

## **The Rodin Time Machine: Sculptural Moments in the Epilogue to *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent***

Francois Truffaut is well known for his humanist contributions to the development of auteur theory, a theory of intertextuality in which a director's personal style is the connecting thread. What I want to explore today is the inverse of this: that is, how a single film's mise-en-scène incorporates a number of works of art and brings them into dialogue, as if they were characters participating in the romantic and sexual drama of the film. Like many other French New Wave films, Francois Truffaut's 1971 *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* deploys sculpture to punctuate key moments, but its epilogue stands out for the historical and geographical specificity of its sculptures and the allusions it creates through them: rather than pastiches, the epilogue presents real sculptures by one artist, Rodin, and shows them *in situ*.

In the pressbook for the film, Truffaut wrote:

### **SLIDE 1 – FT Quotation**

**'For the same reasons that impel us to make people we care for meet each other, I think there exists between books the possibilities of fascinating rapprochements.'**

Such intertextual rapprochements and the way they echo relationships between characters are integral to the film.

### **SLIDE 2 –Claude and Anne**

For those of you who don't know *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent*, it is based on the novel by Henri Pierre Roché. The film is about love between two English sisters and a Frenchman. Claude meets Anne. They become friends. She invites him to her home in Wales to meet her sister, Muriel.

### **SLIDE 3 -Muriel**

Claude and Muriel fall in love, but he breaks off their engagement. Claude then has an affair with Anne. Later, it seems that Muriel and Claude will become reconciled, but when Anne tells Muriel about her relationship with Claude, Muriel flees from him. Anne dies, Muriel and Claude finally have sex, but she refuses to have a relationship with him. The film ends with Claude, alone in the gardens of the Musée Rodin, thinking about time past.

### **SLIDE - Blank**

Throughout the film, characters' relationships are paralleled with couplings of texts and/or art. Letters and a diary are exchanged; art is bought and sold; Truffaut uses paintings and verbal allusions to suggest parallels between Anne and Muriel, and Charlotte and Emily Brontë. Claude, on the other hand, resembles Proust.

### **SLIDE - Credits**

Truffaut's own dialogue with Henri-Pierre Roché is represented in the opening credits by shots of Roché's book, annotated by Truffaut. On the pages of this 1956 novel, we thus see handwriting from over a decade later, like a palimpsest.

This layering of temporality characterises other textual couplings in the film, such as the Brontë/Proust encounter.

### **SLIDE - paintings**

However, few artworks are on screen long enough for us to contemplate their provenance. In this shot, for example, the viewer is able to spot the paintings, but they appear only for a brief moment when Claude walks past them.

### **SLIDE - Blank**

Roche's novel abounds in period detail, including references to many works of art. In the film, these are largely stripped back. The dialogue between art, time and the characters only predominates in the film's epilogue. By shooting the epilogue on location at the *Musée Rodin*, Truffaut created a network of intertextual allusions, via Rodin's work, to other narratives and historical events.

**I'm going to show you the whole epilogue now.**

### **CLIP – Epilogue**

Rodin sculptures are seen briefly in two earlier scenes, but the epilogue's emphasis on them is much more pronounced. Each sculpture is given its own, single shot. The lack of editing preserves the continuity of the sculptures' forms. As the camera tracks around the sculptures, zooming in, action is excluded from the frame and the sculptures' forms and historical themes are foregrounded. Nonetheless, their relevance to the film's narrative ensures that they never completely displace the plot, even when the voiceover narration pauses. George Delerue's score sustains an affectual thread.

On one level, the epilogue's narrative space is restricted, its boundaries demarcated. The epilogue is concerned mainly with Claude's visit to the museum. It ends after he

has passed through the gates; we do not see what lies beyond. On another level, the epilogue opens out the film, creating an essayistic space: a wider frame of reference. By locating the scene in a well-known museum, Truffaut enables audiences to trace the epilogue's allusions; a glance through the museum's guidebook equips the viewer with any knowledge necessary to 'read' the epilogue's textual layers. However, the location makes the scene stand out from Truffaut's *oeuvre*, since he generally avoided tourist sites.

