

FILM NOTES

THE CELLO BOW AS MAGIC WAND

For the audience not familiar with Jacqueline du Pré, the film “Hilary and Jackie” offers a window into an exotic if anguished life. That it is based on a true story only adds to its appeal, augmenting the elements of tragedy and romance. To those well acquainted with her life, the film cannot be seen without contending with the particular difficulties associated with an analysis of a public figure. It is necessary to internally sift through a cache of established biographical fact that might or might not be represented or that has been in some way distorted. This is neither documentary nor pure biography and, like the recent film “Shine,” the story of the profoundly traumatized Australian pianist David Helfgott, it must be viewed as a work of pseudosophisticated entertainment that has been diluted for mass consumption.

The screenplay by Frank Cottrell Boyce was based upon, although could more accurately be said to have been inspired by, “A Genius in the Family,” the 1997 memoir cowritten by du Pré’s older sister Hilary and younger brother Piers. As constructed in collaboration with director Anand Tucker, the film deviates from the format of the book, which attempted to paint a stereoscopic picture of the renowned Jacqueline by way of an antiphonal exchange between her two siblings. In this version, Piers has been banished to the periphery; Tucker and Boyce reconfigure the tale as a series of Rashamon-like duets, presenting and then recapitulating events which are told and retold in turn from the perspective of each sister.

The saga of the sisters du Pré, as presented in the film, can be briefly recounted thus: Jacqueline and her sister Hilary are exceptionally gifted musicians. Their respective talents are encouraged and cultivated by their mother Iris, an accomplished pianist who pursued a professional concert career before her marriage, and early scenes in the movie vividly capture the alternately thrilling and painful competition between the sisters as they vie for their mother’s approval. Their father, Derek, is an accountant, and his exclusion from the inner du Pré circle by virtue of his gender and his not being musical plays a pivotal but

not obviously discernable part in the family dynamic. Both girls are wildly talented, but by some tacit, tenuous pact between them, about which more will be said later, Jackie rapidly ascends to a position of dominance that extends ultimately beyond the realm of music. By the age of seven, Jackie is taken to study with William Pleeth (inexplicably referred to in the movie only as the otherwise innominate “cello teacher”), perhaps the foremost English cellist of the time; she is clearly being groomed for an important career. Following a strategically timed and spectacularly successful debut while she is still a teenager, Jackie’s career and, by extension, entire life, is soon overseen by managers. International stardom comes quickly. With her consummate musicianship and impassioned, masterly performances—her orgiastic abandon, blond tresses tossing wildly, became as much a part of the spectacle of her concerts as the music-making—she established herself as a towering figure in the classical music world. Her mother, her accompanist in early career recitals, is supplanted by more established artists; in the meantime, her sister Hilary abandons her career as a flutist (which had never been promoted as vigorously as Jackie’s), marries conductor Kifer Finzi, the son of renowned English composer Gerald Finzi, and retreats to a farmhouse in the country to start a family. Jackie’s courtship and marriage to pianist-conductor Daniel Barenboim, dubbed by the press as the “Arthur and Guinevere of music’s Camelot,” further fuels her notoriety. In 1973, at the age of 27, she is diagnosed with multiple sclerosis; the inexorable, horrific degeneration leads ultimately to her premature death in 1987 at the age of 42.

Part of the biographer’s art, no less than the filmmaker’s, is to walk the fine line separating interpretation from invention. That line is by no means clear in a work of fiction disguised as reportage which takes the most dramatically salient elements of Jacqueline du Pré’s biography as its starting point. The reasoning behind the use of Jacqueline’s siblings’ book as the primary source material seems at first blush to be unarguable. Other than Jacqueline herself, who might know better what really happened, what was actually said, or how she truly felt during those early formative years than her brother and sister? But the chosen narrative device only provides the appearance of balance, for it cannot be forgotten that each piece of the story presented from Jacqueline’s point of view is a quasi-fictive construction. In both the screenplay and the book on which it was based, Jacqueline’s voice has been presumptively grafted by other authors. While the search for the *true* Jacqueline du Pré is a faulty quest, debates nonetheless rage: In the wake of the film’s release, *The New York Times* published two letters to the editor (January 24, 1999), one from Tucker and Boyce defending

their decision to base their film solely on Hilary and Piers's book, and one printed just below it from Carol Easton the author of an important biography of Jacqueline du Pré, in which she decried what she characterized as Hilary's "self-serving" portrayals of herself and her sister.

