



## ***Nouveau Noir: Claude Chabrol's Ophélie, Shakespeare's Hamlet, and the Nouvelle Vague***

Douglas LANIER

“The only true criticism of a film is another film.”

Jacques Rivette, *Cahiers du cinéma* 84, 1958

In a seminal discussion of the popular legacy of *Hamlet*, Linda Charnes argues that Shakespeare's play offers “the first fully *noir* text in Western literature, and Prince Hamlet [...] the first *noir* revenger”, the work and character which definitively inaugurate the ontological *ethos* of *noir* literature and film and from within whose psychoanalytic coordinates *noir* works take their cultural power. “Situating a plot-driven classical revenge tragedy within the recursive circularity and ethical indeterminacy that characterize *noir*”, she argues, “Shakespeare's *Hamlet* is modernity's inaugural paranoid text”<sup>1</sup>. Though Charnes's discussion focuses on Zeffirelli's 1990 film *Hamlet* and its degraded counterpart *LA Story* (dir. Mick Jackson, 1991), it is Laurence Olivier's 1948 film adaptation which most explicitly acknowledges the relationship between *Hamlet* and *film noir* by recasting Shakespeare's play within the visual vocabulary and pathological psychology of detective films of the 40s<sup>2</sup>. The deep shadows, diagonal compositions and layered deep-focus shots, the treatment of *mise-en-scène* at Elsinore as a symbolic extension of Hamlet's psychological state, the prevailing atmosphere of oppressiveness, surveillance and vexed sexuality,

1. Linda Charnes, “Dismember Me: Shakespeare, Paranoia and the Logic of Mass Culture”, *Shakespeare Quarterly* 48.1, Spring 1997, p. 4.

2. What constitutes *film noir*—is it a genre, mode, visual style, set of themes or psychological scenario?—is a matter of considerable debate among film scholars. For a sampling of positions, see *The Film Noir Reader*, ed. Alain Silver and James Ursini, New York, Limelight Editions, 2004, p. 3-127.



the use of voice-over (and in one instance, the camera) to give the viewer access to Hamlet's mind, the visual isolation of Olivier's Hamlet from the community, Hamlet's status as troubled hero-avenger rendered impotent by the pervasive corruption emanating from the grotesque "father-figure" in power—all point toward Olivier's strategy to position his film *Hamlet* within the conventions of *film noir*.

Olivier's decision to treat *Hamlet* as a *noir* film pursues several goals at once, not all of them compatible or uncontroversial. First of all, he pursues a reciprocal exchange of cultural authority between popular and elite culture which, for the time, was somewhat daring. *Hamlet* is not just a canonical work but in many ways *the* very embodiment of a classic, one that has come to stand in for the very idea of a Shakespeare in the popular imagination. Thus Olivier's recasting *Hamlet* in the stylistic and thematic terms of a popular cinematic genre, particularly one so closely associated with low-budget B-films, was a bid to make the play more appealing, intelligible, and, frankly, marketable to film audiences, a means for avoiding the dead weight of "the classic" in the popular marketplace. At the same time, Olivier's pursuit of thematic links between *film noir* and *Hamlet* creates, for *noir*, a high cultural pedigree, retrospectively making the popular genre foundationally Shakespearean. To put the matter schematically, in Olivier's *Hamlet*, *noir* offers Shakespeare popular appeal and Shakespeare offers *noir* prestige. But matters may not be so simple as that. Olivier's decidedly polished, "quality" deployment of *noir* stylistic flourishes has none of the rough-and-ready quality of lighting and camerawork that give the genre the distinctive visual quality which so attracted the *Cahiers* group, a quality which signaled directorial ingenuity using modest means and thus the presence of an *auteur*. What's more, though Olivier's emphasis upon Hamlet's Oedipal impasse is thoroughly in accord with the conventions of *noir*, Olivier is unwilling to give his Hamlet very much of the ignobility, self-loathing and moral compromise—in short, the quality of castration—so typical of *noir* protagonists. He may be plagued by doubt and Oedipal qualms, but by the end Olivier's Hamlet achieves the full vigor of a classical Hollywood hero, leaping Errol-Flynn style from the parapet to dispatch Claudius. The heroic clarity Olivier gives Hamlet in the final reel would seem to violate the distinction that, Charnes argues, exists between classic and *noir* detective tales. In classic detective tales, she notes, the logic-and-detection structure assumes that the protagonist can, by solving a single crime, correct a disruption in the ethical order (there is a "law of the father" to be restored). In *noir*, by contrast, the discovery of a single crime simply leads everywhere, to confirmation of the knowledge that corruption is systemic and overwhelming and that the "father" at the heart of power is obscene. My point here is that though Olivier's *Hamlet*



evokes an affiliation with *film noir* through style and theme to which subsequent filmmakers have returned, there is an argument to be made that in Olivier's film itself the siren-song of the quality costume drama was too difficult to resist. The affiliation between *Hamlet* and *noir* in his film is arguably no more than skin-deep.

Olivier inaugurates a cinematic tradition of treating *Hamlet* as *film noir*—examples include Kozintsev's *Gamlet* (1964), Zeffirelli's *Hamlet* (1990, so Charnes argues), and Almereyda's *Hamlet* (2000), to name a few—though these films inflect *noir* in different ways (Kozintsev conceives his film as political *noir*, Almereyda conceives of his as corporate *noir*). Just as interesting, the tradition of *noir* screen Hamlets has prompted an interesting counter-tradition, a loose group of lesser-known films that are much less faithful to *Hamlet* in order to be more faithful to their directors' visions of the *noir* ethos. This diffuse counter-tradition—it is unlikely these filmmakers are aware of each other's work—includes several underappreciated *Hamlet* screen adaptations, Helmut Käutner's *Der Rest ist Schweigen* (*The Rest Is Silence*, 1959), Akira Kurosawa's *The Bad Sleep Well* (1960), Aki Kaurismäki's *Hamlet liikemaailmassa* (*Hamlet Goes Business*, 1987) and Stacy Title's *Let the Devil Wear Black* (1999). These films critically engage the conjunction of *Hamlet* and *film noir* with a revisionary, even deconstructive vigor, as they are engaged in making *Hamlets noirs* of their own. Here I want to take up Claude Chabrol's *Ophélie*, his largely neglected 1962 modernized adaptation of *Hamlet*, though, I hope to demonstrate, labeling it as such may be problematic. Chabrol's film has hardly gotten a mention in critical accounts of screen Shakespeare<sup>3</sup>. Beyond short appreciations by Bernice W. Kliman and Kenneth S. Rothwell<sup>4</sup>, there are only two substantial discussions of *Ophélie* by Shakespeareans, one a psychoanalytic study of the film's recasting of *Hamlet*'s Oedipal structures of identification and repetition<sup>5</sup>, the other a contextualization of the film as

3. Chabrol scholars have paid less and less attention to *Ophélie*, despite its pivotal position between Chabrol's early, somewhat experimental films and his later, more commercial and conventional thrillers. See Robin Wood and Michael Walker, *Claude Chabrol*, New York, Praeger, 1970, p. 71-74; Guy Braucourt, *Claude Chabrol*, Paris, Éditions Seghers, 1971, p. 42-43; and Joël Magny, *Claude Chabrol*, Paris, *Cahiers du Cinéma*, 1987, p. 87-90. In the most recent English language book on Chabrol, Guy Austin's *Claude Chabrol* (Manchester, Manchester University Press, 1999), *Ophélie* is hardly given a mention.