### **SLIDE - Epilogue**

The intertitle, 'EPILOGUE', read out by Truffaut as voiceover narrator, marks off the scene from the main narrative. The voiceover then tells us that 'Fifteen years have passed like a breath'. Thus, after the intertitle, Truffaut's voiceover suddenly shifts from recounting moments in the characters' lives to surveying an era. Time is no longer linear; it has become parallel and relativist. He says 'fifteen years' three times. In each case the era measured is of a different nature: fifteen years in Muriel's life; the First World War; and a period of changes in the reception of Rodin's 'Monument to Balzac'. Juxtaposed in this way, personal, socio-political and cultural histories are presented as alternative ways to remember time.

The voiceover combines the terseness of a newsreel with conscientious objection: 'Fifteen years!...The earth of France is full of corpses and shrapnel. Many millions of men have died in a war whose causes have already been forgotten.'

### **SLIDE - Balzac**

It then goes on to state that Rodin's 'Balzac', once rejected, is now universally admired. The relationship between these observations is ambiguous. There is an anti-war sentiment here, which suggests that measuring time by art is more productive than measuring it by military history. However, there could also be a causal connection: war alters the world's aesthetic perception; Rodin's externalisation of Balzac's mind now seems appropriate to a nation whose physical surfaces have been altered by war. Truffaut's elliptical voiceover does not provide the connection for us. It leaves gaps, spaces for the audience to form inferences.

### **SLIDE – The Burghers of Calais**

The announcement about the First World War is spoken over a shot of 'The Burghers of Calais'. This statue portrays an event in the Hundred Years War, when Calais was besieged by the British. Edward III promised to spare Calais in exchange for hostages, who would be hanged. The hostages were later shown mercy. But Rodin's sculpture captures them at the moment when death seems imminent; rather than heroic, they are emaciated. The epilogue takes place in the 1920s, while the voiceover refers to the First World War and the statue to 1347. This layering of time is again elliptical and ambiguous. The reference to two wars suggests a continuity of futile conflict across history. There is a hint, too, of revisionist historiography. History tells us that, in 1347, Britain was France's enemy, but not in 1914-1918. Is there an unorthodox implication in this shot, about Britain's alliance with France in the First World War? The appearance of 'The Burghers of Calais' also recalls an earlier sequence set in Calais, when Muriel loses her virginity. This is a double sacrifice: Muriel

momentarily gives up her Puritanism to bring closure to her relationship with Claude. He sacrifices his relationship with her in order to 'arm her as a woman', according to the voiceover narration. Effectively, he has sex with her so that she can leave him for good. Claude's humiliation when Muriel departs is echoed in the Burghers' humiliation.

### **SLIDE – Ugolino**

After the shot of the Burghers of Calais, there is a shot of the sculpture 'Ugolino and his Children'. In Dante's *Inferno*, Ugolino tells how he was imprisoned with his sons and ate their corpses. The sculpture is situated on an island in an ornamental lake. English schoolgirls run around the lake's edge. The sculpture has a closed form, showing Ugolino bent over, his children climbing under and over him. The closed form – humans turned in on themselves – anticipates cannibalism. On one level, this shot, following the voiceover's comment about the war, implies that masculinity has consumed itself in the futile conflict. Men have died, leaving women behind. English schoolgirls are seen throughout the epilogue and they are always running. Here, the schoolgirls are presented as Europe's future: a future without men. On another level, the sculpture is pertinent to the film's narrative. The insularity connoted in the film's title – English women versus the Continent – is inverted here. The male characters, Ugolino and his sons, are isolated on the island, immobile, as the English girls run on the mainland. Claude, who chose earlier in the film to become a writer rather than to have children, has, in a sense, allowed this choice to consume his potential fatherhood.

The contrast between the stillness of the sculptures and the dynamism of the running girls does not necessarily mean that art freezes time. Truffaut emphasises that art exists in time and is transformed by history.

### **SLIDE – Balzac**

The voiceover points to the changing reception of Rodin's 'Balzac'; the social meaning of the sculpture has metamorphosed over time. Other shifts in attitudes to Rodin's work occurred after the 1920s. The reputation of his work decreased dramatically in the 1930s. A revival began in the 1950s, which gathered pace in the 1960s. Truffaut's deployment of Rodin's sculptures in the epilogue is a late example of this revival; the voiceover's comment brings to mind this second wave of Rodin appreciation.

Rodin's 'Balzac' itself embodies a turning point. Its referent, a canonical novelist, points back to nineteenth-century realism. However, the form of the sculpture, which externalises Balzac's mind (as interpreted by Rodin) can be seen as modernist.

