



The Portrait of a Girl: A Reading of Last Tango in Paris

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It is difficult to grasp the fact that the center of male domination lies not in direct expressions of personal violence (rampant though they are) but in the societal rationality which may or may not be defended by men. Male domination, as Weber said of rationalization, works through the hegemony of impersonal organization: of formal rules that refer to the hypothetical interaction of autonomous individuals; of instrumental knowledge founded in the subject's control of the object world; of the accumulation of profit, which bows neither to need nor tradition. It is this protean impersonality that makes it so elusive. (Benjamin 216)

When *Last Tango in Paris* was presented for the first time at the New York Film Festival (14 Oct. 1972), it created a huge commotion. Pauline Kael, a *New Yorker* film critic, saluted it as "a landmark in movie history ... the most powerfully erotic movie ever made, and it may turn out to be the most liberating movie ever made" (Kael 27–28). At the same time, the Italian Catholic church prosecuted *Last Tango* for obscenity, eventually having the film banned from all Italian movie theatres and even having it sent to the stake (literally). Bertolucci's film was eventually cleared and re-released more than ten years later, after endless court battles.

Yet many Italians had managed in the meantime to see the movie — that is, those who could afford to go abroad to do so. I was among those Italians who saw *Last Tango* for the first time in a movie theatre, in the '80s. Having had the misfortune of seeing *Caligula* in the theatre not long before, I was expecting something more or less on the same wavelength: a porn flick disguised as art. I soon found out my mistake. The sex scenes were strictly simulated, played a secondary role, and were quite tame when compared to any self-respecting skin flick, including *Caligula*. I wondered what had been so offensive for the church. And yet, just a year or two later, a fellow graduate student at Purdue, a devout Catholic, regretted seeing *Last Tango*, and called it "evil." Something in this movie does touch a nerve or two.

As far as my nerves were concerned, I thought that the most disturbing part must be the ending, when Jeanne shoots Paul (possibly in the groin) and kills him. God forbid women should start shooting. This was particularly true for Italy at the time the movie was made, when some extremist groups of militant feminists *were* practicing physical violence against men (one slogan recited: "Le streghe son tornate / Ma

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questa volta armate" — "The witches have come back / But this time they are armed"). Many an Italian boy had nightmares of being attacked and ravaged by a horde of screaming, wailing *Bacchae*, ready to tear him to pieces. Suburban legends for the most part, nonetheless.

Indeed, that final shot was also what Kael found so liberating. I concluded that the puzzle merited investigation. There was one problem, though: when I started my research, it seemed that most critics centered their analyses on the Brando character, Paul, while dismissing Jeanne, which was probably pretty much Bertolucci's point, after all.

Last Tango's saving grace, however, is that it *is* an art movie: it *can* and it *does* mean many things to many people. Bertolucci's movie is, thus — to pun on its X rating — *obscenely* liberating because it aims at provoking a very powerful emotional response from the viewer. It is an aggressive and cruel movie, a great example of sadistic narration. To quote Kolker's excellent study, *Last Tango* in the final analysis "is not about sexuality but about the perception of sexual relationships, the structuring of emotion, and the ideology of romance, the self and the family" (125). It is especially on the aspect of the "ideology of romance" that I would like to concentrate.

Its "object" is Jeanne, the object of a threefold gaze: the hero's, the director's, and the viewer's. Through Jeanne, the viewer is constantly reminded of the politics of cinema, of the power of the camera. *Last Tango*, as we know, is a profoundly modernist movie, well rooted in self-reflexivity. It even has its resident, internal director, Tom, Jeanne's fiancé. Tom has been called "ludicrous" and "ridiculous" by most critics¹: but this character stands for the shortcomings of classic narrative cinema and of *Last Tango* itself.² The TV movie Tom is making about Jeanne, his "Portrait of a Girl," becomes a metaphor of the movie we are watching, its double that mirrors Jeanne's oppression and her desperate struggle against it. Quite interestingly, none of the critics I have read mentioned the title of Tom's movie. By leaving that out, they can deny the centrality of Jeanne and leave her at the margin as "fool and tool" (Kolker 232): the "Portrait of a Girl" is erased to give way to Paul, and *Last Tango* is reduced to your everyday "Portrait of a Man."

