THE BURDEN OF FIDELITY: FROM FRANK NORRIS' McTEAGUE TO ERICH VON STROHEIM'S "GREED"

by

KEVIN ARTHUR LAND

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Anthony B. England

[redacted]

Nelson C. Smith

[redacted]

Barrie McLean

[redacted]

Brian W. Dippie

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Supervisor: Anthony B. England

ABSTRACT

This study concerns what I consider to be the prototypical novel to film transition, that from Frank Norris' McTeague (1899) to Erich von Stroheim's "Greed" (1924). Prior to the removal by the releasing studio of three-quarters of its approximate nine and one-half hour original length, the film represented an uncompromising adaptation of a literary work to a visual medium. Because of its comprehensiveness, Stroheim's work was one of the most ambitious undertakings in the history of cinema. While not proclaiming this project to be equally uncompromising, I do feel examines some of the major issues operating within the translation to the screen. Essentially, it is a study of the differences between two texts, the novel and screenplay, supplemented by the use of the extant film and a reconstruction of the first cut using production stills.

These differences involve changes imposed, whether accidentally or intentionally, on the original text during the transformation. These alterations, I believe, occur primarily for one of two reasons. First, they emerge as a result of the movement from one medium to another, that is, they are caused by the inherent fundamental differences between the two art forms. Second, in a more personal manner, they reflect the presence of another artist, one who, in the process of adapting the work, in some way, recreates it. Basically, this two-fold process of adaptation and recreation is described in the

following study by reference to such traditionally literary features as character, techniques of characterization, symbolism and imagery, and point of view. In each of these areas, my study will consider several shifts in emphasis caused by the director's treatment of the novelist's material.

Examiners: [redacted]

Anthony B. England

[redacted]

Nelson C. Smith

[redacted]

Barnie McLean

[redacted]

Brian W. Dippie

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QUOTATION

One of the implications of this chapter and the one preceding it is that the fewer words printed on the screen the better, and that the ideal film has no words printed on it at all, but is one unbroken sheet of photography.

Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture.

INTRODUCTION

There are fragments and there are fragments. Some works of art are never completed; others are completed and lost for a number of reasons. Unfinished works, by their nature, entice the observer into speculation. What medieval scholar has not been fascinated by the prospect of a complete Canterbury Tales? Here, where the extant material serves as a monument to a larger work, he may conjecture freely as to the nature of the "imaginary" work of art. In the process, other questions are raised. How, for example, would the Renaissance man's imagination have reacted to twelve books of The Faerie Queene? Furthermore, would the hypothetical work have been successful on its own terms, i.e. would it have fulfilled its objectives? If its purpose was merely "to fashion a gentleman or noble person in vertuous and gentle discipline"[1], could it not have done so in one book?

The difference between speculating on the unfinished work of art and seeking the completed product that is now lost is analogous to the difference between searching for the "Fountain of Youth" and trying to recover the remains of the Titanic. One exists in fantasy, the other in fact. A literary example of the latter is the majority of Anglo-Saxon poetry. Since there are only some few thousand lines extant, one must simply make do. Were a complete manuscript of a major poem to be suddenly uncovered, undoubtedly the status of Beowulf would be reassessed. Still, there is something more awesome about this type of fragment, something charged. It is characterized not so much by absence as loss. The completed work is not "imaginary"; it was once real.

Such a case is that of Erich von Stroheim's film "Greed", often called "the Holy Grail of Cinema."[2] Originally some forty-odd reels, about nine and one-half hours in duration,[3] it was alleged to be an uncompromising translation of Frank Norris' naturalistic novel, McTeague (1899), to the screen. In January, 1924, the director held a private screening of the entire work for a group of about a dozen people, consisting of journalists, fellow directors, and personal friends. By December, when it was premiered at William Randolph Hearst's Cosmopolitan Theatre, the film had been reduced three-quarters of its length by a team of editors under June Mathis, all of whom were employed by the studio, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer. The final, ten-reel, two and one-half hour film was received with intensely favourable or excessively malicious reviews, the former tending to come from those who praised its "realism" and veracity to life, the latter, from those revolted by its depressing subject matter and world-view.[4] Clearly, this was not a film to which one could be indifferent.

Needless to say, during the transition from the complete to the edited work, there was much animosity between the director and the studio. Stroheim's final editing of the film brought it down to twenty-four reels, which he intended to show over two evenings. Upon the further objections of the studio, Stroheim offered it to his friend and fellow director Rex Ingram, who reduced it to eighteen reels which, according to Joel Finler, "he [Ingram] considered the bare minimum."[5] To this he adds "In either of these versions, running for four or five hours, the film was probably the ideal compromise between Stroheim's original conception and the demands of the releasing studio."[6] From a

practical point of view, the film in this state can be considered the "authorised edition."

Unfortunately, there is no available material through which one may ascertain of what this "authorised edition" consisted. What criteria Stroheim or Ingram applied in the editing process cannot be determined. The studio's ultimate rejection of these versions and subsequent surrendering of the work to June Mathis negated the possibility of outlining them. One can at best state that the extant film is an edition of the "authorised version". It is said that June Mathis ordered the excised material destroyed, burned as Stroheim claimed, "for forty-three cents worth of silver".[7] Even Judas settled for more. In addition, awkward titles were employed to account for massive gaps in the narrative. Often clumsily written, these titles counteracted the rhythm of the narrative and often changed the original meaning of some aspect of the film.[8] It is indeed fortunate that Joel Finler's publication of the screenplay inserts and identifies these passages. The screenplay also serves to indicate the amount of material removed--the lion's share of the prologue, the Grannis-Baker and Maria-Zerkow subplots, and much of the main plot (the gilded tooth and the gradual decline of the McTeagues' fortunes.)