### **SLIDE – *Balzac*: the first appearance**

'Balzac' first appears earlier in the film, just before Claude and Anne first kiss. In this earlier scene, the sculpture's groundbreaking form anticipates Claude's and Anne's experiments in love. Only the statue is shown. The camera tracks around the sculpture, embodying an abstract aesthetic perspective, rather than an optical point of view.

**SLIDE – *Balzac in the Epilogue***

However, by the end of the film, when a war-torn earth full of shrapnel has habituated the Continent to physical forms turned inside out, the sculpture is admired by all. In the epilogue, we see Claude standing by the monument. It is the sculpture's referent that now seems to dominate, as Balzac-the-canonical-novelist towers over Claude, who has become an aesthete in decline. Claude is trapped in a transient existence which seems issueless; there is no mention of his writing at the end of the film.

**SLIDE – zoom into *Balzac***

The camera's zoom into 'Balzac' reveals the signs of weathering on the sculpture. Like this patina, changing social responses to the sculpture form a palimpsest: layers of meaning accumulate over the artwork. Another image of history-as-palimpsest follows soon after. Claude hears English schoolgirls' voices and hopes that Muriel's daughter is among them. At this point the narration shifts towards subjectivity.

**SLIDE – Muriel photograph**

We see a shot representing Claude's memory of a photograph of Muriel, aged ten. The shot is a reproduction of a close-up from the start of the film, showing the photograph in Claude's hands. However, the monochrome of the photograph now covers the framing image of Anne's hand, too. Another layer of pastness has accumulated.



### **SLIDE - Claude's searching**

The voiceover then abandons its characteristic distance and adopts free indirect discourse to present Claude's thoughts: 'And if one of them were Muriel's daughter, on holiday in Paris? This one, that one, or the small redhead?' The camera alternates between Claude's optical point of view and a reverse shot of his searching gaze. This gaze fails, as the girls, who play hide and seek, all elude it, running in and out of shot.

Instead, Claude's eyes fall on Rodin's 'The Kiss'.

### **SLIDE – The Kiss and Muriel**

Truffaut points us towards this sculpture's historical source: as the camera tracks around it, a girl shouts 'Francesca', which is also the name of the woman represented by 'The Kiss'. The sculpture depicts a moment from another story recounted in Dante's *Inferno*: that of Francesca's affair with her husband's brother, Paolo. Francesca and Paolo were killed by the husband. Love triangles proliferate: *The Kiss* echoes Rodin's concurrent relationships with Marie-Rose Beuret and Camille Claudel. In the film it also recalls the kiss between Muriel and Claude, in Anne's studio, where Muriel seizes him in the same way that Francesca grasps Paolo.

### **SLIDE – *The Kiss* and alternative couples**

At the start of the shot, two English girls walk between a man and a woman on the left and the sculpture on the right. The shot suggests three potential couples: a bourgeois husband and wife; two schoolgirls who could be siblings; and, in the sculpture itself,

adulterous lovers. It thus presents the film's trilemma: three options, all unfavourable because they exclude a third person. These can only be held together for a moment, because of the tensions between them.

### **SLIDE - Disappearances**

As the camera tracks around, the girls run off, the man and woman disappear, and Francesca and Paolo vanish behind a tree: in time, everything fades from view. Everything is ephemeral. Claude's gaze fails to transfix even a sculpture and he also disappears momentarily.

### **SLIDE - Reflection**

Claude then pauses to look at his reflection in a taxi's window. Again, Claude's arc is placed in a wider historical context; his ghostly reflection is framed by the car, an icon of modernity, with its security-glass windows. He adjusts the frames of his spectacles for the second time in the sequence. His glasses – which signify his having aged – emphasise the framing. Suddenly, Claude's deeds seem all the more evanescent.

### **SLIDE – The Gate**

He walks through the museum's gate, surrounded by young English girls. They offer hope for the future, but not to Claude, who is carried along in a flood of youth, out of the film's story world. The characters leave the museum like actors exiting a stage.

Except for its first shot, of the Browns' cottage, the epilogue is set entirely in the museum garden; the museum's walls seem to delimit its story world. Even the taxi is *inside* the garden. The epilogue contains reverberations from earlier parts of the film; the film's plot has become another relic in the museum. The museum becomes a microcosm, a synecdoche for this and other stories' worlds. In this space, histories rub shoulders with one another.

The gate is a self-conscious marker post for the end of the plot time. There is a jump cut and epilogue closes on a freeze frame of the museum gateway. It is as if this image of a gateway has been caught in the camera's gate. Cinema's illusion of moving images is arrested and made evident. Like Rodin's 'The Kiss', in which the lovers seem to sit on the rest of the material from which they have been carved, the film reveals its material basis in still images.