Indeed, Tom's movie about Jeanne mirrors her problematic status in *Last Tango*: Tom's interest in Jeanne is a fetishist mania, a desire to film her like a Hollywood star. But there is a liberating element in his fetishizing: it is so strong, that Jeanne-fetish takes over the direction of what is done and said in the film.³ Thus, Tom's constant pursuing of Jeanne as object of his and our gaze becomes so exaggerated as to disrupt the whole rhetoric of male, classic cinema. Another important aspect is that Jeanne always appears to be well aware of her role in Tom's movie: she is always masquerading and acting up her role of perfect female impersonator. As she says while parading in her bridal dress, "it's the dress that makes the bride," not vice versa. However,

she soon shows up in the perfect outfit of a '70s feminist, leaving her beehive hairstyle in favor of a wild perm, and her miniskirt and go-go boots for a pair of pants and a jacket. It is on this occasion that she takes over the direction of her story and says: "Today we improvise."

Tom's movie also frames Jeanne's affair with Paul. After their first meeting in the "haunted-house" apartment, Jeanne rushes to the station to meet Tom. They embrace and kiss each other, while being filmed by Tom's crew. As soon as Jeanne realizes that she is being "raped" by a camera, she has a violent reaction and tells Tom that he should have asked for her permission to do that. The equation "film we are watching/film Tom is making" is reinforced by the fact that, when Jeanne pushes the microphone away from her, we stop hearing what is being said until the microphone is put back to its former position (Kolker 136): what we are seeing becomes the signifier of Tom's film.

Jeanne, too, appears to be the signifier of Tom's film, but her initially negative reaction soon turns to irony and masquerade: when Tom asks her what she had been doing while he was away, she replies, very dramatically: "I thought of you day and night and I cried. Darling, I can't live without you." Jeanne is actually performing for the camera, actively provoking its intrusive gaze. Tom finds her answer "*magnifique*," seemingly unaware of Jeanne's ironic mimicking of numberless heroines of classic cinema. Indeed, Tom, being caught up in his narcissistic art, fails to really *see* Jeanne and keeps misunderstanding her (Mulvey 206).

Another instance of the undercutting of classic cinema's relation to women is Tom's shooting of his marriage proposal: he "traps" Jeanne with a life-preserver (is marriage supposed to be Jeanne's salvation or her trap?), that she throws into the water. The life-preserver immediately sinks, still leaving us the time to notice that it bears the name of Vigo's classic *L'Atalante*, a happy-ending-movie that deals with a woman's temporary marriage-crisis. Again, later on, while Jeanne tries on her bridal dress, Tom starts comparing her to a number of classic Hollywood stars: "You are better than Rita Hayworth, better than Joan Crawford, Kim Novak, Lauren Bacall, better than Ava Gardner when she loved Mickey Rooney." He does not mention any other actresses: his only touchstone for female perfection is classic cinema and its reduction of woman to object — a comparison that makes Jeanne run away (without Tom's or *our* noticing it), in her bridal dress.

At this point, I would like to highlight another curious erasure made by critics, concerning Jeanne's alleged "wedding" with Tom. For example, Kinder and Houston have claimed that Jeanne, being the "daughter of a French army colonel ... delights in shocking her conventional mother with her liberated life style. But later she destroys her outrageous lover and chooses a conventional marriage" (Kinder and Houston 186); and Kolker: "her ultimate decision to marry Tom and adopt a safe bourgeois life signifies her ultimate betrayal of the passion Paul attempts

finally, and too late, to offer her" (Kolker 135). But, in the end, Jeanne does not marry Tom: she kills Paul. Committing murder is not exactly a safe way to adopt a bourgeois life. Like her affair with Paul, Tom's film is over, too, and most likely it will never begin again (besides, Jeanne ominously tightens her lips when Tom depicts all his future films about her).