4. Bernice W. Kliman, "Chabrol's *Ophélie*: Mirror for *Hamlet*", *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter* 3, December 1978, p. 1 and 8; and Kenneth S. Rothwell, *A History of Shakespeare on Screen: A Century of Film and Television*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 177-178.

5. Karen Newman, "Ghostwriting: *Hamlet* and Claude Chabrol's *Ophélie*", in *Essaying Shakespeare*, Minneapolis, University of Minnesota Press, 2009, p. 77-84, previously published in *The Scope of Words*, ed. Peter Baker, Sarah Webster Goodwin, and Gary



a parody within independent Shakespearean filmmaking in the fifties and sixties<sup>6</sup>. Useful though these studies may be, my interest here is in how psychoanalysis and film history might be brought to bear on each other.

Chabrol was a central figure in the *nouvelle vague* in its glory years, and his relationship to that group of filmmakers was complicated. His choice to engage *Hamlet* so early in his career is in itself noteworthy, particularly so given the *Cahiers* group's hostility to literary adaptations in French filmmaking<sup>7</sup>. But what makes his adaptation all the more intriguing is that it is the first film to portray its Hamlet as a filmmaker. *Ophélia* offers us a film-within-a-film that reflects not only upon the *nouvelle vague* filmmaker's relationship to his audience, but also upon the misrecognitions and Oedipal dynamics that underlie the *nouvelle vague*'s mythologization of the cinematic *auteur*. The remarkable self-consciousness of *Ophélia*, I will argue, extends in several directions at once—to the seductive power of the *Hamlet* narrative and particularly its Oedipal scenario, to *film noir* as an expression of modern angst and a genre of mythic stature within New Wave film culture, to Olivier's film as an ambivalently *noir* adaptation of *Hamlet* and a mythologization of his own stature, and to the ways in which New Wave filmmakers conceived of themselves as intellectuals and their relationship to film tradition. The Oedipal psychoanalytic drama *Hamlet* plays out and which Olivier revived in his quasi-*noir* film version becomes Chabrol's vehicle for reconsidering the self-created myths of the *nouvelle vague* just at the moment when the first wave of excitement over its early successes had begun to crest.

To understand Chabrol's use of *Hamlet*, it is necessary to sketch out the *nouvelle vague*'s place in French cinematic culture of the late fifties<sup>8</sup>. The *nouvelle vague* had its origins with a group of young film critics associated

Handwerk, New York, Peter Lang, 1991, p. 161-178. An earlier version appeared under the title "Chabrol's *Ophélia*" in *Shakespeare on Film Newsletter*, March, 1982, p. 1 and 9.

6. Anthony Guneratne, chapter "French Connections, of the *Auteur* Paradox", *Shakespeare, Film Studies, and the Visual Cultures of Modernity*, New York, Palgrave Macmillan, 2008, p. 207-208. Guneratne's primary focus is on how intercinematic allusions in the period contribute to Orson Welles's developing persona as an independent Shakespearean *auteur*.

7. The story was by Paul Gégauff, Chabrol's longtime collaborator and co-screenwriter throughout much of his early period. In addition to *Ophélia*, Gégauff co-wrote and Chabrol directed *Les Cousins* (1959), *À double tour* (1959), *Les Bonnes femmes* (1960), *Les Biches* (1968), *Que la bête meure* (1969), *La Décade prodigeuse* (1971), *Docteur Popaul* (1972), *Une partie de plaisir* (1975), and *Les Magiciens* (1976).

8. This overview draws upon James Monaco, *The New Wave*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1976; Alan Williams, *Republic of Images: A History of French Filmmaking*, Cambridge, MA, Harvard University Press, 1992; Richard Neupert, *A History of the French New Wave*, Madison, University of Wisconsin Press, 2002; Naomi Greene,



with the journal *Cahiers du cinéma*, who mounted a fierce critique of the *tradition de qualité*, the ideological foundation of postwar film production in France. *La tradition de qualité* consisted of films, many of them literary adaptations or melodramas made largely by older directors, with lavish production values, theatrical performances, and well-known stars. Emphasis fell on stylistic elegance and polish. By the mid-fifties this had become a state-sanctioned aesthetic, a means to promulgate dominant standards of taste and a mode for “branding” French cinema in the wider marketplace, for it was difficult to find production support without sanction of the Institut des hautes études cinématographiques (IDHEC) and Centre national de cinématographie (CNC), both of which promoted the *tradition de qualité*. As critics, the so-called Young Turks at *Cahiers*—Truffaut, Godard, Rivette, Rohmer, and Chabrol—forcefully attacked this tradition, and when they turned to filmmaking, their films reflected their oppositional sensibility. Their revolt focused on three elements. First, the emphasis on the verbal elegance of screenplays and prestige of the literary materials screenwriters chose to adapt placed purely filmic elements—image, editing, *mise-en-scène*—in a subordinate position to the word. This the Young Turks regarded as a betrayal of cinema’s basic nature as an art form. Second, the prevalence of nineteenth-century costume drama, crime pictures, and melodrama crowded out portrayal of the realities of contemporary life, especially the life of the young generation from which *nouvelle vague* filmmakers sprang. For that reason the Young Turks lionized Italian neo-realism and documentary, for these, they argued, were styles committed to capturing life as it is, free of generic constraints. Third, and most important for *Ophélie*, the Young Turks rebelled against what they regarded as bourgeois notions of taste and propriety that the *tradition de qualité* exemplified<sup>9</sup>. Their revolt was not merely against an older cinematic style and institutions of production, but also against the cultural domination of the ruling class and generation. Indeed, the term *nouvelle vague* originally referred to the young generation who came of age in the fifties; it was applied to cinema only after the Cannes Film festival in 1959, when the popular press linked the new youth culture to the Young Turks’ series of films about it<sup>10</sup>. In short, the *nouvelle vague* saw its work in terms of a struggle against an oppressive older generation intent upon enforcing its cultural orthodoxy. Truffaut’s snide phrase for the *tradition de qualité*,

*The French New Wave: A New Look*, London, Wallflower Press, 2007; and *The French New Wave: Critical Landmarks*, ed. Peter Graham with Ginette Vincendeau, London, Palgrave Macmillan, 2009.