In 1958, the Cinémathèque de Belgique published, for the conference which it held to determine the twelve greatest films of all time (of which "Greed" was sixth), a text of the director's screenplay taken from Stroheim's personal copy. It was not, however, until 1972, when Finler published a version complete with editorial commentary, that the work, as Stroheim conceived it and as it was ultimately filmed, was

available to the public. The primary advantage the screenplay affords is the opportunity to conceive a hypothetical version of the original film, particularly given the detail which Stroheim used in it. This endeavour could be supported by the employment of The Complete Greed by Herman Weinberg, which is a pictorial reconstruction of the seven and one-half hour version (Stroheim's first cut) of the film, based on the production stills from M.G.M.

One of the more pervasive truisms about a work of art is its aptness for the form it assumes. A play is conceived with an awareness of the limitations of the stage, a novel generally with a clear narrative framework in mind and some knowledge of how language operates within it, a film with the understanding of the means through which the visual image conveys the artist's intentions. The distinctions between the genres are not at all fine, as diverse in nature, perhaps, as they are on an experiential level. Therefore, transversing these distinctions implies certain assumptions. To clarify this point, however, one must first examine some of the essential differences in the natures of literature and film.

The most important distinction is also a platitude, but it is central to any discussion of the two. One does not need to read George Bluestone to know that film is essentially visual, having its basis in photographs, whereas literature is essentially conceptual, having its basis in language. In simpler terms, the former is a presentational, the latter a discursive art form. Film, then, refers directly to physical reality using space as its primary mode of presentation while literature employs recognized symbols to communicate, using time as its

primary mode of presentation. Bluestone speaks of "the two ways of seeing." He cites D.W. Griffith's statement, "The task I'm trying to achieve is above all to make you see," and compares it with a passage from Conrad's preface to The Nigger of the Narcissus: "My task which I am trying to achieve is, by the power of the written word, to make you hear, to make you feel--it is, before all, to make you see."[9] One "sees" a film with one's eyes; one "sees" a novel with one's imagination. One finds in Stephen Crane, an acquaintance of Norris', the belief in the novel as a "succession of sharply outlined pictures, which pass before the reader like a panorama, leaving each its definite impression,"[10] a point of view which Norris was in accordance with, given both his training in France as a printer and his later comments in his essays on the mechanics of fiction.

The movement from novel into film, then, is from the conceptual to the visual, from a word-symbol to what the symbol represents (visual counterpart), from imagination to reality. Because of their differing natures, absolute translation is impossible. As Fred Marcus comments,

> The novelist tends to reveal what people do through what they are; the director, to reveal what they are through what they do. What the novelist deploys, the director must display. It is exactly here that the film based on the novel usually fails.[11]

In short, there are components of each that are mutually exclusive. Vachel Lindsay, perhaps the first to attempt a critical aesthetic evaluation of film as an art form, in his The Art of the Moving Picture, wrote,

> What is adapted to complete expression in one art generally seems but half-expression in another. The supreme photoplay will give us things that have been but half-expressed in all other mediums (sic) altered to it.[12]

Lindsay would likely have had little sympathy for Stroheim's plight with the studio over "Greed", undoubtedly arguing that the director attempted to express the "whole" novel, rather than the allotted half. He would also have attacked Stroheim for the film's length, for he was an advocate of the sparing (in its simplest sense) film:

> The intimate photoplay should not crowd its characters. It should not choke itself trying to dramatize the whole big bloody plot of Lorna Doone or any other novel with a dozen leading people.[13]

He also stated definitely: "Edgar Allan Poe said there was no such thing as a long poem. There is certainly no such thing as a long motion picture masterpiece."[14] It is possible that Stroheim was familiar with Lindsay's work, as it was published in 1915, nine years before the release of "Greed", but he obviously cared little for such sentiments.

George Bluestone, some four decades later, concurs with Lindsay's views on the translation of a work of art from one medium to another, stating that "changes are inevitable the moment one abandons the linguistic for the visual medium."[15] As he explains,

> We discover, therefore, in film versions of the novel an inevitable abandonment of "novelistic" elements. This abandonment is so secure that, in a strict sense, the new creation has little resemblance to the original. With the abandonment of language as its role and primary element, the film necessarily leaves behind those

> characteristic contents of thought which only language can approximate--hopes, dreams, memories, conceptual consciousness. In their stead, the film supplies endless spatial variations, photographic images of physical reality, and the principle of montage and editing.[16]

For him, the novel is simply "raw material" with which the film-maker "ultimately creates his own unique structure."[17]

Such a viewpoint introduces the concept of the director as "auteur" Andrew Tudor traces the term back to the "politique des auteurs" of Cahiers du Cinéma in the criticism of Truffaut and his colleagues. The "auteur theory", he argues, is a poor translation--"policy" being the most obvious translation of "politique."[18] Tudor considers two notions central to the application of "auteur" from the onset. Primarily, there was "the old idea that the director was the true creator of the film"[19]. However, this does not mean that he must exert megalomaniacal control over the entire production. Turning to Truffaut, one reads that,

> . . . the man who has the ideas must be the same man who makes the picture. This being so, I am also convinced that a film resembles the man who made it--even if he didn't choose the subject, didn't choose the actors, didn't exclusively direct them and let assistants do the editing--even such a film would . . . profoundly reflect in depth, for instance through the rhythm, the pacing, the man who made it . . .[20]

(Stroheim chose the subject and the actors, exclusively directed them, and did the editing himself. Unfortunately, he did not do the final editing.) The second notion involves the necessity that the director

exercise complete freedom over his production, a condition by which the French critics often excluded all but a handful of Hollywood directors, who were subservient to the dictates of the commercially-minded studio management. This condemnation, however, bears little relevance here for, although it was the studio's "greed" which ultimately butchered the film, Stroheim enjoyed complete liberty in its production.