The relationship between Jeanne and Paul is, needless to say, the most disputed and interesting part of the film. They first meet on the street, during the first shot. Jeanne passes him by and stops to look at him. He has aroused her curiosity — but he is unaware of it, and does not return her gaze. Paul appears thus to be the object of Jeanne's (and the viewer's) desire, "the exotic, dangerous lover (this time a man)" (Kinder and Houston 189). She pursues him, consciously or not, to the mysterious building first, then to the phone booth, and finally to the apartment: he is always already in the place where she is going, like the Big Bad Wolf in the Little Red Riding Hood fairy-tale. Jeanne will find Paul in the apartment for rent, curled up on top of the mantelpiece, all alone in the dark, in a semi-fetal position. Jean pulls up the blinds and lets the light get in. He then moves into another room, where there is a big mysterious "thing" covered by a white sheet. He looks under it, picks up a small lamp-shade and curls up again in a corner. He hides his nose and mouth in the little cone-shaped object, and starts crying. Jeanne's curiosity reaches its peak. When the phone starts ringing, she picks it up right after Paul has answered it, and she starts overhearing the conversation.

Later on, he snaps at her for no reason, addressing her with the informal (and rude, in this case) *tu*: Paul has taken command. Instead of leaving the apartment, he comes back and — without meeting any resistance on her part — grabs her and has sex with her there and then, without a word. After that, they both leave, always without exchanging a word, taking different directions: Jeanne will go to the train station to meet Tom, who will begin shooting his "Portrait of a Girl"; Paul will return to his wife's flophouse, where we see him in a bathroom all sprayed with blood. A maid is cleaning the blood stains and telling him that the police had been there to ask her questions. We thus learn that Paul's wife is dead: she supposedly killed herself with a razor in that bathroom, the night before, without leaving any note. We also learn many things about Paul's (and Brando's) past. The maid makes a brief summary of Paul's adventurous life/Brando's adventurous career: "Then [the police] said, 'Nervous type, your boss. You know he was a boxer?' So? Then he was an actor, then a bongo player. A revolutionary in Mexico, a journalist in Japan. One day he debarks in Tahiti, wanders around, learns French ..." to finally arrive in Paris and be kept by a rich wife. That's our hero's career so far: a series of central roles in classic movies, where he played the romantic rebel-hero.

Quite possibly the fact that Brando plays Paul's character helped many to see Paul in a romanticized, glamorously decadent light.⁴ However, as J.C. Rice points out, these very same allusions to Brando's former interpretations aim to enhance his obsolescence as well: yesterday's rebels have become today's oppressors, as Jeanne will soon find out. After all, it is in these years that youth culture was exhorting young people not to trust anybody over 30 — and Paul is 45.

Thus, even though Paul may be seen by some as Jeanne's "tamer" — a gratifying role for a forty-five-year-old tough guy with thinning hair and a growing tummy — his character is heavily tainted. Here are just a few superficially "motivating" traits of Paul's character, thrown in to give our hero the gloss of a fascinating, Henry-Miller-type anti-hero. First of all, he desperately needs to feel alive: his wife's suicide has just revealed in a most shocking way the reality and nearness of death. Moreover, when Rosa was still alive, she had a stable lover, plus several other affairs with "guests" of her hotel. Paul is now alone in the world, doesn't have any children,⁵ and, last but not least, he is also culturally isolated, a stranger in a strange country, an American in Paris.⁶ As Kael pointed out, "[Paul's] profane humor and self-loathing self-centeredness and street 'wisdom' are in the style of American hard-boiled fiction aimed at the masculine-fantasy market" (Kael 29). Is there any room for feminine fantasy, then?

Jeanne's affair with Paul may be seen as the fruit of her sexual fantasy, her pursuit and conquest of the dangerous, mysterious lover. Indeed another important and different aspect of Paul's character, that has often been overlooked, is that he initially appears in the guise of the Gothic villani.⁷ The first time one watches *Last Tango*, quite often one spends the first half of the movie believing that Paul has killed his wife: only in the scene when he talks to Rosa's body does one realize that he is "not guilty" of his wife's death.⁸

If Tom's use of the camera in filming Jeanne is fetishistic, the apparatus filming Jeanne with Paul — always according to Mulvey's terminology — is voyeuristic:

Voyeurism ... has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control, and subjecting the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness. The sadistic side fits well with narrative. Sadism demands a story, depends on making something happen, forcing a change in another person, a battle of will and strength, victory/defeat, all occurring in a linear time with a beginning and an end. (Mulvey 205)

Paul "the tamer" appears to be violent from the very start. His initial angry exclamation, his blunt and aggressive attitude towards Jeanne on their first meeting, his ill treatment of the hotel maid — these are all

clues that reveal the anger inside him, a violence vented against those who cannot fight back.