9. They affronted “proper” French taste, for example, by championing elements of American popular culture, elevating American genre directors to the status of *auteurs*.

10. See Greene, p. 11.



“*le cinéma de papa*”, reveals that this generational antagonism had a potent Oedipal dimension<sup>11</sup>.

Related to this struggle were the ways in which *Cahiers* critics reconceptualized the status of the film director. It is well known—and controversial at the time—that they elevated those directors with a distinctive visual style and thematic concern to the level of *auteur*, the cinematic equivalent of literary author. But their elevation of the director meant more than identifying certain directors’ unique visual or thematic signatures. Building upon André Bazin’s discussions of the unique capacity of the photographic image to transform our perception of the world it captures, many *Cahiers* critics stressed the director’s unique mission to pursue truth through film, stripping away the artificiality of genre and stylistic polish to reveal contemporary reality in all its power and ambiguity. The genuine *auteur*, they asserted, was not just a skilled visual craftsman but a person of ideas, a heroic intellectual with a camera battling individually, bravely, and often quixotically against ossified, artificial aesthetic standards and outmoded bourgeois mores. Though the Young Turks pursued this sense of mission in quite different ways when they became filmmakers, their understanding of film directing as heroic intellectual work quickly became part of the self-created mythology of the *nouvelle vague*. They sought to establish themselves as intellectuals working in film and filmmaking as form of philosophical inquiry and ideological critique. Framed in this way, it may be easier to see why *Hamlet* might prove attractive for Chabrol in his critical meditation on filmmaking. For, since the Romantic period, Hamlet has been a powerful, seductive model for the disaffected, counter-cultural intellectual—the sensitive idealist disappointed by the corruption he senses around him, who engages in a campaign of affront and mad resistance against the status quo the motto of which might be *épater la bourgeoisie*. Updating that model with an eye toward concerns of the French cinematic avant-garde, Chabrol at the same time critically engages, quite savagely in the end, the seductiveness of Hamlet as a cultural icon.

Like other *Cahiers* group films of the late fifties and early sixties, Chabrol’s early *œuvre* is fascinated with the generational divide between emergent urban youth culture (the original meaning of *nouvelle vague*) and the dominant, class-oriented mores of the day. Unlike his filmmaking peers, however, Chabrol’s take on youth culture’s flouting of bourgeois convention tends to be ambivalent. Chabrol’s first two films, *Le Beau Serge* (1958) and *Les Cousins* (1959), underlines both his attraction to and dis-

11. In her introductory essay for *The French New Wave*, Ginette Vincendeau explicitly identifies Truffaut’s attack upon the *tradition de qualité* as an “insolent oedipal rebellion” (“Fifty Years of the French New Wave: From Hysteria to Nostalgia”, p. 3).



comfort with youth culture's rejection of tradition. Though *Le Beau Serge* photographs the rhythms and rituals of French village life<sup>12</sup> in loving neo-realist style, the self-destructive downward spiral of Serge stresses just how hidebound, boring and repressed—in a word, provincial—the reality of rural existence was. Even Serge's friend from the city, François, is unable to rescue him. By contrast, *Les Cousins* portrays the intoxicating freedom and vibrancy of urban youth culture through Paul, a law student who introduces his provincial cousin Charles to the pleasures of bohemian student life in Paris. Paul's life has all the intellectual and sensual excitement and anti-bourgeois rebelliousness that Serge's lacks<sup>13</sup>. As the film moves along, however, Chabrol's unease with Paul's decadence and authoritarianism becomes more and more palpable as Paul destroys his milquetoast cousin's chance at conventional success and eventually accidentally shoots him dead.

In different ways, Chabrol's next two films, *À double tour* (1959) and *Les Bonnes femmes* (1960), wed his ambivalence about youth culture with the basic architecture of the psychological crime thriller, what would become Chabrol's signature genre in years to come. The clash of youth culture with older bourgeois sensibilities is particularly apparent in *À double Tour*. The bourgeois perspective is represented by Henri Marcoux, a middle-aged patriarch of a wealthy family who is trapped in a loveless marriage, afraid to leave his controlling wife for his next-door mistress Léda out of fear of scandal. His youthful opposite is Laszlo Kovacs, the freewheeling boyfriend of Henri's daughter Elisabeth. Played with verve by Jean-Paul Belmondo, Laszlo exudes the youthful rebelliousness Belmondo would make iconic in his next film, Godard's *À bout de souffle* (1960). He enters the film driving a sports car to a jazz theme, and upon arrival at the Marcoux estate, he unguiltily indulges his sensual appetites by eating a huge meal and getting drunk. Laszlo's behavior is calculated to offend Henri's uptight wife Thérèse, who is appalled by what she sees as his unrefined manners. When Laszlo learns of Henri's affair with Léda, he openly urges Henri to leave his wife and pursue his passion without fear of what others might think. Soon Léda is found murdered, and the culprit is revealed to be Henri's son Richard. With Richard, the family's concern with maintaining bourgeois status and propriety has hardened into pathology. Despite the fact that he is idle, he wears a formal business suit and he doesn't venture far from the family villa. In contrast to Laszlo and his taste for American jazz, Richard is a cultural elitist, listening obses-

12. It was filmed in Sardinia, where Chabrol lived with his grandmother during the Occupation.

13. Charles is actually played by the same actor as Serge (Gérard Blain).



sively to classical records in his room and often pretending to direct the music; he even plays a classical record during Léda's murder. Fixated on his mother and social propriety (the ostensible motive for the murder is to protect her from scandal), Richard's sexuality is deeply repressed, for in the film's first scene we see him secretly peering through a peephole at the family's buxom maid. In fact, Richard's speech during the murder scene makes clear that his killing of Léda is a revenge upon the sensuality and liberated sensibility she represents to him. It is telling, then, that the film culminates in a fight between Laszlo and Richard over the crime, for the film as a whole is a contest between the perspectives Laszlo and Richard represent. And yet Chabrol's savage critique of bourgeois attitudes is here not without ambivalence. Even though the sensibility Richard perversely embodies is revealed to be destructive, the sumptuous photography of the Marcoux villa and its pleasures nevertheless suggests that Chabrol is not willing to reject bourgeois tradition entirely.