### **SLIDE - Vignettes**

After this emphasis on the materiality of the film, the end credits appear with vignettes of the characters in motion, taken from earlier scenes. It seems that the film has been stopped and reversed. Time can only be regained through cinema, which is revealed to be an illusion.

### **SLIDE - Blank**

The tragic tone at the end of the film captures pathos - Claude fails to regain time. But it balances this with poetic justice: Claude and Anne's betrayal of Muriel leads them

to premature ageing and death, respectively. In this respect, the epilogue's role is similar to that of mainstream epilogues.

### **SLIDE - Branigan**

Edward Branigan argues that 'The *epilogue* is the moral lesson implicit' in a film's plot. However, the epilogue of *Les Deux Anglaises et le Continent* is more ambiguous than a simple moral lesson. The film celebrates the characters' search for new experiences, in spite of the flux of time. The epilogue does not only reflect on these experiences; it opens the film out. The *Musée Rodin* becomes a stage for Claude's remembrances. But with its sculptures and their narratives from different eras, the museum is also like a time machine, taking us to the 1920s, to the 1280s, to 1347, to Rodin's time and to museum gardens as they looked in 1971. An essayistic space is created, through which the epilogue reflects on time, history, memory, art and the materiality of film itself.

### **SLIDE – Blank**

Other historians and theorists of film narrative have described how even in the most mainstream films epilogues can at once reassert narrative closure and open up the film as text, breaking its realism in a controlled way. Garrett Stewart has written about the combination of freeze frames with a character's death at the end of a film as a 'controlled rupture' of the still frame into the illusionism of film's moving image. The epilogue of *Les Deux Anglaises* provides no closure as definite as a death and its contrasts between movement and stillness suggest a pervasive instability. Claude's

wanderings have become aimless amidst broader histories. In the essayistic space of the museum, the film plays a hide-and-seek game with history and finds itself: that is, its materiality. An unstable tissue of temporal layers is unearthed, at the heart of which is the film strip.

Sculpture is the main device with which this temporal opening out is achieved.

Statues do not move, but narratives can be embedded in them, which, in turn, cinema can create the illusion of reanimating. In Truffaut's film these are forking narratives; 'The Burghers of Calais', 'Ugolino and his Children', and 'The Kiss' all capture history *in medias res*. We know what happens next: the Burghers will be released, Ugolino will eat his children and Francesca and Paolo will be killed by the cuckold. However, Rodin has sculpted each moment in such a way that a different finale seems more likely. The Burghers look like they will die. The children look like they will eat Ugolino. Francesca and Paolo are locked in a kiss that does not seem fatal. In the film, then, the sculptures become emblems for the type of moment in which they feature: an epilogue in which narratives have multiplied. It becomes clear that history can be told in many different ways: in the gaps between these narratives, meta-historiography and materiality rear their heads.

### **SLIDE – Rohmer picture**

Rodin and sculpture were both referred to in the French theoretical writings on cinema which preceded the French New Wave films. Back in the mid-1950s, Eric Rohmer wrote a series of articles in *Cahiers du Cinema* entitled 'Le Celluloid et le

Marbre'. Rohmer attempted to argue for a cinematic realism, by comparing film with the plastic arts. He makes little reference to sculpture, but he states that:

**SLIDE – Rohmer Quotation**

'Despite the doubts one may have about the fragility of celluloid that supports the film's emulsion, now we can claim that celluloid resists the decay of time much better than the hardest marble of Paros.'

**SLIDE – Rohmer picture**

Although his article's investment is in realism, Rohmer points to the materiality of film and compares it with the materiality of sculptures.

This relation is at the heart of the Truffaut film, in which proximity to materiality of sculpture is part of a strategy in which the static frame of the film strip and the multiple choices in storytelling are pointed to.

**SLIDE – freeze frame and blow-ups**

So, the epilogue ends with its freeze frame and earlier in the film, Truffaut reveals the film grain with some blown-up shots. However, the closer Truffaut brings us to the materiality of film, to forking paths of storytelling and to the openness of an essayistic space, the more he and composer Georges Delerue immerse us in affect. There is a kind of anti-Brechtian strategy at work in the epilogue, a romantic modernism, which combines self-reflexivity with overwhelmingly emotive melodrama.