

5. Far from my comments eradicating the very notion of rape, they do the opposite; they stress that Hitchcock, Frank, and morally normative 1930s spectators would all agree that the artist “asked for it” by pushing things as he did. That doesn’t rule out the “concessive clauses” and countertensions generated by questions like whether death by stabbing is poetic justice for attempted rape. But even if it was overly severe a punishment here, that wouldn’t make Alice any guiltier. Entertainment abounds in consequences both unintended and undeserved, and fifty-fifty just-yet-unjust is an entirely common balance.

6. Modleski glumly assumes that something called “patriarchy” would convict Alice of murder and “sexuality.” Widespread “patriarchal” theories placidly accept female sexuality, and by 1930 it was a hot topic (see D. H. Lawrence, Louise Brooks, and Garbo and what Elinor Glyn said about “It”). Far from the idea of a lady detective striking the spectator as absurd, the idea is attractive (compare lady-detective-story writers like Agatha Christie and Dorothy L. Sayers).

7. This isn’t the place to analyze certain feminist notions of (a) spectators and (b) males. But far from any Alice-centered moral readings criticizing this film’s structure, they obviously *are* its dominant structure. No other character even challenges Alice’s perspective, for male spectators as for female. Few if any males would want to identify with the artist, or the assorted comic policemen, or Frank’s callow streaks.

Most 1930s English male spectators were *not* patriarchal, *not* macho, *not* (vide Modleski’s opening) splatter-loving teenagers but “family men” amidst a family audience. Women predominated in that audience, and to that extent the audience that judged Alice was neither patriarchal nor “subversive” but “split the difference”; given the prevalence of Alice’s experience, a useful term is “matrist” (see Gordon Rattray Taylor, *The Angel-Makers: A Study in the Psychological Origins of Historical Change 1730–1850*, London: Heinemann, 1950).

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*Reply:*

I will not respond to the entirety of Raymond Durnat’s letter because its rather bewildering speculations about the mental attitudes of British audiences fifty years ago are largely irrelevant to my argument, which focuses on the way male critics have treated the issue of rape in *Blackmail*. Instead, I will confine myself to making explicit my reason for referring briefly to one short passage in Durnat’s chapter on the film.

Far from travestying his argument, I simply wanted to call attention to the rather extraordinary fact that Durnat and other male critics actually subject the heroine to a mock trial, although there is no trial in the film. I certainly did not and would not deny that he, like all judges,

assumed an air of impartiality (discerning tensions and “countertensions”) in apportioning guilt and innocence. Indeed, the belief in the ability of patriarchal law to *be* impartial is what enables the masculine perspective to pass itself off as the universal one. I wanted to challenge this “aperspectivity” by interpreting the film from the woman’s point of view—precisely the point of view that Durnat ultimately disqualifies: “Hitchcock would not have been allowed to show incontrovertible evidence of rape even if he had wanted to so there’s room for doubt even on the issue of whether Alice is right in thinking she’s being raped rather than merely [sic] forcibly embraced [sic].” (In the scene in question, it will be remembered, the man drags the screaming and struggling woman across the room and forces her onto his bed). Despite Durnat’s claim to have constructed “entirely clear arguments,” the clarity of this particular formulation eludes me, as does the humor he implicitly arrogates to himself by characterizing *my* attitude as “glum.” In tiresomely conjuring up the specter of the humorless feminist, Durnat responds all too predictably to an essay that insisted on the way “man’s laughter” so often entails the objectification of woman and the denigration of her experience.

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### The Use of Teaching Associates

To the Editor:

It is now commonplace for foreign language and English departments, particularly those at large state universities, to use (I choose the word advisedly) part-time, temporary faculty members to staff elementary or intermediate language courses. There are slight variations, but in one common pattern, such persons teach three times the load of graduate student teaching assistants for two times the salary. They receive virtually no benefits and have no job security. It is not hyperbole to characterize their employment as exploitative. The fact that in hard economic times people will prefer unfair employment to no employment is inadequate rationalization for such ethically questionable policies. That much is hardly controversial and should, one would think, constitute basis enough for discontinuing the practice; but it hasn’t, and if the issues are seriously discussed at all, the ethical issues are ignored, and the arguments are made on the basis of “programmatic needs.” Cutting ethical corners is justified on the basis of expediency and the alleged strengthening of the program.