*Les Bonnes femmes* heightens even further the ambivalence of Chabrol's earlier films, this time concentrating on the lives of four shopgirls in contemporary Paris. As in *Les Cousins*, *Les Bonnes femmes* offers glimpses of the freedom and exhilaration of city life, particularly in the nightclub and pool scenes, with Jane, the most free-spirited of the quartet, embodying the spontaneity and sexual liberation of youth. But it is equally clear that despite the delights Paris offers and their romantic dreams, these women cannot escape the prison of conventional patriarchy. As the opening scene of the film outside a strip club makes abundantly clear, these women are subject to the predatory sexual gazes of men, and lonely and often bored, these women are in different ways vulnerable to those gazes. Chabrol photographs the women at the shop where they work so as to emphasize how they are like goods for display, like the household appliances they sell. Even Rita, who alone among the group has found love, feels the constraints of bourgeois gender roles when she is coached by her fiancé how to act around his imperious upper-class father, in a scene which critiques bourgeois propriety but also registers Rita's desperation to please. The shocking murder of Jacqueline by her lover at the film's end brutally demystifies the romanticizing of the lives of urban youth that was the stock and trade of *nouvelle vague* films. Notably in both *À double tour* and *Les Bonnes femmes*, young women are treated as symbols of youth culture, liberation and love, but in both those women end up killed by pathological expressions of the dominant culture in ways that deromanticize their victimization. This scenario—the young woman fated for death—certainly bears upon Chabrol's treatment of Ophelia.

Drawing on motifs and concerns from his earlier films, *Ophélie* is the culmination of Chabrol's increasingly ambivalent portrayals of the young-



er generation. What most sets this film apart in his early canon, however, is its direct engagement with filmmaking, in particular the *mythos* of the *nouvelle vague* filmmaker. Despite its title (more on that anon), *Ophélie* focuses on the Hamlet character of Chabrol's story, Yvan Lesurf, scion of a provincial bourgeois family. Nearly all commentators express admiration for the film's arresting opener, the funeral of Yvan's father Gabriel. Daringly, Chabrol presents the grief of Yvan and his mother Claudia from the dead father's perspective, ending the scene with the casket's lid being sealed shut and Yvan's voice piercing the darkness with the cry "Father!" This image immediately situates Yvan in existential crisis, bereft of inherited purpose and meaning, barred from access to "the law of the father"<sup>14</sup>. The following scene establishes a second source for Yvan's angst. We follow Gabriel's casket and the funeral procession into a church, the doors shut, and after the credits, the doors reopen, now revealing the exit of a wedding party headed by Claudia and Adrien, Yvan's uncle. This disorienting edit economically communicates the jarring haste of Claudia and Adrien's marriage, and it wittily links the *Hamlet* scenario with one of the *nouvelle vague*'s signature elements, the jump cut.

This opening sequence sets up the first of many parallels to *Hamlet*. Like Hamlet, Yvan is beset by a misanthropic melancholy and aimlessness catalyzed by his father's death and his mother's re-marriage, but which he extends to what he sees as universal corruption. Chabrol transforms Hamlet's soliloquies into vignettes in which Yvan walks alone in desolate, wintry fields, reciting poetry ("alone, [Bellerophon] wandered by the banks of the Allion, fleeing the paths trodden by mankind")<sup>15</sup>, casting himself as a crusader against the world's ugliness and moral indifference. These largely visual soliloquies are designed to establish that Yvan's campaign against Claudia and Adrien is more than adolescent petulance or grief—it springs from his philosophical, artistic sensibility. Like Shakespeare's Claudius, Adrien has risen to power through unethical dealings, though Chabrol keeps their exact nature obscure, and like Claudius, Adrien's control is shaky. Workers at the factory he has inherited have organized a strike, and the Lesurf estate is surrounded by guards to protect him from death threats (threats which one critic, on the basis of little evidence, has attributed to

14. When Yvan later returns to the Lesurf estate after the funeral, he finds himself literally locked out, unable to supply the password to the new guards; this also perhaps distantly echoes the "Who's there?" opener of *Hamlet*. Yvan's name hints at his resemblance to Dostoevsky's existential protagonist Ivan Karamazov, also isolated from the world, troubled by its injustice and suffering, and driven to anguish, guilt and ultimately madness by his father's murder; he is, as several commentators have observed, yet another incarnation of Hamlet.

15. My translation for the French "Seul, [Bellerophon] errait sur les rives d'Allion, dévorant son âme et fuyant les sentiers fréquentés par les hommes".

Yvan himself)<sup>16</sup>. Like Gertrude, Claudia tries to balance sympathy for her son's melancholy with loyalty to her new husband; her complicity in Adrien's unspecified "crimes" is hinted at but remains finally ambiguous. Several other details round out the parallels. Corresponding to Polonius is André, a coarse working-class foreman in the family's employ who serves as Adrien's fixer and conducts surveillance on Yvan; André's daughter is Lucy, the film's Ophelia figure, with whom Yvan begins a romance. Yvan's working-class confidante François fills the role of Horatio. And the film narrative also features many plot points corresponding to *Hamlet*: Lucy and Yvan break off their relationship; Yvan converses with a gravedigger in a local cemetery; Yvan formulates a plan to expose Adrien and Claudia with his film-within-the-film *The Mousetrap*; Yvan's *Mousetrap* escalates the tension between Adrian and Claudia, and André accidentally dies while spying on Yvan. Toward the end of the film, Yvan even begins to quote Hamlet's dialogue, observing mockingly to Adrien that André, upon his death, is now "at supper... not where he eats, but where he is eaten". The parallels are so unmistakable—and they concatenate as the story moves along—that the viewer simply cannot escape reading *Ophélie* through its relation to *Hamlet*. Indeed, it is precisely the dominating, oppressive presence of *Hamlet*, its status as an almost irresistible interpretive model for Yvan and the viewer, that is central to Chabrol's film.

At first Yvan's fury might seem focused on his mother's remarriage to his uncle, but in fact the central issue for Yvan is the couple's comfortable bourgeois existence, especially taken up so soon after Gabriel's death<sup>17</sup>. In *Ophélie* the loci of those bourgeois comforts are the sitting and dining rooms of the Lesurf manor. One early scene begins as an idyllic evening in a sitting room, the opening shot of a fire in the hearth. Claudia works on needlepoint as Adrien reads her love poetry. (That Adrien shares with Yvan a taste for poetry subtly anticipates the film's final revelation.) When Yvan enters, his disgust for the couple's unguilty domestic contentment and delight in art is palpable, and he immediately goes about using his own counter-art to disrupt their pleasure. When Adrien tries to continue reading, Yvan starts playing an aggressively atonal piano piece until, exasperated, Adrien just gives up, at which Yvan leaves the room. Throughout *Ophélie*, Yvan's actions are calculated to rupture the bourgeois self-content of Adrien and Claudia—their affection, their meals, their rapport with servants, their socializing. At one meal, Yvan, in order to create a

16. See Wood and Walker, p. 74.

17. Many critics have noted that Chabrol is repeatedly fascinated with the relationship between comforting daily pleasures of bourgeois life and the potential for shocking violence that lurks just beneath the surface. See Williams, p. 347; Monaco, p. 258-259; Austin, p. 43; and Greene, p. 70.



scene, accuses the servant Paul of spitting in the food because Adrien has mistreated him; at another he lobs class-coded insults—"You're hideous! You're dumb! You're old! You're vulgar!"—until Adrien erupts, at which Yvan pitches a fit. What Yvan wants is less to kill Adrien than to destroy his happiness, to make him feel as psychically bereft and angst-ridden as Yvan has come to feel.