This *film noir* — and Gothic novel — undercurrent (i.e., Paul as the villain-murderer) remains a constant throughout the movie. The very apartment where Jeanne and Paul meet has elements of a haunted house. It is in an old building in Rue Jules Verne,⁹ a fantasy place. Jeanne's entrance in the building is very ominous and reminds us of many a Gothic tale. When Jeanne first rings the front-door bell, nobody answers. The concierge is a strange woman who talks in riddles and warns Jeanne that "strange things happen in [that] place." The people who live there appear to be quite strange, too — more dead than alive: as the concierge talks, a door opens and a bare, trembling female arm deposits an empty bottle of liquor outside (this will surface again in Paul's tale about his alcoholic mother). Besides, continues the concierge-prophetess, the building is rat-ridden. As she gives her the key (a double, since the original had mysteriously disappeared), she grabs her hand and does not want to let go. Then, when Jeanne manages to free herself from the strange guardian of the place, she runs toward the old elevator, which is automatically and silently coming to fetch her, without having been called. Finally, as she enters the dark, threatening apartment, she finds her Lovelace.¹⁰

Or was it Rochester,¹¹ instead? Jeanne intentionally returns to the apartment, with the excuse of returning the key, and finds Paul there. The game has begun. We initially see her going on all fours like a big cat. Some workers have just delivered a bed and few other things. But, in case Jeanne had ever thought she might be with Paul like Jane with her Rochester, she was mightily mistaken. If Tom doesn't see, Paul doesn't listen. Paul is the one and only master of the house. He immediately orders her to take off her coat and help him out with the furniture: she obeys meekly. Jeanne asks him to tell her his name, but he refuses, setting the rules of the game: "I don't wanna know nothing, nothing, nothing about you. ... You don't have a name, I don't have a name ... We don't need names here ... You and I are gonna meet here, without knowing anything that goes on outside here." He then asks Jeanne if she is scared by his proposal. She says no and invites him to go with her.

Many, following the "explanations" given by Bertolucci on different occasions,¹² have seen Paul's "rules" as a positive, utopian attempt to go back to a blissful and lost state of 'oneness.' Kolker, for example, sees Paul attempting "to create a world of sexuality isolated from the outside world, to deny social identity and lineage by refusing names, to retreat from the symbolic realm of the I and the Other" (Kolker 189). From this point of view, Paul's later behavior would be more of a schizophrenic slip into the symbolic. From Jeanne's point of view, though, Paul's utopian project was reserved only for himself: he never stops

seeing her as his "fool and tool." Paul's and Jeanne's relationship seems to follow, then, the sadomasochistic pre-Oedipal model described by Benjamin, in which the sadist/Paul strives to find a "surviving other."¹³

Indeed Rosa has not survived — and the bathroom covered with blood can become the scene of Paul's rebirth into a new struggle to overpower the Mother. His retreat into the womb-like apartment (whose strange yellow light takes possession of everything, as if it were immersed in amniotic fluid) is a desperate search for himself, albeit at the expense of an other that he is unable to recognize. Paul does not want to know anything about Jeanne, as she is just the object of his will; his unrevealed name keeps his identity separate. Paul's aggressiveness and isolation will emerge again in the next scene, when he faces Rosa's mother.¹⁴

Immersing themselves again in the maternal womb, Paul and Jeanne try out their pre-Oedipal language, exchanging animal-like grunts and squeaks. Still, the counter-shot links their cries with those of the animals that Tom's crew are filming — a reminder that Paul's and Jeanne's are nonetheless just conscious imitations. In this next scene, we see Jeanne telling her story in Tom's movie: her childhood in her parents' country house. We meet her nurse Olympia, "the personification of domestic virtue: faithful, economic, and racist," as Jeanne describes her. We also see pictures of "The Colonel," Jeanne's dead father, in his full army uniform. Interestingly, though, Jeanne does not talk about him in Tom's film: she will do so in the apartment, in Paul's presence: "The Colonel had green eyes and shiny boots. I loved him like a god. He was so handsome in his uniform!" To which Paul retorts: "What a steamy pile of horseshit. All uniforms are horseshit." After this severe reprimand, Jeanne asks him again what she is supposed to say and what she is supposed to do: Paul answers with his silence.