Amidst all this controversy, some questions arise: What is the filmmaker's obligation, if any, to present a story that hews faithfully to biographical fact? Can, or should, the film be judged on the basis of its entertainment or aesthetic value without consideration of other issues? Perhaps more productive than a protracted critique or discussion of the film in that vein is to use it as a vehicle for an expansive discussion of issues inherent in or implied by it. In this regard, particularly as it is based on the lives of a actual people and is not pure fiction, the film is analogous to the case of a psychoanalytic patient whose treatment has terminated and which forms the basis for public discussion, albeit disguised by an analyst, in an article or clinical presentation. Despite the analogy, there are important distinctions to be drawn. Baudry's (1984) careful delineation of applied psychoanalytic methodology is pertinent in charting the course of what follows. While Jacqueline and Hilary du Pré, as historical figures portrayed by actors in a movie, are capable of undergoing, as Baudry states, "a thematic analysis identifying traces or derivatives of mental contents" (p. 552), it is important to "stress the difference between a live patient" (p. 551) and a static representation of one depicted in or by a work of art. Jackie, and at times Hilary, are enlisted here as surrogate pseudopatients to illustrate psychoanalytic hypotheses, with descriptive scenes from the film standing as quasi-equivalents to clinical vignettes. Ultimately, however, of greatest import is whether insight about the human condition can be gleaned or if psychological dynamics are illuminated.

With its drama and by the demands of a publicity machine designed to amplify the minuscule in order to sell concert tickets and recordings, Jacqueline du Pré's life lent itself to being mythologized. But it is for her music-making, her cello-playing, that she is most remembered. The gap between what can be simplistically characterized as Jackie's public and private personae in fact frames the crucial question that haunted Jacqueline du Pré: If not for my cello, who am I? The issue of perspective is important here, not merely in terms of what is deemed public or private, but because the question is asked not only *by* Jackie but, in slightly reconfigured form, *of* her. In the film we see Hilary vindictively taunt Jackie, recently returned from a concert tour, that she is nothing without her cello, an accusation ragefully unleashed when Jackie selfishly, childishly belittles and negates her sister's announcement that she will accept Kiffer's proposal of marriage. Al-

though it is Jackie who was away, she seems to experience the news of her sister's engagement as a betrayal and an abandonment.

As a self-directed question, it parallels what Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) would consider to be the "rift between the Ego and its Ideal" (p. 27) and, in combination with the film's portrayal of Jackie as a woman relentlessly conflicted not only by the usual vicissitudes of growing up but also by her complex, ambivalent desire to live, as she termed it, an "ordinary" life, points to one of the central issues of the child prodigy: the enduring relevance into adulthood of a self constructed and fostered in childhood. For Jackie, that self is ostensibly defined as "musician." But that is only a descriptive moniker. On a deeper level, it can be conjectured that the activity of music-making was adopted as an element of a false self; this is the core of her unconscious sense of herself—a too small self.

The case of a child prodigy such as Jackie presents a special permutation of what Kohut (1957) posits as the "regressive experience of a primitive narcissistic equilibrium" (p. 399) permitted by musical experience, in that, for the prodigy, the regression paradoxically provides no haven, no true return to parity; the solution reinvokes the problem. Jackie's failure to have negotiated the path of normal maturation, depicted in the movie in scene after scene of her obdurate, petulant, and narcissistic behavior, seems to be attributable to the abnormal life she led. Her precocity and genius are at once the essence of her specialness and her basic faults. In "Creative Writers and Day-Dreaming" Freud (1908) writes that "the play of children is determined by their wishes—really by the child's *one* wish, which is to be grown-up. He always plays at being 'grown-up'" (p. 146). This is the crux of the special developmental difficulties of the precociously masterful child: The play of being big—that is, in the context of Jacqueline du Pré's life, of having achieved an adultlike, indeed a larger-than-life-like, level of accomplishment—is acknowledged by the adults as both real and desirable. The fantasy is ratified as reality; childhood is for all intents and purposes vanquished and prematurely supplanted by a faux-adulthood. But dazzling proficiency at a tender age is itself neither the problem nor its source. Even with remarkable talent, attaining world-class levels of accomplishment in such a rigorous art form requires formidable discipline and effort, the sustained implementation of which requires psychical motivation not sufficiently explained by yielding to the coercion of external demands in exchange for reward or in avoidance of punishment, or by the ego gratification derived from mastering activities. The child is enticed into believing she is already big; it is a promise too powerful to resist, and its ramifications, and that it is a delusion,

are beyond the child's comprehension. There needs to be another psychological element that follows from Freud's view of the child's *überwunsch* to be big but which is even more deeply embedded and that is engaged sympathetically by the confluence of such other factors as innate talent, nuclear family structure and dynamics, and access to relevant outlets.