Central to Chabrol's technique are principles of misperception and transference, both in the relationships between characters and between the film and its viewer. Chabrol often encourages his viewers to jump to conclusions about his characters' moral or psychological dispositions and then to confound those conclusions in the course of the story, sometimes with an unforeseen act of violence. He often pairs his main characters and treats them as opposites, an approach which encourages us initially to type-cast in simple binaries. As the story progresses, his paired characters come to exchange guilt, suspicion, egoism, insecurity or destructive potential from one to another. In this way, the viewer is forced to re-evaluate initial impressions, identifications and assumptions—characters we identify as "moral" or "immoral", "weak" or "strong", are revealed to be something other than what we first thought. As Chabrol himself puts it, "What interests me is to tease the audience along, to set it off chasing in one direction, and then to turn things inside out"<sup>18</sup>. His earliest films, *Le Beau Serge* and *Les Cousins*, both with paired protagonists, firmly establish this technique, though both accomplish the perceptual shift slowly. *Ophélie* follows this pattern, but with two crucial changes. First, Chabrol saves the perceptual shift for the last few scenes of the film, so that we and Yvan are allowed (indeed, encouraged) to retain our initial misperceptions far longer. Second, film—specifically Olivier's *Hamlet*—plays a pivotal narrative role.

Quite by chance Yvan happens upon Olivier's *Hamlet* playing at his local village theater, but the encounter is for him electrifying. As he lingers over the stills on display and hears Hamlet's dialogue with Claudius and Gertrude from 1.2 about being and seeming, Yvan experiences a revelation: he comes to see himself in terms of the heroic Hamlet of Olivier's film. (As Yvan has his epiphany, he is watched from above by a villager casually enjoying a cigarette, an ironic detail given the moment's impact on Yvan.) Immediately he pursues the identification. On a foggy window which evokes the screen itself, he works out an anagram between Elseneur (the French equivalent of Elsinore) and Ernélès, the village where he lives, as if the near correspondence of the letters magically confirmed the parallel. Yvan's identification with Olivier's *Hamlet* provides his otherwise inchoate disaffection and melancholy a sense of coherence, importance and

18. Quoted in Greene, p. 86.



“heroic” purpose. Underlining his propensity for role-playing and heroic identifications, he begins to perform grand fictional and historical roles in a mirror, a game which Lucy soon joins. It is as if Yvan were playing out Lacan’s mirror stage before us with the screen we see as mirror, figures of myth providing him ego ideals. This sequence ends with Yvan calling himself Hamlet and Lucy Ophelia, pulling Lucy’s black hair back and over a lamp in imitation of Jean Simmons’ drowned Ophelia. But after Yvan turns away from the window, Chabrol offers us a quick second shot of the foggy window, this time with the dripping letters unreadable and the view outside obscured, as if to clarify the extent to which Yvan’s identification with Hamlet has sealed him off from a clear view of the world.

As he tells his clueless friend François, he has become convinced that Adrien and Claudia have murdered his father, and now it has become his mission to terrorize the two into feeling guilty by making his film version of Hamlet’s *Mousetrap*. Here too the model of Olivier’s film is noteworthy—Yvan will become Hamlet the filmmaker, and film will become the principal instrument of his revenge. For Chabrol, this conjunction of filmmaker and Hamlet, a heroic conception of film *auteur*ship, is crucial to his concerns. The appearance of Olivier’s *Hamlet* in the film also confirms for the spectator the unmistakable parallels between Elseneur and Ernèlès we as viewers have been tracing all along, prompted by the film’s title *Ophélie* and “confirmed” by detail after detail. As Karen Newman argues in a perceptive reading of this scene, we are encouraged at this key moment by Chabrol’s camera to identify with Yvan’s perspective. Insofar as we accept his Hamlet-modeled version of events, we are encouraged to accede to his status as moral cinematic avenger, albeit a troubled one. In other words, Chabrol does much to coax us to accept Yvan’s newly-found model for the disaffected counter-cultural intellectual—Hamlet the heroic *auteur*. And, we might note that, in a further complication, insofar as we identify Olivier’s *Hamlet* with the conventions of *film noir*, this makes Yvan the hero of his own *noir* drama, the one who perceives a web of corruption and struggles to understand and confront it, in this case using his own film.

Running against Yvan’s anti-bourgeois campaign, however, is a very different cross-current, a working-class perspective on the Lesurf family’s circumstances. That viewpoint is established early in the film, when Yvan drops by a local bar after Claudia and Adrien’s marriage. A trio of workingmen are chuckling sardonically about the changes at the Lesurf estate, and their mocking giggles continue as Yvan awkwardly drinks a beer. Indeed, Chabrol includes a small moment which reveals much about class divisions in the village and Yvan’s status. When one of the workers goes to the bar to order a wine, he and Yvan lock eyes and stare at each



other tensely, Yvan's face filled with a mixture of unease and contempt. Unwilling openly to confront the man, Yvan takes out his contempt on the barmaid Ginette, insulting the torrid romance novel she's reading and rebuking her for responding to his flirtatious remarks<sup>19</sup>. After Yvan leaves, the men once again take up their conversation about the Lesurfs, with one worker proclaiming that "the husband's a good-for-nothing, the mother's a whore, and the son's..." making a gesture that he's crazy. For these men, the scenario in the Lesurf household has none of the mythic dimensions of Shakespeare or, for that matter, none of the psychologically-fraught drama of an Oedipal triangle. If Yvan comes to see himself as the protagonist seeking truth and justice in a corrupt world<sup>20</sup>, a Hamlet or a *noir* hero, for the workers this is just the typical decadence and dysfunction of the rich and powerful, the stuff of gossip. Repeatedly Chabrol returns to this "popular" perspective on the action, using it again and again to deflate the heroic dimension Yvan wants to give his situation.

