand on the chair to adjust the Christmas decoration, and as he falls, the tree topples over onto him in agonising slow motion. The disorientation of everyone concerned is suggested in the weirdly angled faces. The hunt for reasons begins: could it be a parasite?

Time passes and the festive season switches to Easter, another important event in the calendar. Significantly the parents are in church, and one frame follows the next in the symbolic significance:

- The solemn church music is deeply emotional

- The parents stand together and, like God in whose hands lies the fate of all, The viewers look down upon the gathered congregation. The message of the

Epigraph threads its way through the film, as parents turn their eyes upward to God for assistance. Only their faith will see them through the trail that awaits them.

- The Christ-child is protectively cradled in the arms of the Virgin- His future also determined from the moment of His birth. Candles are held in the hands of boys, faintly reminiscent of Wilfred Owen's poem 'Anthem for Doomed Youth'.

The scene is fraught with tension and deep, genuine emotion.

In contrast the hospital wards are stark, sterile and silent. While a child's voice is heard, fading into the distance. This is the stuff of which good films are made.

### BAGDAD CAFE

This is a wonderfully human film by German director Percy Adlon. The opening scenes focus on two people relieving themselves, basic human action. Conflict exists in the relationship. Adlon uses pastel colours and again, unusual angles. Marienne Sagebrecht is a most unlikely heroine, but in the film, by the sheer warmth of her caring and humanity, she transforms the lives of the occupants of the God-forsaken Baghdad Cafe Motel. She is ideally suited to the part.

The flask is an important item in the opening scenes: to the man it symbolises his wife. he leaves it at the side of the road. The human touches are constantly present: when in a temper, often many little things go wrong for all of us. The husband's ineffectual manoeuvring of the vehicle after their argument is an example. Their irritation with each other is suggested in her impatience with her husband's smoking. Note the initials on the suitcases - an

emblem of their marital bond, although emotionally there is no longer a connection. She makes the decision to leave the vehicle and has to wade her way through the desert sand in her high heels. I am sure we can all identify with the minor irritations that often accompany a disagreement with another. Everything becomes a further irritant, increasing the problems at hand.

Symbolically, the heroine finds herself on a long and deserted road, leading she knows not where. The theme song is beautiful and speaks of reaching out for meaningful human contact that is what the film is about.

### HOWARDS END

The opening sequences of *Howards End* provide a good example for considering how a novel may be transformed into a film. Film is a different medium, but to be successful, the directors must remain true to the spirit of the original text. The Merchant/Ivory team, with Ruth Jhabvala as their screenplay writer, are among the best at achieving this. Some of their films are: *Howards End*, *Room with a View*, *The Remains of the Day* and the most recent release is *Jefferson in Paris*.

*Howards End* is a gentle novel about relationships. Helen and Meg are sisters who met the Wilcoxes abroad and Helen is visiting Mrs Wilcox. When the novel opens, Forster explores the different nature of men and women, showing the former as being ambitious, practical, businesslike and the latter as sensitive, philosophical and far more in touch with their own and others' emotions. His novel investigates how two such different points of departure find a meeting place where they are able to coexist harmoniously.

When the novel opens, Mrs Wilcox is dying, and she seeks a spiritual heir for her home that has been in the family for generations. It has such traditions as a wych-elm with a pig's tooth imbedded in its trunk, and the accompanying superstitions. Ruth Wilcox knows that her husband regards the property merely

as a house. She discovers a soul - mate in Meg, and it is her last wish that Meg inherit Howards End. The Wilcoxes decide that Ruth could not have been in her right mind and destroy the note after her death. Ironically, Meg and Mr Wilcox become romantically linked and eventually marry. After many trials and tribulations, which lead to learning experiences in the relationship, particularly on the part of Mr Wilcox, Meg does become owner of the property.

I would like to draw your attention to a few details in the opening passages of the novel, and then if you watch film, you will see this has been transformed into visual language.

## CHAPTER 1

One may as well begin with Helen's letters to her sister.

Howards End

Tuesday

Dearest Meg

It isn't going to be what we expected. It is old and little, and altogether delightful - red - brick. We can scarcely pack in as it is, and the dear knows what will happen when Paul (younger son) arrives tomorrow. Hall itself is partially a room. You open another door in it, and there are the stairs going up in a sort of tunnel to the first floor. Three bedrooms in a row there, and three attics in a row above. That isn't all the house really, but it's all that one notices - nine windows as you look up from the front garden.

Then there is a very big wych - elm - to the left as you look up - leaning a little over the house, and standing on the boundary between the garden and meadow. I quite love that tree already. Also ordinary elms, oaks - no nastier than ordinary oaks - pear trees, apple trees and a vine. No silver birches, though. However, I

must get on to my host and hostess. I only wanted to show that it isn't the least what we expected. Why did we settle that their house would be all gables and wiggles, and their garden all gamboge - coloured paths? I believe simply because we associate them with expensive hotels - Mrs Wilcox trailing in beautiful dresses down long corridors, Mr Wilcox bullying porters, etc. We females are that unjust.