One of the tenets of "auteur policy" is the concept of "camera-stylo," a term invented by French film-maker and theorist Alexander Astrue, which viewed the camera as a pen, thereby expressing "any sphere of thought",[21] as does literature. Though the term was introduced in the late forties, therefore predating André Balgin's critique of the theory in April of 1957 in Cahiers du Cinéma, it is certainly applicable to Stroheim. His use of the dreams, hallucinations, and visual projections of the ambitions of his characters is perfect evidence of this, and acts as a qualifying counterpoint to the statement of George Bluestone above on the distinctions between film and literature, a notion which will be discussed at length in a future chapter.

While it is not my intention to interchange "auteur" for "author", I do believe that the role of Stroheim, in certain instances, approximates that of the novelist. The approach is not new--Lubitsch is said to have described film-makers as being "story-tellers in the novella form, but the only true novelist was Stroheim."[22] Recently Penelope Gilliatt, film critic for the New Yorker, has said,

> The nearer truth may have been that he was a man with a mind more like a writer's. His films transmit a writer's concentration, and it's very infectious. It pervades the films and fills them . . . Stroheim was a novelist in film. To a novelist, detail simply matters.[23]

The purpose of this study is to examine the translation of a novel to a film from a two-fold perspective. Such a transition is destined to be incomplete first, because of the differing natures of the media, and second, because of the influence of another artist on the raw material. In a co-operative art form such as film, other factors may intrude also (e.g. the influence of others involved in the production). Further, as a popular art form, additional factors, such as budget and popular tastes, may be involved. However, these aspects can be rightfully discounted, given Stroheim's control over production, his "carte blanche" in monetary matters, and his stated contempt for popular tastes. In this manner, all changes may be accounted for and explained as the results of the differing natures of the two media or the intervention of the auteur. For changes, as stated, are inevitable.

Basically, there are two stages in the movement from novel to film, that from novel to screenplay, and that from screenplay to film. Perhaps this is why Bluestone states that,

> Like two intersecting lines, novel and film meet at a point, then diverge. At the intersection, the book and shooting-script are almost indistinguishable. But where the lines diverge, they not only resist conversion, they also lose all resemblance to each other.[24]

The extant film of "Greed" is about one-quarter of its original length. Until the "Holy Grail" is found, one can only surmise about the destroyed film, with occasional support from the production stills. Despite the extensive editing, the extant film generally exists as a self-enclosed, homogeneous unit.[25] For this reason, its use in this study is essential. Were it not so, it would only be possible to compare novel and screenplay with little difficulty. Treated as an examination of two texts, the critic could determine some of the tendencies in the transition from one medium to another while remaining within the initial medium, treating the screenplay as a sort of linguistic skeleton for a visual form. In this context, however, the film is both integral and supplementary--integral, in that it serves to substantiate the degree to which Stroheim was faithful to his script; supplementary, in what it suggests about the missing footage.

When one approaches literature, one must consider such elements as plot, character, themes, setting, imagery and symbolism, and point of view. While all of these may apply to film, some may be eliminated immediately in the case of this investigation. Since what I am focusing on are changes that occur in the novel-film process, where there is no change, there is not need for discussion. Plot, for example, will not warrant much examination because the screenplay adheres closely to the plot of the novel, with only a few minor variations and a long, introductory prologue added by Stroheim (which will be discussed). Similarly, many themes common to both forms do not merit elaborate consideration. Setting, too, is almost entirely consistent with the book--the film was shot on the very street, even

on the very site where the murder on which the book was based took place. Stroheim was so desirous of a realistic presentation that he insisted the actors live in the quarters of the characters they were to portray during the shooting. The scenes in Death Valley were authentic, so authentic that they put Jean Hersholt (Marcus) in the hospital for over-exposure to the sun. "Greed" was the first film to be shot entirely without the benefit of studio sets (save the bizarre, Caligariesque graveyard where Zerkow uncovers the "treasure"), a move revolutionary to the time.[26]

My examination, therefore, will focus primarily on character, devices of rendering character, imagery and symbolism, and point of view. For numerous reasons, characterization represents a severe difficulty for the film-maker. The chapter on character will outline these, but its primary consideration will be the alterations to the novel. The second chapter will study the director's technique of characterization, devices which are employed to minimize this difficulty. Further reference to the use of cinematic devices will be made in the third chapter, on imagery and symbolism, and in the fourth chapter, which is devoted chiefly to "auteur" considerations.[27]

Although the following project illustrates the inability of one artist to fully adapt the work of another into a different medium because of their incompatible natures, it really concerns the interpretation of a literary work by a film-maker, his presence in a film translated from that literary work, and the applicability of the "auteur policy" in such a case. Charles Wolfe sums this up best when he says,

From available evidence, "Greed"'s substantial claim to greatness is rooted not in its revelation of "merciless truth" (whatever that may be), but rather because of the integrity of the relationship between the artist and his chosen subject, and the rigorous and rhythmic pattern with which the subject is revealed to us.[28]

FOOTNOTES: INTRODUCTION

[1]Hugh MacLean, Edmund Spenser's Poetry (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, Inc., 1968), p.1.

[2]Herman Weinberg, The Complete Greed (New York: Arno Press, 1972), Introduction (unpaginated).

[3]There is some discrepancy between film historians as to the length of the film. For my purpose, the figures most often cited will suffice.