This perspective extends to film itself. Whereas, like Hamlet, Yvan sees his film-within-the-film as crucial to his moral mission to reveal the truth and destroy the complacency of those in power, the townspeople of Ernèlès see cinema entirely in terms of popular entertainment. Moments before Yvan has his epiphany outside the cinema, we see ordinary folk also looking over the stills of Olivier's *Hamlet*, debating whether to enter and evaluating the film in terms of commercial genres. One man exclaims approvingly that the film has fighting, while another answers his girlfriend's objection that it's "historical" by claiming that it's a romance. Neither immediately recognizes it as a "classic" or even a *film noir*, and only belatedly does one spectator identify it as Shakespeare. (This comic vignette picks up on an earlier, throwaway moment in which, as Paul walks home, we overhear two guards discussing what the local cinema has on offer. One guard comments that he wants to see the film because it has sword fighting, though it has a strange title and must be, so he thinks, American. Only later do we discover that the film is *Hamlet*.) Here Chabrol's irony runs in two directions at once. Certainly he is mocking popular culture, but the pointed contrast with Yvan's response hints at his overinvestment in the power of film and the truth of *Hamlet*. Even François, Yvan's confidante

19. This moment distantly echoes Hamlet's rejection of Ophelia's affections, though it leads to none of the destructive effects it has in Shakespeare's version.

20. Jacques Rivette also explores the seductiveness of conspiratorial thinking in *Paris nous appartient* (1961). Interestingly, Shakespeare also figures in that narrative—much of the action centers around a rehearsal for a production of *Pericles*, the play's notoriously disjunct narrative serving as an index of the disjunction of events that Philip Kaufman (Daniel Crohem) weaves into a vast, compelling conspiracy theory that ultimately proves utterly false.





and the ironic Horatio of the film, shares this “popular” perspective. As Yvan explains to him his plan to make a film in order to expose Adrien’s crime (with a dead mouse on the table between the two!), François finds it difficult to follow his friend’s logic. He sees Yvan’s *Mousetrap* mostly as an opportunity to court Ginette. These sardonic moments—and the responses to Yvan’s film-within-the-film described below—suggest that his mission to use cinema as an instrument of truth and social change is misguided, compromised from the start.

*The Mousetrap* is the culmination of his strategy to *épater la bourgeoisie*. The story it tells is tawdry: while Mr Ferlus, a grocer, balances his accounts, his wife flirts with his brother Fred. Soon the two conspire to murder Ferlus with rat poison in his tea, and when they succeed, they dance obscenely around Ferlus’s dead body. Like Hamlet’s *Mousetrap*, this film-within-the-film constitutes a public accusation of Adrien and Claudia, since the film is shown to a gathering of their friends. In reality, of course, there is little to justify Yvan’s hypothesis. Unlike Shakespeare’s play, where the ghost of the father Old Hamlet returns to reveal Claudius’ crime, here it is only a chance encounter with Olivier’s *Hamlet* that prompts Yvan to conclude that his father was murdered. Even so—and this makes Chabrol’s film fascinating in its ambiguity—there is enough evidence of impropriety to encourage us to entertain Yvan’s hypothesis, at least on an initial viewing. Certainly Adrien is ruthless and perhaps underhanded in business, and it is also clear that he and Claudia had a relationship that predated Gabriel’s death. When we get a glimpse of Yvan as in the process of making *The Mousetrap*, we might expect that his film would have qualities of *nouvelle vague* realism, for, in a speech which echoes Hamlet’s instruction to the players, he tells his amateur actors to avoid theatricality and aim for naturalism—“I chose you because I want you to be you... Your role doesn’t exist. You exist. Understand?” It is deeply ironic, then, that the final product is so stunningly crude, squalid, and clichéd, a silent melodrama with overwrought performances. Ironically, Yvan’s film is an unintended version (and Chabrol’s parody) of the costume dramas so characteristic of the *tradition de qualité*. What seems most noteworthy about its showing, however, is Yvan’s authoritarian performance as master of ceremonies and narrator. He pushes his actors aside, demands his audience’s full attention, arrogantly snaps his fingers to start the show, and relishes narrating his cynical script about feminine treachery and the rewards of crime. As the film’s Hamlet-like *auteur*, Yvan has become a misanthropic moral tyrant.

As Yvan intends, Adrien and Claudia are devastated by the accusation of murder; the camera lingers on their horrified faces. Increasingly isolated by guilt and fighting over how to handle Yvan’s behavior, the idyllic rela-



tionship between the two quickly disintegrates. Other responses, however, point up the irony of Yvan's grand plan to expose his nemeses. Reaction shots of Lucy alternate with those of Adrien and Claudia, underlining how cruel she thinks Yvan has become. Throughout the entire film, one elderly matron laughs uncontrollably, and she comments "how droll!" as she exits. Adrien's guards, chatting as they leave, comment approvingly, "Crime pays. That's normal". If, as Yvan promises Lucy before the film, "Now the truth will out", it seems to have had little effect on the other filmgoers. After the crowd leaves, François asks obtusely, "What should I do now?" A long close-up captures Yvan as he mulls over a question which apparently had never occurred to him before, and he answers "Nothing". Even though Yvan sees himself as Hamlet, he never contemplates killing Adrien. For him, the film itself constitutes his revenge. To be sure, Adrien and Claudia are racked with guilt, just as Yvan desires. Yvan even has a bedroom confrontation with his guilty, grieving mother not unlike Hamlet's confrontation with Gertrude. Like Claudius, Adrien contemplates a plan to send Yvan away and sends André to spy on him, leading to his accidental death. But the narrative begins to part with *Hamlet*: André dies not because Yvan kills him but because he has a stroke in the sun; increasingly paranoid, Adrien resolves to murder Yvan, not through a second party but directly himself with a gun. He even gets so far as Yvan's darkened bedroom, but as he approaches, Yvan dramatically turns on the lamp and exposes his uncle's homicidal intentions, at which Adrien, overcome with shame, loses his nerve and flees<sup>21</sup>.