In this long and central scene, both our heroes end up telling each other/us some revealing aspects of their past: Paul recalls his childhood with a violent father, a "super-masculine, bar-fighting, whore-fucking drunk," and a poetic, alcoholic mother who "taught him to love nature," and who ended up in jail for walking on the street naked. Paul then asks Jeanne to tell him about her first orgasm, although he soon shows an affected disinterest. Why? It may be that he wishes to tease and demean her ("I don't listen because whatever you say does not matter to me anyway"). This is Jeanne's interpretation. She retorts: "Why don't you listen? ... Your solitude weighs on me ... you are not generous, you're an egoist!" But Paul also does not want to listen because Jeanne reached her first orgasm by herself, while running to school: she achieved it in isolation, without the need for a penis — enjoying her body in public, like the naked body of Paul's mother. Paul's dismay turns into open tears when Jeanne, in a moment of self-

assertion ("I can be by myself, too"), starts masturbating. Paul does not look at her and repeats his movements of the first apartment scene: he returns to his little womb-like lamp-shade, hides his face in it, and starts crying. But he immediately regains his assertive power in the next scene: while he is lying on a couch back in the flophouse, Rosa's mother comes to cuddle him and comfort him: "You're not alone, Paul." Paul first bites her hand, then scares her and the entire hotel by switching off the electric power.

The sadist, as we have already mentioned, always aims at a "togetherness" in which he can affirm his separation from the other/object. Back to the apartment, in the bathroom (Jeanne is putting on make-up, Paul is shaving) Paul remarks how he likes the old-fashioned sink of their apartment: it has a large mirror, in which Paul can gaze at himself and Jeanne at the same time, thus being reassured of his separate identity and of her being a mere impersonal image. The use of the camera reinforces this process by substituting itself for the mirror: Jeanne, completely naked, turns toward the camera, while Paul is still shaving, facing the mirror: Jeanne's [objectified] body is still a reflection, but this time of our gaze. On this occasion, Jeanne tries again to find out something about Paul's identity, but her attempt is once again frustrated. When she tries to say something about her identity, Paul yells at her. "You hate women," Jeanne says. "What have they done to you?" Paul's answer seems to come out of a handbook: "Either they pretend to know who I am, or they pretend I don't know who they are, and that's very boring." Paul can only know *who* they are *not*.

After the scene in the Paris underground (in which Jeanne gives vent to her self-reflexive frustration), the camera takes us to the flophouse, where Paul goes to visit Rosa's lover Marcel. They talk about Rosa, a scene that prepares us for Paul's dramatic monologue in the death-chamber. He leaves Marcel, muttering a spiteful "I wonder what she ever saw in you." The next shot is still a door opening: but, instead of seeing Paul walking out of Marcel's room, we see Jeanne walking into the apartment. Thinking that nobody is home (but, as usual, Paul is there — he simply had not answered her call), she walks next to the huge white "thing" and says: "Hi, monster ... Something wrong?" It is quite an ironic greeting, when seen in retrospect: because this will be the notorious "butter scene." This most powerful and shocking scene, that seems to come straight out of a Marquis De Sade tale (his *La philosophie dans le boudoir* comes to mind), reveals the movie's double standard in all its obscenity. Paul orders Jeanne to fetch him the butter from the kitchen and uses it soon after to sodomize her against her will.¹⁵ But this is not all: while he is sodomizing her, he forces her to repeat after him the following catechism lesson about the "holy family":

A holy institution, meant to breed virtue in savages ... Holy family ...
 Church of good citizens ... Where the will is broken with repression ...
 Where freedom is assassinated by egotism ... The family ... You, fuck-
 ing family ..."