[4]Respective examples of each are found in Variety Weekly (New York: December 10, 1924) and Exceptional Photoplays (New York: December-January, 1925), reprinted in Joel Finler, Greed (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1972), p. 31-2.

[5]Stroheim (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 34.

[6]Ibid., p. 34.

[7]Peter Noble, Hollywood Scapegoat (London: Fortune Press, 1950), p. 52.

[8]The most obvious example is Trina's intrusive comment in the extant film "Let's go and sit on the sewer" upon Mac's arrival at the train station, whereas the act was intended as a more subtle consequence of a lengthy promenade.

[9]George Bluestone, Novel Into Film (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1961), p.1.

[10]Keith Cohen, Film and Fiction/The Dynamics of Exchange (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 33.

[11]Fred H. Marcus, Film and Literature: Contrasts in Media (Scranton/London/Toronto: Chandler, 1971), p. 158.

[12](New York: Liveright, 1970), p. 197.

[13]Ibid., p. 50.

[14]Ibid., p. 194.

[15]Novels Into Film (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 5.

[16]Ibid., pp. vii-ix.

[17]Ibid., p. ix.

[18]Andrew Tudor, Theories of Film (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), p. 121.

[19]Ibid., p. 122.

[20]William Jinks, The Celluloid Literature (University of Florida and Gainesville: Glencoe Press, 1974), p. 147.

[21]Ibid., p. 196.

[22]Herman Weinberg, The Complete Greed (New York: Arno Press, 1972), Introduction (unpaginated).

[23]New Yorker Vol. 148, June 3, 1972, p. 81.

[24]Novels Into Film (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 63.

[25]The exception to this would be certain individual shots, such as the gold tooth in the McTeagues' room and the presence of Grannis and Baker at the wedding, the basis of which remains unexplained in the film.

[26]The only inconsistency in setting is an unnoticeable one. As Herman Weinberg explains: "Stroheim updates the action to 1908, covering a span of fifteen years, to 1923, but he does a curious thing, unprecedented then and never repeated since: he costumes his players in the dress of the Norris story, at the century's turn, although the people of his backgrounds are dressed in the styles of the year the picture was shot--1923. There is no clash, not the slightest" (The Complete Greed, New York: Arno Press, 1972. Introduction).

[27]There are many aspects which will not be discussed. Some, like the incidental changes imposed on the screenplay (e.g. the alteration of dates, times, sums of money, etc.) or the addition of material to "fill-in-the-picture" (the introduction of names, for example: McTeague becomes "John McTeague" in a letter from the dental board; Trina wins the money from the "Mexican Lottery Company") are not particularly significant.

Others, like the role of the titles, are important. Although primarily a substitute for sound, the titles also acted as a commentary on the action. Further, their basis being literary, they possess an affinity with the narrative form. Reaction by reviewers and critics to the use of titles was generally unfavourable, "pure film" being considered a work independent of them, such as Murnau's "The Last Laugh." But even here there is dissension. George Bernard Shaw speaks of playwright James M. Barrie as saying "that the film play of the future will have no pictures and will consist exclusively of sub-titles" (Harry M. Geduld, Authors on Film. Bloomington and London: Indiana University Press, 1972. p. 121).

The most drastic use of titles in "Greed", as stated, involved the insertions by the editors to account for gaps in the narrative. The clumsy use of a title with over-stated symbolism produces a crass and facile effect (consider the consecutive "Such was McTeague" and "Such was Mother McTeague"). Another possible consideration is the matter of the various literary quotations themselves. The decision by the editors to replace the Robert Blair quote from "The Grave" with which Stroheim opened the film with a passage of doggerel verse from Thomas Hood's "Miss Kilmansegg: Her Moral" typifies the respective natures of director and studio. In the course of the original film, Stroheim used a quote from Scott as well as numerous passages from Norris' novel, many of which were subsequently altered or removed by the editors. Examination of these titles and their implications would offer some insights into both the director and the editorial process.

[28] Sight and Sound, Vol. 44 (Summer, 1975), p. 170.

CHAPTER I

CHARACTER

> Great character is the most obvious single mark of great literature. The rude, the vulgar, may see in Alyosha nothing more than the image of a modest, God loving youth, the scholar may perceive through this demeanor a symbolic form; but the Alyosha of the untutored is somehow more real and present to him than the youth on his street whom he's known since childhood, loving of his God and modest too, equally fired, fully as patient, for in some way Alyosha's visionary figure will take lodging in him, make a model for him, so to reach, without the scholar's inflationary gifts, general form and universal height; whereas the neighbor may merely move away, take cold, and forget to write.
>
> William H. Gass, "The Concept of Character in Fiction".

It is not easy to overestimate the importance of character to either fiction or narrative film. William H. Gass emphasizes that "Great literature is great because its characters are great, and characters are great when they are memorable."[1] For him,

> characters are clearly conceived as living outside language [and] . . . seem to have come to the words of their novels like a visitor to town . . . and later they leave on the arm of the reader, bound, I suspect, for a shabbier hotel, and dubious entertainments.[2]

Similarly, as the prefatory quote shows, they are somewhat outside life too. The reason for this lies in the use of the terms "real and present" and depends largely, I believe, on their degree of accessibility. A film character is far more "real and present" than his literary counterpart insofar as he is visually represented. He goes about his business on a lighted screen in a darkened room, oblivious to even the noisiest observer, whose very presence in that darkened room restricts his attention to the screen. The character in fiction, however, can only be encountered in the light. To his credit, though, he can be found at crowded railway stations, on the bus, in one's living-room, or even in one's bed when one is alone at night. The cinematic figure, then, is more immediate, the literary one, more removed. But while the latter may emerge as an Alyosha, the former more closely resembles the youth on the observer's street from Gass' analogy. The cinematic character, it appears, pays for his immediacy. While he is granted a conditional residency in the so-called real world, his literary equivalent takes up lodging in the imagination.