Soon after Yvan experiences his revelation outside the cinema, a minor character emerges who seems to offer oblique commentary on the unintended effects of Yvan's actions. This is the village idiot, employed as one of Adrien's guards. We first see him in the company of the head guard Sparkos as the two pass Yvan on his way to elicit François's help in making his film. As Yvan passes, the idiot is making shooting gestures, the motif with which he is associated throughout the film. He appears again when in an effort to feed Adrien's paranoia, Yvan stirs up the guards on the Lesurf estate by pretending to be an intruder. As they scatter across the property, the idiot, now armed with a real gun, wanders after them, giggling. Parting the bushes with his weapon raised, he nearly shoots Sparkos before the two proceed on their chase. That Yvan is ultimately the catalyst that leads to this near accident links the two. The idiot becomes more dangerous and

21. This detail alludes to a moment in *Strangers on a Train* (1951) by Alfred Hitchcock, one of Chabrol's cinematic idols. The reference helps subtly to re-characterize both Yvan and Adrien, for in Hitchcock's version the encounter is between Bruno Antony, a murderous madman, and Guy Haines, the innocent man he terrorizes. It is Antony who turns on the light.



more clearly associated with Yvan later in the film, when in a tense wordless sequence we see the idiot once again fooling around with his gun. As he does, Lucy, returning from the market, crosses the field where he stands guard. Not knowing what he is doing, the idiot takes aim and fires, barely missing her and hitting her basket of eggs. The purpose of this otherwise enigmatic scene is to underline again the unpredictable and destructive chain of events Yvan has set in motion. Like the idiot, Yvan the filmmaker is slowly revealed to be an uncomprehending fool who wields a weapon he doesn't fully comprehend. That Yvan is associated with the idiot is made clear by the parallelism of scenes: in the scene immediately prior, André, the Polonius character of the film, engages in surveillance of Yvan because Adrien, upset by Yvan's film, orders him to do so. Having hidden himself in a tree, André dies of a stroke as he reaches for the eggs in a jay's nest, an indirect victim of Yvan's machinations. Notably, the idiot also makes a cameo appearance after Yvan shows his film. The last spectator to exit and giggling uncomprehendingly, he offers Yvan a congratulatory flower which Yvan bats from his hand, yet another indication of Yvan's lack of self-recognition.

The film's ending is a remarkable bit of narrative daring, turning Yvan's and the spectator's perspectives on their heads. As morning breaks, we learn that Adrien has poisoned himself, ironically taking up the position of Mr Ferlus the grocer, the poisoned rat of Yvan's film, seemingly a neat bit of poetic justice prompted by Yvan's relentless campaign of moral terrorism. Yvan cannot at first resist gloating—"So, time to die?" he callously remarks as he looks down on Adrien in his death throes. But as Adrien nears death, he reveals the truth. There was no crime of fratricide, only Adrien's guilt about his affair with Claudia hidden beneath the veneer of bourgeois bliss. The *Hamlet* narrative which brought Yvan's antagonism toward Adrien and Claudia into focus in reality is a misrecognition of their situation, nothing more than Yvan's projection of his desire to make something heroic and mythic of his youthful disaffection. To Yvan, Adrien says, "You were mistaken. You were always mistaken, and we always suffered. I killed no one but myself". Here, interestingly, truth is indeed revealed, but not the truth Yvan imagined. For what Adrien reveals with his last words is that Yvan is actually his son, apparently the secret fruit of his long affair with Claudia. (Even here, there is ambiguity, for it is not entirely clear that the kinship Adrien's claiming with Yvan is literal or figurative.) With this revelation, Adrien's guilt is now transposed to Yvan, as Yvan comes to realize that his cinematic revenge upon his bourgeois enemy Adrien, his relentless disruption of his marriage to Claudia, has led to Adrien's unwarranted death. Unwittingly, Yvan, identifying with the false model of *Hamlet* and imagining himself the avenging *noir* protagonist, has instead



taken up the position of the obscene father, committing Claudius' crime of murdering the rightful father and in the process inheriting the Lesurf kingdom/estate<sup>22</sup>. Yvan's campaign against bourgeois corruption and tyranny has only revealed Yvan himself as tyrannical and vapidly moralistic. What is more, the psychoanalytic underpinnings of Olivier's *Hamlet*, a subtext Yvan never acknowledges, return with a grimly ironic vengeance as Yvan comes to recognize that he has committed, quite literally, the Oedipal crime of unknowingly murdering his father<sup>23</sup>.

This final exchange between Yvan and Adrien retrospectively recasts much of the film's narrative—the parallels to *Hamlet* that Yvan has pursued seem like some insubstantial pageant faded. The evidence of this mismatch has been there all along—remember the Elseneur/Ernélès anagram?—but the power of the *Hamlet* myth has supported Yvan's heroic self-conception and blinded him to Adrien's human capacity for existential pain, despite his bourgeois status. Even here, however, Chabrol obliquely echoes *Hamlet*, though in a rather different way. As Adrien dies, he asks Yvan, "Do you think that death will end this pain?", a question which resonates with Hamlet's "To be or not to be" soliloquy. That very question—and Yvan's inability to answer it (he says "I don't know")—suggests an unsuspected *affinity* between Adrien and Yvan, not at the level of rivals struggling for supremacy in an Oedipal triangle but at the level of shared, irremediable angst. The moral superiority which Yvan has evinced throughout the film is revealed as tragically misplaced, self-congratulatory, cruel and isolating. Yvan is no Hamlet in the sense of a mythic pursuer of justice, the intellectual-avenger whose work bravely reveals the truth, and yet in another sense, he is revealed to be a different sort of Hamlet, the damaged *naïf* who is drawn into rivalry with the obscene father and who, in an effort to right wrongs or gain knowledge, leaves the innocent dead in his wake—in short, the castrated protagonist of *noir*. Chabrol's critique here extends in two directions at once. Insofar as Yvan's film aesthetic mirrors the "heroic" mythos of *nouvelle vague* filmmaking, that mythos is debunked as just so much self-misrecognition, an overvaluation of cinema's capacity to offer justice, a matter of Oedipal, not ethical, rivalry between generations. But Chabrol also critiques Yvan's model, Olivier's *noir Hamlet*, for not being *noir* enough, for succumbing to the aesthetic of the *tradition de qualité* and, in the final reel, to Hollywood-style heroics. If

22. Magny stresses Yvan's inheritance of the estate, arguing that it reveals that, for all Yvan's efforts in the cause of justice, the unintended results of his actions only confirm "the triumph of dishonesty and crime at the cost of the death of innocents" (p. 88-89, my translation).

23. Indeed, in one sense, the surprise ending of Chabrol's *Ophélie* returns the Freudian Oedipalism of Olivier's film to its classical, literal form.



you want a more genuinely *noir* *Hamlet*, Chabrol seems to say, here's what it might look like.