We can here recognize two aspects of Benjamin's pre-Oedipal sadist: the enjoyment of anal sex as denial of the feminine organs,¹⁶ and the use of rationality as a substitute for affect.¹⁷ We can also interpret this scene as Paul's repetition of the primal scene, when his own "will" was broken with repression by the "fucking family." But the most intriguing aspect of this scene is what Paul is saying to Jeanne while raping her: quite paradoxically, he is "teaching" her freedom while denying it to her, while showing her that she is not free. *Voilà* the most subtly perverted torture for Jeanne and the empathic viewer. Paul here embodies the scandal of paternalism, the double standard of the self-professed nonconformist, rebel male: Paul the father teaches his little girl a loving lesson on freedom from the violent restraints of the establishment, while at the same time violently negating her right to freedom, all in a typical Alpha-male fashion — i.e., through bugging.¹⁸

Jeanne is immobilized once again in the next scene, this time by Tom's *Atalante* life-saver. Then, finally, we see Jeanne's mother for the first time (we had already met her double, Jeanne's nurse): both Jeanne's mother and Olympia are preparing, as it were, turning their country-house into a family museum in honor of the dead Colonel. M.me the Colonel is sending to the country all his things, save for the two main symbols of power: the Colonel's boots and his gun. The feeling of permanence of patriarchal power is heightened by her apparently innocent remark, while brushing the Colonel's uniform: "These military things never get old." Jeanne masquerades by trying on her father's uniform: in the next scene, she will become the bride in Tom's movie.

After running away from Tom in the pouring rain, Jeanne returns again to Paul, to suffer new degradation. Paul makes fun of her bridal dress, picks her up and lays her on the bed, next to a dead rat (this image will return in Rosa's death-chamber: she too is wearing a bridal dress). In spite of all this, Jeanne breaks into a passionate declaration of love. She is next seen completely nude, in the bathtub; Paul is washing her and "schooling" her at the same time about the impossibility of finding true love. A most interesting "slip"¹⁹ takes place in Paul's speech:

You want this golden, shining, powerful *wife* to build a fortress so you can hide in. So you don't ever have to be afraid ... or you don't have to feel lonely ... you never have to feel empty ... Well, you'll never find him ... you're all alone and you won't be able to be free of that feeling until you look death right in the face. ...

Paul is, once again, talking about himself, repeating his anguished quest for the Other that will not make him feel lonely. He finally manages to look death right in the face: first by gazing at Rosa's face, then by dying himself. But, before that, he performs one last act of sadism on Jeanne: he makes her switch roles with him, ordering her to sodomize him with her fingers, while describing nightmarish love-tests that he would ask her to perform to prove her complete submission. Jeanne agrees to everything, "and more than that." Has she been tamed and subjugated, is she no longer threatening? In theory, "once the tension between subjugation and resistance dissolves, death or abandonment is the inevitable end of the story" (Benjamin 65). Indeed, when Jeanne returns to the apartment, Paul is not there. All rooms are empty, save for the one with the "thing," the big white monster. In a final, desperate attempt to recover from this new denial of her self, Jeanne pulls down the white sheet covering the "thing" and kicks down what is under it: a pile of discarded objects — the rubbish of the past, just like Paul turned out to be. Paul, Jeanne's symbol of rebellion against bourgeois society, turned out to be a reduplication of patriarchal oppression. Thus, what lies beneath is just one big pile of junk, under which Jeanne hides herself to cry.

Once she walks out of the apartment/womb, she is reborn a different Jeanne. As soon as Paul approaches her on the street, she starts repeating "It's over:"²⁰ Paul can only exist in her fantasy, or not at all. As we mentioned earlier, Paul's great attraction was in his "utopian" project, "his effort to escape society and start a new one based on 'nature,' on the Romantic notion of noble savagery" (Bundtzen 181). However, his utopian dream was built on Jeanne's body and on her submission. ... So ... Why does she shoot him? Out of anger? Out of fear? Both? We cannot say — Bertolucci doesn't let us. The one clue he left in an interview, was that Jeanne is not supposed to represent the woman of the future, but that she is, rather, the woman of today, i.e., of the early '70s (Mellen 12). Jeanne was, in a sense, a borderline woman. As we know, Bertolucci was in those years steeped in Marxist and Freudian theories: both of them were under attack and soon to be thoroughly analyzed and critiqued by feminist thought. However, he felt the need of claiming that he was all in favor of women's liberation (Mellen 12).