That additional element finds its roots in the earliest stages of the child's psychosexual development. Jackie is said to have remembered hearing a cello being played over the radio at the age of four, and recalls feeling that she "want[ed] to make that sound" (Easton, 1989, p. 26). There are a multitude of meanings that may be construed from this. Following Kohut's formulations of music as a substitutive form of anxiety discharge as well as a mechanism for mastery, that is, as a transitory superegoic surrogate (p. 394), it is plausible that the young Jackie experienced an acute identification with the sounds produced by the cello akin to the internalization of omnipotent parental figures. As an extension of this hypothesis, it is worth exploring the possibility that the cello's brooding resonant tones evoked her father's voice. Physically embracing the cello and stroking its strings would thus provide an elegant sublimatory avenue for separation anxiety and for nascent oedipal desire, enabling her to exult in her own apparently omnipotent ability to summon the feelings associated with his presence without fear of rebuke or rejection—father's, mother's or sister's—while at the same time offering exhibitionistic satisfaction for which she was praised.

While for the nineteenth-century symbolist artist Odilon Redon, music "transports us into the ambiguous world of the undetermined" (in a letter to A. Mellerio, August 1898), for Jackie, it may instead be, as Chasseguet-Smirgel writes regarding perversion, "a means of eluding the fatal character of the Oedipus complex" (p. 26). In this view, musical performance extends beyond the "catharsis of primitive sexual tensions" (Kohut, 1957, p. 391) provided by music's prosodic and harmonic structure. Here, musical performance does not function merely as a compromise formation or a sublimation but is a perversion, in the meaning intended by Chasseguet-Smirgel (1985) as a "solution which constitutes a balm for our wounded narcissism and a means of dissipating our feelings of smallness and inadequacy" (p. 24). Playing the cello, following Freud's (1938) characterization of the "ingenious solutions" of perversion, is truly an "artful" (p. 277) means of dealing with reality. Paradoxically, the constant external validation of the precocious behavior, behavior adopted at a time of actual smallness to defend against a feeling of being too small, conspires to reinforce the very belief the false self's activities are calculated to repel. The vicious cycle thus inau-

gured remains unfettered and unabated so long as the artful activity gratifies the needs closest to consciousness—the fantasy of inescapable smallness.

The image of a latency age Jackie feverishly practicing a devilishly intricate passage in preparation for a performance with her sister Hilary calls to mind Freud's (1914) notion of idealization, wherein the subject projects her primary narcissism on the object who [or, in this case, which] then becomes the carrier of the Ego Ideal. For Jackie, the cello, or more accurately, the music she can create with it, is the symbolic part-object she can idealize. In the quest for absolute mastery, arguably a legitimate requisite to enter the pantheon of elite musicians for which Jackie was groomed, there is scant distinction, on a metapsychological level, between conquering a difficult phrase in an obscure duet for cello and flute and, much later, her refractory demand that Hilary share her husband.

Much is made of this sexual exchange in the movie, not least because the event occurs—we see it—thus implicating Hilary and Kiffer in a disastrous oedipal triangle redux. Scenes following Kiffer's union with his wife's sister are filmed like home movies from Hilary's point of view: She has been excised from her own family and replaced by Jackie, whom she watches gleefully cavorting with Kiffer and the children. But as much as this may well be an enactment of how Hilary felt—familiarily substitutable and of insufficient consequence to those for whom she should be absolutely otherwise—it is more Jackie's fantasy. The manifest content of the grainy dreamlike images of the film-within-a-film show her as a blissfully ordinary wife and mother. But the images are necessarily condensations and distortions given the latent material—matricide and paternal incest. Jackie has conjured the symbolic removal of her sister/mother and possession of her father, “safely” disguised as her sister's husband. Crucially, her cello is entirely absent. *She* is enough; that is the essence of the wished-for ordinariness. It is a double-double replacement—her sister for her mother; her cello for her brother-in-law *qua* father. The fantasy permits the fetishistic object to be jettisoned in favor of the originary object of desire. Without minimizing the astonishing narcissism of Jackie's actually making her request, and setting aside for the moment her sister's complicitousness in its enactment, there is an element of treachery, however unconscious, embedded in the fantasy. If the cello were the fetishistic object enlisted as a substitute for her father, then a fantasy that repudiates that object must be seen as an oblique attack on the father himself. In this sense, the wish to sleep with her sister's husband becomes a secondary artful solution to the problem created by the first—the cello,

which was at first the perfect compromise formation, ultimately proved unsatisfactory, and so it became necessary to devise a means of eradicating the surrogate while maintaining the image with which it was identified. Kill the cello; keep the father.