In fact, I think quite the opposite is the case. The use of temporary, part-time faculty is shortsighted, detrimental, and ultimately counterproductive. The benefits are purely economic and the costs are high in both human

and intellectual terms. Because teaching associates function neither as students nor as scholars, they are marginal and marginalized within the department and beyond. Instead of strengthening the program, their presence tends to weaken it, not because the quality of instruction is low (it is often quite high) but because a language program staffed by second-class citizens tends to be isolated from the other components of the department (“ghettoized”) rather than integrated with them. It is axiomatic that that part of the program which is in the custody of marginal faculty will be viewed as marginal. This arrangement merely legitimizes the view, already pervasive, that the primary function of a language department is utilitarian rather than humanistic, a form of capitulation that in this case borders on academic suicide.

In short, the use of teaching associates, instead of being an innocuous compromise, reflects directly on the educational and intellectual climate that produces them and provides an interesting perspective on what is generally agreed to be the deterioration of the humanities.

It is usually assumed, without debate, that the difficulties facing foreign language departments are largely due to a scarcity of resources and, as a corollary, that the remedy is largely financial. A look at the recent history of foreign language instruction in the United States suggests something quite different. The passage in the sixties of the NDEA provided funds for language fellowships, institutes, and teacher training. Foreign language instruction was never better funded. But the availability of money was, not surprisingly, a mixed blessing. The strings attached were quite severe. Language instruction was to serve a rather narrow utilitarian function, within the political context of the time. Language was in the service of business and government. This was quite explicit; for example, given the prevailing rationale, there could be no justification for the support of the classical languages, which by definition were nonfunctional. Thus, language instruction was understood to emphasize spoken language, communication was the primary goal of language instruction, and Russian and Chinese were suddenly discovered as neglected languages. The result was a rather sharp transformation in focus. Concern for truth, beauty, and virtue was replaced by the criterion of utility. And foreign language departments saw themselves as the beneficiaries, not the victims. They had more students, more faculty, more degree programs. The humanities business was booming.

Now, fifteen or twenty years later, the fellowships and institutes are gone; what remains is the ideological residue. The rhetoric of universal aesthetic and ethical values seems hollow in the contemporary university, with its concern for FTEs and SCHs. Language departments now

have the worst of both worlds. We sold whatever was left of our humanistic soul to the marketplace devil and now have the benefits of neither. Our colleagues in the classical languages were on the side of the angels. Whatever their faults and limitations, nobody ever thought that the purpose of Latin instruction was to enable the traveler to buy a toga.

We faculty members in the humanities have traditionally been uniquely arrogant in our refusal to meet the most minimal demands of accountability. Anybody who questioned our legitimacy was a philistine, deserving only scorn and ridicule. Ironically, we now are required to justify what we do in the most antihumanistic terms, succumbing to the cost-accounting mentality that completely dominates today’s educational institutions.

Indeed, a comparison of the character of university faculties over the years is instructive. The previous generation was elitist, paternalistic, quite comfortable with the privilege of what was essentially a white, male province. Today’s faculty member displays at least a veneer of egalitarianism (“Call me ‘Jack’”) but is more cynical and opportunistic than his or her predecessor and quite tolerant of an educational climate in which what matters are national rankings, outside offers, visibility rather than substance, and economic viability. While still preaching the value of the traditional humanistic virtues, we carry on our daily affairs according to the law of supply and demand. We are the faculty members who campaigned shamelessly for increasing foreign language requirements, without any concern for how the additional classes were to be staffed. Under those circumstances, there is nothing more natural than a kind of academic colonialism, in which elementary language classes provide the statistical rationale for the exercise of personal ambition by tenure-track faculty, whose opinion of their part-time colleagues’ function is very close to contempt.

Instead of an innocent solution to a temporary emergency, the hiring of teaching associates turns out to be a rather reliable litmus test of the intellectual vigor and sincerity of the modern-day language department. Find a modern language or English department where elementary and intermediate language instruction is primarily in the hands of temporary faculty, and you are likely to find a department that is morally unprincipled and, not surprisingly, intellectually stagnant. This predatory use of cheap labor, far from being a minor contradiction, is symptomatic of a fundamental hypocrisy and lack of integrity.

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