One characteristic that critics have seen in Bertolucci's work was his nostalgia for situations that stop short of change, situations that come "before the revolution."²¹ Jeanne's situation is quite similar. She is the woman "before the revolution," not yet fully conscious of her status: after all, she's not even in her twenties, yet. This may be the movie's greatest shortcoming: although Bertolucci wanted to create a situation of clash between two opposite forces (Bachmann 4), he pitted a middle-aged pseudo rebel against a middle-class teenager who ends up being called

a bimbo. Jeanne wasn't given much of a chance as a character in the first place: how could she teach that old dog new tricks? Thus, all we are left with at the end of the movie is a curled-up, dead body, a smoking gun, and a young little witch soon to be arrested by the police. It sounds like the parable of a film director's fears of a women's revolution.

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NOTES

¹Bondanella, to quote one of the most authoritative (Bondanella 308).

²Bertolucci said about Tom's character that "it represents an attempt to be ironical about myself" (Ungari 89).

³Similarly to the *Lola Montes* example quoted by Silverman, 226. I find it extremely fascinating that Jeanne's role in Tom's movie also mirrors Maria Schneider's in Bertolucci's movie: she in fact improvised quite a large part of her character, despite the "strictness" of the script (Ungari 90).

⁴Interestingly, Bertolucci's first choice for Paul had been Jean-Louis Trintignant, who had played the male lead in *The Conformist*.

⁵We will eventually find out that he is sterile: Paul will admit in the tango ballroom that he has "a prostate like an Idaho potato," caused by "a 'nail' [he] picked up in Cuba" (Mellen 12) — possibly, also a reference to Hemingway.

⁶The parallel *Last Tango/An American in Paris* is a conscious one: "*Last Tango* is also my very own *An American in Paris*. Alongside the memory of Henry Miller begging through the streets of Montparnasse in order to eat, there is the nostalgia of a dancer who transforms his sad pilgrimage into a choreography in which he can star. When Brando enters the lift, drenched to the bone, and tip taps to let some water out of his shoes, he's my version of Gene Kelly" (Ungari 91).

⁷For a good starting point on Gothic fiction, consult *The Oxford Companion to English Literature*, edited by Margaret Drabble.

⁸— and only partly at that: not by chance, in the dead chamber, Paul addresses Rosa as a "fake Ophelia drowned in the bathtub," thus automatically becoming the fake Hamlet that drove her to her death.

⁹The allusion to Verne is conscious, as Bertolucci has modified the geography of Paris to fit his needs (Kline 109).

¹⁰The dashing but villainous male protagonist of Samuel Richardson's *Clarissa*.

¹¹The seemingly villainous but truly good hero of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*.

¹²See, for example, Bachmann's in his interview of Bertolucci (4 and following).

¹³"The adult sadist ... is searching for a surviving other, but his search is already prejudiced by his childhood disappointment with an other [the mother] who did not survive. Likewise, the adult masochist continues to find an other who survives, just as she did in childhood, but again loses herself in the bargain" (Benjamin 68).

¹⁴In this scene, a wide space separates them, with a door in the middle bearing the sign "Private."

¹⁵It is quite interesting to note that the sodomy part was not in the original script (Bachmann 7).

¹⁶"The anal allusions degrade what woman has to offer, her bodily difference from man" (Benjamin 77).

¹⁷"This rationality bypasses real recognition of the other's subjectivity" (Benjamin 76).

¹⁸I find this scene to be the most politically charged in the movie: a very effective as well as brutal reminder of how masters teach "freedom" to their slaves — i.e., by beating into them the notion that they will never attain it.

¹⁹Kline eliminates this "mistake" by substituting "wife" with "warrior" (116); Kolker corrects it with "knight" but puts the original in footnote: "Paul actually says 'wife' here, but that makes no sense in the context of the statement" (231).

²⁰Which makes me disagree with those critics who see her rejection of Paul as "class-conscious."

²¹For a fuller discussion of this point, which has very interesting psychoanalytical implications, see Bundtzen.

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