But persecutory fantasies are difficult to fulfill in reality. Jackie's vacillations in her relationship to her cello are depicted as ranging from violent loathing to possessive attachment. An illustrative scene in the film shows Jackie in Moscow, where she is attending a masterclass given by the legendary cellist Mstislav Rostropovich. Her reputation precedes her, and when, through an English-speaking interpreter, the great maestro extends his welcome to her and invites her to play, Jackie declares that she no longer wants to play the cello. Later, in her drafty hotel room, her sleep is fitful—her cello is creaking as the sensitive wood contracts from the cold and we are given to understand that she hears these noises as distortedly loud, like a baby's cries, indeed, perhaps as projections of her own cries. In a gesture redolent with meaning given the cello's multidetermined significance for her, she places it—a rare and breathtakingly expensive 1712 Stradivarius that had been given to her as a gift—outside the balcony window in the snow. It is a brazen act: The woman/child banishing her prized possession in the hope that it will be silenced, relieving her of its demands and permitting her, finally, to be ordinary, which is to say, a child, small and needy. The gesture can also be seen, again, as a quiet tantrum designed to lash out at the figure signified by the cello—her father.

Extending Chasseguet-Smirgel's comprehensive elaboration of the visual and physical properties of the ideal fetishistic object, the foregoing provides an opportunity to consider that its aural qualities may serve the same function. Jackie du Pré's complex, passionate relationship with her cello and with music can be taken as a hypothetical but nonetheless paradigmatic example fortifying an expansion of the notion of the fetishistic object to include the auditory sphere. The daily practice so essential to the musician's art and craft is in this instance not merely a necessary means to an end, but is also consistent with the kind of ritualized, worshipful activity of the fetishist. Furthermore, and most importantly, for the musician, the fundamental component, indeed, the true object of desire, is not an object per se, but is the music itself; the instrument is but a conduit, engaged through technical mastery and requiring repetitive, intimate tactile interactions. For Jacqueline du Pré, drawing the bow across the strings of her cello was, to invoke Chasseguet-Smirgel's marvelous analogy in describing perversion, like waving a magic wand. Music-making was the means par excellence by which she could maintain the introjected auditory representa-

tions of her father and regulate overwhelming feelings of smallness and abandonment. It is beyond the scope of this writing to develop this idea further here, but Isakower's (1939) contributions regarding the role of the auditory sphere in the development of the superego and in contending with perceived threats of loss of reality are pertinent in understanding a linkage between music and fetishism.

Commentary about "Hilary and Jackie" would be incomplete without the inclusion of a brief discussion of the sisters' relationship. The bonds between them, as sisters, as their parents' daughters, as musicians, as women, are indelible, loving, rivalrous—in short, complex. There are a number of scenes in the movie that reveal the many layers and convoluted dynamics of their relationship, which was generally exceedingly close, but at moments contentious and accusatory. Even as it evolved and undulated over time, however, Jackie's dominant position in the hierarchy of familial relationships appears to have been established early. In his essay titled "The Psychogenesis of a Case of Homosexuality in a Woman," Freud (1920) introduces the notion of one person's "retirement in favor of" another. Within the context of his exploration of the psyche of a homosexual girl, Freud explains "retirement" to generally imply the conversion of a young woman's sexual object choice as a compromise solution to remove what she perceived as intolerable competition with her mother for the attention and admiration of men. In a footnote, Freud elaborates the concept of retirement in terms of siblings. He first discusses the case of twin brothers where one's homosexuality manifests itself ostensibly as a means of deferring to his brother's perceived greater success with women, but, as Freud posits, actually is as a consequence of his fear of their father which impelled him to "renounce" both his otherwise heterosexual disposition and his work as an artist. Freud continued by writing, "in his [the homosexual brother's] imagination, all women belonged to his father and he sought refuge in men out of submission, so as to 'retire from' the conflict in favour of the father" (p. 159, fn.1). With closer relevance to the discussion at hand, he continues, "among brothers and sisters who are not twins, this 'retirement' plays a great part in other spheres as well as in that of the love-choice. For example, an elder brother studies music and is admired for it; the younger, far more gifted musically, soon gives up on his own musical studies, in spite of his longing, and cannot be persuaded to touch an instrument again" (p. 159, fn.1). In his final example, Freud's clear implication is that engagement in or retreat from musical study are manifestations of the underlying psychosexual states of each sibling.