At the time of "Greed"'s release, it was customary in films to present characters as types rather than individuals. The reasons for this were varied. First, characters had to be developed completely without the aid of sound. Second, film was a relatively new art form and was therefore largely undeveloped. Third, and most importantly, it was a popular art form, and consequently had to be accessible to the commonest of men. Although Stroheim's treatment of character was generally antithetical to this practice, it nonetheless produced one effect upon the spectator that was similar to an effect achieved by the more conventional films (Griffith's "Way Down East" or "La Boheme", for example), that is, it aroused his emotions in a fairly extreme way. The primary reason for this is an emphatic distinction between "hero" and "heavy". The spectator thus identifies and/or sympathizes with the hero (at its simplest level, a viewer identifies with William S. Hart and sympathizes with Chaplin) and recoils against the villain. While Stroheim does not exactly resort to white and black Stetsons, he does make it clear how his characters are to be perceived. In this chapter, I shall examine Stroheim's handling of two of the three central characters of the novel, McTeague and Marcus, and illustrate, after some discussion of their individual natures, their roles as "hero" and "heavy", respectively.

In his commentary on McTeague, Warren French cites S.I. Hayakawa's distinction between what he terms "thing-handlers" and "symbol-handlers" in order to acquire a sense of the basis of McTeague's behaviour. According to Hayakawa, "The former are handlers of economic things (potatoes, fish, coconuts) and the latter are handlers

of economic symbols (notes, bills, futures, covering the exchange of potatoes, fish, coconuts)."[3] In applying this world view to McTeague French refers to various incidents in the novel (such as his problem with the purchase of the theatre tickets, his incomprehension at the notion of interest, and his failure at the job that entailed "a certain amount of ciphering" (p.211)[4] at Uncle Olbermann's factory) as examples of McTeague's inability to deal with symbols. Such observations, I believe, are valid insofar as they are aimed at the root of McTeague's social ineffectiveness. French's argument, however, is in some ways incomplete. When he refers to the notion that "McTeague allows Maria to talk him out of some valuable dental instruments that simply need repair"[5], he seems to suggest that it is yet another case of McTeague's being taken in by argument, in the same way that he proves to be easily influenced by Trina or the owner of the house he agrees to rent. While in part true, the importance of this incident is chiefly that it acts as evidence for one of the most crucial comments made about Mac's character in the work. It occurs in the same chapter as the event French refers to, and reads, "McTeague was continually breaking things which he was too stupid to have mended; for him anything that was broken was lost "(p35), a statement which may be taken as the absolute thing-handler's dictum.

Although this attitude is prevalent throughout the novel, two instances are noteworthy. The first is Marcus' attack with a knife on McTeague which results in the breaking of the dentist's pipe. McTeague is either unable to recognize the threat to his life or does so and is unmoved by it. At any rate, what disturbs and incites him

to anger is the destruction of the thing, an act which vaguely smacks of castration. The second major manifestation proves the extent to which his rejection of broken things permeates the other areas of his life. For him, Trina, too, is a "thing." Before he possesses her, he keeps the tooth he had extracted from her "wrapped in a bit of newspaper in his vest pocket" (p. 26). When he struggles against kissing her as she is unconscious in the chair, he is aware that she would become tainted in the process:

> Dimly he seemed to realize that should he yield now he would never be able to care for Trina again. She would never be the same to him, never so radiant, so sweet, so adorable . . . (p. 29).

She is the thing which is broken upon acquisition. When he kisses her at the train station against her will, these sentiments reappear:

> McTeague released her, but in that moment a slight, a barely perceptible revulsion of feeling had taken place in him. The instant that Trina gave up, the instant she allowed him to kiss her, he thought less of her. She was not desirable after all . . . Was there not something gone from Trina now? (p. 64).

Nonetheless, McTeague's whole sensibility is frustrated by loss. While economic deprivation may be the general cause, the effect is particularly disastrous to a thing-handler. As McTeague's position declines, it is characterized by a systematic removal of "things." The occasion of the auction sale proves a crisis for the dentist:

> When it had come to the sale of his office effects McTeague had rebelled with the instinctive obstinacy of a boy, shutting his eyes and ears. Only little by little did Trina induce him to part with his office furniture. He fought over every article . . .(p. 182)

In the same paragraph, which had begun with Mac's vehement declaration that he would never sell his pug dog and engraving, one learns, in the last sentence, that "a veritable scene took place" (p. 142) between them and that the outcome meant his capitulation.

In the case of his wife's inducements to place his concertina and his canary up for sale, "he simply opposed her entreaties and persuasions with a passive, inert obstinacy that nothing could move" (p. 143). Ironically, it is the concertina which brings about Trina's murder. Having discovered that she sold it to a store, Mac attempts to buy it back. Lack of funds forces him to confront his wife. Upon her refusal to surrender the money, he kills her. He has lost the concertina forever. In his flight, he carries his last remaining "thing"--the canary. The money, of course, is a "symbol", something incomprehensible to the thing-handler. (As stated earlier in the novel, "What he would do with the money once he had it, he did not precisely know"(p. 213)). The canary, then, is his most important acquisition. The fact that the dentist ventures into Death Valley is significant, for that is a terrain where symbols are useless and things absolutely essential, where a canteen filled with water becomes priceless. As the novel ends, as McTeague sits handcuffed to the corpse of Marcus, it is apparent that he is about to lose his last "thing", for he sees the "half-dead canary chittering feebly in its little gilt prison "(p.304).