Of course, Yvan's belated recognition that he has misidentified his situation with that of Hamlet extends also to Chabrol's viewer. As I have suggested, the film actively rewards the viewer's recognition of parallels to Shakespeare's play, despite the fact that we are also given a myriad of details that don't quite match up and perspectives that run counter to Yvan's. Like Yvan, when we run across Olivier's *Hamlet*, we may think that we have found the hermeneutic key to this story, one that allows us to cast Yvan in the role of the righteous counter-cultural avenger-intellectual, even through Chabrol goes out of his way to make Yvan a protagonist difficult to sympathize with. Those commentators who faulted André Jocelyn's performance as Yvan for being "alienating" seem to miss the point<sup>24</sup>. True, he's no Jean-Paul Belmondo, but the dissonance between Yvan's fantasized position as hero of his own private *Hamlet* and the reality of his own insufferable misanthropy and physical awkwardness is essential to the film's effect, particularly at the film's end. What is more, for those familiar with early Chabrol, the casting of Jocelyn draws upon his earlier role as Richard Marcoux, the murderous bourgeois son in *À double tour*. When Chabrol reveals that the *Hamlet* narrative we have been following is a red herring, we are prompted to re-evaluate our willingness to have accepted Yvan's "heroic" status as avenger all along because that fits the *Hamlet* template. Of course—and it is an irony I believe Chabrol is in control of—by encouraging us to read the film as a version of *Hamlet* and then in the final reel to reveal that such an interpretation is misleading, Chabrol engages in his own form of *épater la bourgeoisie*, prompting us to re-evaluate our assumptions, as well as the power and truth of the *Hamlet* myth and of the films made from it.

In his final conversation with Lucy, Yvan confesses his error and his guilt, coming to recognize the full tragedy of his heroic conception of himself. "What have I done?", he asks Lucy, "I tried to do justice. I judged him, condemned him, and killed him. He loved me, and I killed him, Ophelia. What have I become?" His reference to Lucy as Ophelia, a motif throughout the film, even at this late stage in the narrative, only underlines how seductive the *Hamlet* paradigm remains for Yvan. All along, Lucy actively resists being interpellated into Yvan's *Hamlet* narrative. When Yvan first calls her Ophelia during their play-acting in the mirror, Lucy insists, "I'm not Ophelia, Yvan". When later Yvan persists in the misidentification, she replies, "Don't start that tale again! I know *Hamlet*. Ophelia was blond".

24. See, for example, Monaco, p. 276; and Wood and Walker, p. 71-72. The word "alienating" comes from Wood and Walker, p. 71.



Throughout, Lucy (“light”) is clear-eyed about the proper relationship of reality to myth, and she refuses the tragic trajectory her role as Ophelia might subject her to, breaking off her relationship with Yvan because she perceives a frightening “nastiness” in his character. Notably, after the break-up, Yvan persists in identifying her as Ophelia and even fantasizes callously about her death. Happening upon a graveyard, he muses, “What if some dawn I saw them put you in one of those tombs? What if you died in madness, Ophelia, because I am just? Or what if I am unjust because of the Evil surrounding me?”<sup>25</sup>.

At the end, it is left to Lucy to purge what remains of Yvan’s misrecognized self-conception. To Yvan’s question “What have I become?”, she replies “What you always were. You’re Yvan. I’m not Ophelia, I’m Lucy. And I’m here next to you”. Her insistence upon her physical presence seems designed to strip away the mythic paradigms and performances through which Yvan has encountered the world, and it is at this moment that Yvan reaches out to her and breaks through his isolation. If this ending is, as I’m arguing, also designed to explode the mythic paradigm of the New Wave *auteur* as artistic avenger, heroically attacking bourgeois sensibilities, it is not entirely clear that Chabrol escapes (or can escape, given the strategy of the film) the charge of moral superiority, for Chabrol has willfully misled us as viewers in order to make his point. The film depends entirely upon the mythic power of the *Hamlet* narrative to pursue its critique—would the game of perception this film pursues work with a different play?—and Chabrol as director ends up almost by necessity in a position of moral and perceptual superiority over the viewer as he encourages then exposes our misrecognition. It is a matter for some debate, then, whether or not Chabrol’s own film is able to avoid a certain smugness as he deconstructs the mythic allure of *Hamlet*<sup>26</sup>.

25. Advertising for the film actively contributed to the viewer’s misconceptions. The French poster for the original release featured a large close-up of Juliette Mayniel (Lucy) against a bleak landscape with setting sun, with jagged tree branches extending up its length; André Jocelyn (Yvan) appears in a much smaller silhouette in front. This image, combined with the prominently displayed title “Ophélie”, would seem to suggest an inverted version of the *Hamlet* story. The Polish poster offered a more stylized image, of a dark-haired Ophelia holding a skull before her face. In both cases, the poster leads us to believe that, within the film, Ophelia will suffer the tragic fate she suffers in Shakespeare’s version.

26. In his discussion of the film’s play of partial perceptions and misrecognitions, Magny stresses that the film posits a “third eye”, that is, a viewpoint outside the fiction supplied by the audience that “has all the elements and can synthesize a global perspective, a shifting and dialectic view” (p. 90, my translation). I would argue otherwise, that here Chabrol misleads that “third eye” so that we can have an object lesson in the dynamics of mythic misperception. In this film, Lucy/“Ophelia” supplies the third eye.

Perhaps this is why *Ophélie* failed with the public. For Chabrol, it was one of his greatest box-office disasters of the sixties—it cleared no more than 12,000 francs in its original Paris release—and critics were unanimous in their confusion and condemnation. In fact, in subsequent interviews Chabrol has tended to dismiss the film as a youthful lark. Even so, I think the film is worthy of reconsideration. An example of experimental Shakespeare adaptation, its goal is not to reproduce *Hamlet* on film but rather to critically engage the cultural legacy of Shakespeare, and particularly the legacy of *Hamlet* as a heroic model for the disaffected intellectual. That critical engagement extends even to *nouvelle vague* filmmaking itself, with its own myths about battling the *tradition de qualité*, its idealization of film as an instrument of truth, and the heroic quality of true *auteurs*. In many ways, in its strategies of engagement with *Hamlet* and *Hamlet as noir* film, in its interest in the pitfalls of identification and repetition, even in its title, Chabrol's *Ophélie* foregrounds a persistent issue in film adaptation of Shakespeare—the question of fidelity to sources. *Ophélie* uses fidelity to *Hamlet* against itself, in order to offer a critique of the very enterprise it is engaged in—filmmaking as a heroic art of exploding bourgeois culture and revealing truth. It is from Chabrol's willful deviations from *Hamlet* that the film draws its power, though by design the significance of those deviations emerge only in retrospect, revealed to Yvan and to us as viewers at the last possible narrative moment. Those who look to the film for a simple screen *Hamlet* updated to rural France will be (and, judging from critical reaction, have been) disappointed. But that disappointment, I am arguing, is as Chabrol intended and is crucial to the film's effect. *Ophélie* is not quite a *film noir*, though it engages *noir*'s conventions, nor is it in any simple way a Shakespeare adaptation. Insofar as we, as Shakespearean viewers, look for fidelity to *Hamlet*, we miss the full deconstructive power of this curious, frustrating, illuminating self-reflexive film. To paraphrase Lucy: it's not *Hamlet*. It's *Ophélie*.

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