The concept of "retirement" between siblings is helpful in gaining

deeper insight into Jackie and Hilary's relationship. A scene near the end of the film, once Jackie has succumbed to the full force of her terrible illness, depicts how plastic are their established roles. Jackie is a helpless invalid; it is years since she has been able to play the cello (although not shown in the movie, she established herself as an eminent teacher when she became too incapacitated to perform). We see her lying in a bed in the home of her friend Dame Margot Fontyne. Her husband, Maestro Barenboim, is with her, trying to quiet her spasmodically flailing body; she cannot speak. Hilary enters the room and replaces Barenboim. She cradles Jackie's head in the crook of her arm, strokes her brow, and talks to her in a gentle voice. Jackie is eventually becalmed enough to listen, looking up at her sister wide-eyed, and Hilary succeeds in getting Jackie to drink from a cup of milk. The image seems of a mother and despondent child more than of sisters and, as a counterpoint to the earlier scene in which Hilary has been deposed from her marriage, this one reverses the established relational paradigm. Although tempered by the stark reality of impending death and the presence of deep love, however, this is the fulfillment of Hilary's wish, once proclaimed in a fit of rage, and as if somehow in reply to the question of Jackie's core identity without the interposition of ego ideal, that her sister is nothing without her cello. Ironically, of course, even if Hilary is the important caregiver, the one able to tend to the sick, needy child, the focus is still Jackie, and the tragic implication is that it is Hilary who feels like nothing without Jackie's cello. This is the important link, exposing the unifying connection between them—what is signified for each by music and the price they paid, each in her own way, for believing the magic it appeared to promise. It is an image of wistful regression, to the time before flutes and cellos, before there was a genius in the family, when they were just little girls.

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ALEXANDER STEIN

FALLING DOWN: BASER INSTINCTS

“*Homo hominis lupus*”—“Man a wolf unto man”—ran the credo of that gloomy seventeenth-century philosopher, Thomas Hobbes. Hobbes asserted that the social contract was forged to curb our exuberant native viciousness; laws were invented lest we rend each other to pieces in our unrepentant lust after power and possession. Throughout history art invoking liberal/humanist assumptions of an inherently benevolent human nature (dictated or not by some higher moral order) has been mocked by art favoring Hobbes’s rancid view of human nature in the raw.

The Hobbesian vision of universal rapacity, exploitation, and greed is encountered in the paintings of the tormented Goya, in literature diverse as De Sade, the savage Poe of *The Cask Of Amontillado* and *Hopfrog*, the nauseous E.C. horror comics of my youth (*The Haunt of Fear*, *Tales from the Crypt*, so forth). It has been acted on the stages of Seneca, the Jacobean revenge tragedians, the dark Shakespeare, and the Grand Guignol.

Robert Ray (1985) has written persuasively on Hollywood’s penchant for facile reconciliation of divisive social issues. The Hobbesian perspective has surfaced but fitfully at the Bijou, arguably because it does not fit well with the chronic middlebrow hopefulness responsible for so many convenient solutions to inconvenient problems regularly discovered upon the American screen. Hobbesian motifs and microcosms appear in *ALIEN* (1978), *Full Metal Jacket* (1987), *Unforgiven* (1993), and most notably in *Psycho* (1960)¹ that nihilistic masterpiece which sent up every bland Tinseltown expectation of a tidy—and tidily moral—happy ending. I now propose to critique *Falling Down* as a flawed Hobbesian fable, pitched ambiguously at the evils of late twentieth-century corporate capitalism.

Michael Douglas’s range is conspicuously narrower than his father’s. He also does not quite own Kirk Douglas’s startling good looks: The eye is duller, with a tight, ungenerous quality about the mouth. In the late 1980s and for most of the 1990s, Douglas carved out a formidable career cleverly exploiting these very limitations and bellying up to Hobbes. With the industry clout to choose his roles, he opted for the narcissistic, devious, or frankly criminal opportunists (in *Fatal Attrac-*

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