Such a reading of the character, one in which he is inextricably tied with the objects surrounding him, is intensely cinematic. The emphasis on things is obviously visual and makes for a relatively easy transition to the screen. The process of introducing and removing

things in order to reflect the inner state of a character adapts comfortably to film, particularly when a concluding long shot emphasizes the desolate wasteland he inhabits. However, although this is an important similarity in presentation of character, there are some equally significant differences which show the mind of the film-artist transforming the materials with which he is working.

In some ways, the casting of an actor in the role of McTeague provides an immediate contrast with the novel. He is, in an illusory if not in an actual manner, more real and present than his literary counterpart. The presence is more human, and therefore, more accessible, to the observer. This contrast is heightened by the fact that despite the abundance of visual imagery and description in the novel, McTeague moreso than the other characters, remains imprecisely sketched. One emerges from a reading of the text with a vague sense of his bulkiness and an awareness of the scant, almost obligatory, attention paid by Norris to personal detail. There are occasional references to his "thick mustaches"(p. 47) (which, for some reason, Stroheim chooses not to preserve in the film although, in the screenplay, a reference is made to his wearing one), "enormous jaws" (p. 128) and "thick lips" (p. 65), "his huge, square-cut head, ... his shock of yellow hair" (p. 68), and "his huge hands" (p. 30), but the fact that they are repeated in formulaic style tends more to reduce McTeague to a stock level through flat and deflated language than to define his singularity.

This absence of extensive and definite physical attributions to McTeague reinforces the impression conveyed of his atavistic, and even

bestial, nature, for it suggests an ape-like creature lifted from the pages of Darwin. For Stroheim, this scarcity of detail meant a reduction of the difficulty in casting an actor without sacrificing fidelity to the novel. However, McTeague's "larger-than-life" qualities expressed in the novel posed a problem of accurate representation for the director, for it was essential that he emphasize the character's immensity and strength; he circumvented this problem through techniques of the medium, such as intense close-ups and low angle shots of Mac to make him appear more menacing and powerful.

Although the director has chosen to preserve the exterior McTeague of the novel, it is clear that he has a different notion of his predominant characteristic. Whereas Norris seems to place primary emphasis on McTeague's stupidity, Stroheim highlights his compassion. Essentially, the distinction between the two is between a sympathetic handling of McTeague by Stroheim and an objective, somewhat condescending, treatment of him by Norris. By referring to passages which outline their respective interpretations it is possible to ascertain the means by which the presentation of a character may be transformed in the adaptation to the screen.

Thing-handler or not, for Norris, McTeague is excessively dim-witted. The novelist brings the point home many times in the narrative, often with implied animosity. One of the ways he does so is through reference to McTeague's occupation. In his preparation for dentistry, McTeague "had read many of the necessary books, but he was too hopelessly stupid to get much benefit from them" (p. 10). Note the description of the manner in which McTeague does his job:

> He worked slowly, mechanically, turning the foil between his fingers with the manual dexterity that one sometimes sees in stupid persons. His head was quite empty of all thought, and he did not whistle over his work as another man might have done. The canary made up for his silence, trilling and chittering continually, splashing about in its morning bath, keeping up an incessant noise and movement that would have been maddening to anyone but McTeague, who seemed to have no nerves at all. (pp.19-20)

Despite Norris' apparent mistrust of ideas and thought as substitutes for action, there is little doubt that McTeague is not the ideal "naturalized" man. His "mind was as his body, heavy, slow to act, sluggish . . . altogether he suggested the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient " (p. 10). He perceives his world "dimly" (pp. 29, 43) or "stupidly" (pp. 44, 48, 167, 180, 186, 207, 211). Even Trina is aware of him as "her stupid brutish husband" (p. 132) and attempts "to raise him from the stupid animal life to which he had been accustomed in his bachelor days " (p. 145). She goes so far as to call him "stupid" (p. 145) and "the thick-wittedest man that I ever knew" (p. 145) after his dealings with the landlord of the dilapidated house, claiming no responsibility for herself because "It's your stupidity got us into this fix " (p. 146). For the novelist, McTeague's problem is that he "never went to the bottom of things " (p. 235). He is an animal who lives simply by routine (so the novel begins: "It was Sunday, and, according to his custom on that day . . .) (p. 9) who gradually finds this routine more and more disrupted and attempts, ultimately, to regain it in his own "stupid" way.

As Norris emphasizes McTeague's stupidity, so Stroheim stresses his compassion. This is not to say that Stroheim bestows him with

intelligence; there are numerous similar and identical examples of the character's inarticulateness in the film in addition to those incidents, such as the purchase of the theatre tickets, which express the dentist's general inability to comprehend simple concepts. For the most part, however, the handling of such matters is achieved in a manner which evokes sympathy for the character rather than alienates the audience from him.

Joel Finler observes that "By opening 'Greed' at the mine, Stroheim has given the film a form that the novel lacked."[6] The truth of this statement is the fact that the introductory section both gives the work a circular structure, for McTeague returns again to the mine near the end, and associates the degeneration of the character with geographic movement (mine to San Francisco to mine to Death Valley). However, in addition to this, the opening section that Stroheim introduced into the film also establishes those aspects of McTeague's character which tend to create sympathetic responses to him. The director injects McTeague's early life with a vitality that greatly surpasses the implications of Norris' peripheral allusions to it.[7] Part of the reason is thematic. With Stroheim, moreso than with Norris, one becomes convinced that nowhere is Mac more suited and able to achieve contentment than at the mine. It is here that his nature is most compatible with his environment. The elaborate sequence of events created by Stroheim which leads up to the youth's departure from the mine establishes this thoroughly.