I shall be back Saturday; I will let you train later. They are as angry as I am that you did not come too; really Tibby is too tiresome, he starts a new mortal disease every month. How could he have got hay fever in London? and even if he could, it seems hard that you should give up a visit to hear a schoolboy sneeze. Tell him that Charles Wilcox (the son who is here ) has hay fever too, but he's brave and gets quite cross when we inquire after it. Men like the Wilcoxes would do Tibby a power of good. But you won't agree, and I'd better change the subject.

This long letter is because I'm writing before breakfast. Oh, the beautiful vine leaves! The house is covered with a vine. I looked out earlier, and Mrs Wilcox was already in the garden. She evidently loves it. No wonder she sometimes look tired. She was watching the large red poppies come out. Then she walked off the lawn to the meadow, whose corner to the right I can just see. Trail, trail went her long dress over the sopping grass, and she came back with her hands full of the hay that was cut yesterday - I suppose for rabbits or something, as she kept on smelling it. The air here is delicious. Later on I heard the noise of croquet balls, and looked out again, and it was Charles Wilcox practising; they are keen on all games. Presently he started sneezing and had to stop. Then I hear more clicketing and it Mr Wilcox practising, and then ' a - tissue, a - tissue': he has to stop too. Then Evie comes out, and does some callisthenics exercises on a machine that is tacked on to a greengage - tree - they put everything to use - and then she says ' a - tissue ', and in she goes. And finally Mrs Wilcox

reappears, trial, trial, still smelling hay and looking at the flowers. I inflict all this on you because once you said that life is sometimes life and sometimes a drama, and one must learn to distinguish tother from which, and up to now I have always put that down as 'Meg's clever nonsense'. But his morning, it really does seem not life but a play, and it did amuse me enormously to watch the W's Now Mrs Wilcox has come in.

I am going to wear (omission). Last night Mrs Wilcox wore an (omission), and Evie, (omission). So it isn't a go - as - you - please place, and if you shut your eyes it still seems the wiggly hotel that we expected. Not if you open them The dog - roses are too sweet. There is great deal of them over the lawn - magnificently tall, so that they fall down in garlands, and nice and thin at he bottom, so that you can see ducks through it and a cow. These belong to the farm, which is the only house near us. There goes the breakfast gong. Much love.

Modified love to Tibby. Love to aunt Juley: how good of her to come and keep your company, but what a bore. Burn this. will write again Thursday. Helen

The house is described in some detail. Those out of touch with nature suffer from hay fever. Ruth Wilcox is established as being at one with her environment. In contrast with those members of her family who lack sensitivity she delights in the smell of the hay. The wych-elm is mentioned in the second paragraph. The merchant ivory team are always very careful about the musical scores they select, and the musical accompaniment for the opening scenes is very beautiful, but more important is how closely they have captured the mood and important issues of the first few pages of the novel. Ruth Wilcox is shown trailing through the hay, with flowers in her hair, and ethereal quality is very well captured. She is outside the house, looking in on her family, and thus is symbolically separated from them, preparing the viewer for her death.

The opening scenes of the film quite clearly establish the mastery of the film team and their expertise in transforming the written word into the visual image.

### *THE REMAINS OF THE DAY*

This is another Merchant/Ivory production. The story is about a butler who so caught within his role of being the correct, exemplary figure that when the possibility for romance comes his way, he is unable to respond on an emotional level to the obvious interest of the housekeeper.

He realises his mistakes too late, and the final scenes of the film show the two parting company, probably forever. I would like to focus on the symbolic power of the closing scenes where the pigeon is temporarily imprisoned - he escapes, but Stevens is left a prisoner of his inability to be more than a role model for the perfect butler. The windows of the palatial establishment close on his life, with the bars superimposed for a moment on an image of the house, and the camera zooms out, as the viewer leaves Stevens to his fate - trapped within the walls of the estate he has given his life to.

One may now ask: are Spielberg's films good because they are technical masterpieces? Some would argue that a film is good if the director achieved what he set out to do. In this course I ask students to bring a different criteria to bear. Does what they have viewed give them any thing to think about? Does it deal with the human dilemma and with the subtleties and complexities of human relationships? Is there artistic unity and do all parts of the whole contribute to the final effect? I ask them to judge material from an aesthetic perspective rather than a purely commercial or popular one. I hope that the film study

course has provided them with some of the skills they need to be more critically aware in future, when watching television or films.

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**Remains of the Day**  
**Santa Barbara**





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