It is clear that both Norris and Stroheim view Mac as little more than a brute. For the former, he undoubtedly resembled some Darwinian

model, Homo Sapiens with dental instruments. Although it is apparent that each perceives him as basic uncultivated man, Stroheim tends to present him more as a "blank slate"[8], like the Victorian notion of a child, something to be altered or defined in accordance with the user's wishes. It is an idea that the director discovered in Norris, for the latter gives this impression of McTeague with respect to Trina, who "creates" him in the image of the "cultivated man" but, as a result of a combination of economic pressures and a personal mania, she must withdraw her influence. This transition in McTeague's character is evidenced in the screenplay by Trina's suppression of McTeague's characteristic gesture of wiping his mouth with his hand, his abandonment of his "routine" (as in the novel), his observance of etiquette, his abstaining from frequent visits to the saloon (in the novel he prefers a higher grade of tobacco and substitutes bottled beer for steam beer as further proof), and the approval by a group of women of the changes that marriage brought about in the dentist. This might explain the additional emphasis Stroheim attaches to the scene in Mac's office after his suspension by the dental authorities. As the two sit bewailing their fate, Trina is holding the slate on which is written the names of the patients who held appointments that day. As she cries, the tears fall on its surface. Finally, she runs her hand over it, obliterating all the names, symbolically removing those values she had instilled in the dentist during their period of affluence.[9]

In the opening segment, the director employs Mother McTeague as an antecedent to Trina. The insertion of her into the narrative is

purely Stroheim's. The only reference to her influence on her son in the novel is reported in Norris' typically factual, plain style: "He [Dr. Potter in the film, unnamed in the novel] was more or less of a charlatan, but he fired Mrs. McTeague's ambitions, and young McTeague went away with him to learn his profession" (p. 10). Stroheim's depiction of the woman holds none of the harmless undertones of Norris. Rather, it shows a woman obsessed with the prospect of her son's success. Although her ambitions for him are likely to gain the sympathy of the audience, the underlying tension in the early scenes caused by McTeague's stoicism amidst his mother's suffering at the hands of his father, and later at his father's death, proves the absence of a strong bond between any of the members of the family. On the contrary, the mother is shown, by implication, to be an agent of misfortune to her son because of her objectives. Consequently, sympathy for McTeague is created, because he is defined as a victim of his mother's irrational and uncomprehending influence. Further, the fact that she distorts reality (the daydream of her son as businessman and travelling dentist in place of Potter) indicates that she really does not know him. While she may love him, she has no conception of his nature and limitations.

In one early scene, holding her late husband's pocket watch in her hands, she touches the large tooth which was used as a fob and looks "from the tooth up into space as if realizing and understanding its significance. She nods slightly as if to say, it must be so " (s.p.57). If there is any doubt that she has become obsessed with her son's success, Stroheim removes it. Not long after, one finds all the

major thematic concerns rolled up into an old woman's anxiety:

> Mother McTeague starts to tell him in pantomime that his future here does not amount to anything and is not worthy of a man, that she has great ambition for him and great hopes for his future; that the coming of the dentist seems to her a great intervention of Fate; that she has talked to the dentist and that he suggested that Mac should go up with him; that she agreed with him and that she has packed all his things. She points to them.(s.p.58)

Although McTeague "shows no emotion whatsoever" (s.p.55) in these early scenes, his mother displays it to excess. Overcome by sentiment as the dentist's wagon carrying her son departs, she "stuffs her handkerchief bit by bit, into her mouth, then pulls on the edge of the handkerchief so hard she tears it"(s.p.60). The sight of her "emaciated body" (s.p. 59) witnessing the departure is intended by Stroheim to represent a greed of a different sort, that which consumes itself as it craves satisfaction.

The other significant feature of the opening material in Stroheim's film is that it establishes the compassion of McTeague. In fact, McTeague is introduced befriending and caressing a bird he discovers on the track outside the mine. His subsequent physical abuse of a miner who belittles him and knocks the bird out of his hand perfectly captures the tension that exists within him between simple passion and scant reason. Further evidence of his compassion emerges when his father steals his mother's cheque, for he immediately surrenders his own to her. This action, of course, also entails devotion as well, the same devotion which later compels him to attempt to realise her ambitions for him, but its function as a reinforcement of his affinity for feeble and helpless creatures cannot be ignored.

Traces of McTeague's compassion in the novel, however, are almost non-existent. The work concludes with McTeague merely staring at the caged bird, not with his freeing it, as in the film. His treatment of Marcus' teeth gratis is more a token of friendship than anything else. He gives the scavenger Maria his old dental instruments not out of any kindness but as a means of appeasing her and causing her to leave. Even his fitting of Trina's bridgework resulted from a feeling "that it would be a pity to disfigure such a pretty mouth" (p.25). This is probably the result of his animal attraction for her (he had already begun "to like her better and better" (p.25)) coupled with his revulsion for broken things, for he sincerely desired "to remedy the blemish "(p.25). In the entire work, there is not a single instance where McTeague exhibits true unqualified compassion. Further, on the occasion where he is most prevailed upon to do so, he does not act. The incident in question is a critically neglected one which, interestingly, Stroheim does not adapt to the screen. It consists of the dentist's encounter with "Big Jim", "an immense Indian buck" (p.270), who approaches him at a railroad stop and offers him a letter informing the reader that "Big Jim was a good Indian deserving of charity." (p.270). McTeague returns the letter and boards the train without a reaction. The entire transaction occurs without speech on either part. As the train departs, the buck remains immobile, "a forlorn and solitary point of red, lost in the immensity of the surrounding white blur of the desert" (p.271). Clearly, McTeague has encountered his alter ego. Both are atavistic, social outcasts, unintelligent, and find no satisfactory means of articulating their feelings. McTeague's inability to act on behalf of the Indian is simply an extension of his own plight.

The potential this scene would have offered the film is not minor, not merely in a visual sense but also through the Indian's characteristic affinity with McTeague and the spectacle of the buck's solitude in the desert which foreshadows the final shot of the isolated McTeague in Death Valley. But it is obvious why Stroheim would not present such an incident on film. As it stands, it is incongruous with the character he had depicted. Stroheim's McTeague would likely have given the buck a share of the lottery money in the same way that he spent much of the money he stole from Trina earlier on buying drinks for strangers.

Stroheim's more sympathetic treatment of McTeague also manifests itself in the account of the decline of his relationship with Trina. Here, he rejects two of Norris' explanations for the degeneration. The first of these is broad, and entails some of the contemporary notions of sexual determinism:

> Perhaps he dimly saw that this must be so, that it belonged to the changeless order of things--the man desiring the woman only for what she withholds, the woman worshipping the man for that which she yields up to him. With each concession gained the man's desire cools; with every surrender made the woman's adoration increases. (p. 65)

Admittedly, it is not likely that this viewpoint is abandoned by Stroheim because it is thematically irrelevant, for it smacks of the Victorian code of ethics to which he, in many ways, subscribed. But what is pertinent is the fact that such abstract sentiments would be difficult to express in visual terms without ambiguity, because of the precision with which they are outlined linguistically. Another reason given in the novel for the decline in the relationship is personal and

specific--for Norris it is something rooted in McTeague's character, as emphatic a trait as his contempt for broken things. Stroheim, however, in the same way that he does not tend to present Trina as a broken "thing", chooses not to convey any revulsion by McTeague for his wife which emerges as a result of an inherent sexual male trait. Rather, his loss of love occurs primarily through Trina's miserliness. Her increasing avarice, coupled with the decline in their economic stability, results in a denial of those goods upon which McTeague's newly-acquired cultivation is dependent. This systematic removal of "things" is co-incidental with his personal degeneration. Consequently, there is increased sympathy for the dentist's plight by the audience,[10] in addition to a greater thematic emphasis on the ravages of greed.

In the novel, McTeague is far more responsible for the deterioration of his relationship with Trina. After barely a year of marriage, "There was no passion in the dentist's regard for his wife " (p. 135). He has, in fact, become as docile and indifferent as Stroheim depicts him in his early mining days in his relationship with his mother. The expenditure of sentiment has taken its toll, leaving him spent and acquiescent in its wake:

> But that tempest of passion, that overpowering desire that had suddenly taken possession of him that day when he had given her ether, again when he had caught her in his arms in the B. Street station, and again and again during the early days of their married life, rarely stirred in him now. On the other hand, he was never assailed with doubts as to the wisdom of his marriage. (p. 135)

Stroheim, as stated, abandons this aspect completely, preferring to cite as the cause of the decline in their relationship the prohibiting of his practising dentistry combined with Trina's unaltering avarice. By shifting the blame away from McTeague, the director keeps audience sympathy for the character at a maximum. Whether it results from what he believes to be audience expectation, or whether it is because he holds a perception of McTeague that is incompatible with Norris', this is the effect that he attempts to achieve throughout the narrative.

If the director transforms the central character of the novel into a "hero", in the interest of clarity, he should have a "villain." This is not merely a case of moral equilibrium or a balance in the conflict. As a popular art form, film at this time, as expressed, dealt with relatively simple moral issues involving people who fitted comfortably into "type" roles. If the audience is to "identify" with a character, it should also be entitled to reject another. Unlike Norris, whose "C'est la vie" attitude leaves his characters railing against the unseen forces of nature and fate, Stroheim prefers to have the conflict manifested physically between two tangible opponents. In the novel, blame is dealt out equally; in the film, such concerns tend to be more polarized. The transition from page to screen sees Marcus as antagonist and foil to McTeague, and Stroheim re-interprets events of the novel in order to insert additional scenes or modify existing ones.

In the same way that an early scene shows McTeague's compassion through his action toward an animal, so Marcus' cruelty is exemplified in an introductory context by his abuse of animals in another scene invented by Stroheim. The setting is the day hospital owned by Grannis

where Marcus is employed, and the event occurs five years after the incident of McTeague's introduction to Marcus on the boarding-house steps. The description of him as he enters is enough to ascertain the type of individual he is, for he is

> wearing a very loud black-and-white striped suit, college-cut pants from a pepper-and-salt suit and bulldog tipped tan button shoes. His shirt sleeves are rolled up, his waistcoat open and he has a loud red, white and red watch fob with the name "Marcus" in brass letters across it. Also a red bowtie with white dots and stripes, underneath which is a horseshoe fake diamond necktie pin stuck into his shirt. A brown derby with a black band sits at a cocky angle on the back of his head. He has the stump of a dead cigar, with the billy band still on, in his mouth. (s.p. 66)

In one hand, Marcus carries a gunny-sack; in the other, a bottle of chloroform. With a jerk of his thumb, in "a cold-blooded manner", he asks Grannis if he is to dispose of the dogs. With Grannis' mournful confirmation, Marcus "smiles cynically over the foolish sentiment of his boss" (s.p. 66) and turns his attention to the task, after which he hands the half-filled sack "rather carelessly"(s.p. 66) to Zerkow, the junk dealer.

Since there is no counterpart for this scene in the novel, it becomes clear that in a way unlike that pertaining to any other character, Stroheim has focused on Marcus, transforming him from the invisible, unknown side of the triangle in the novel (for we rarely see Marcus by himself and are given little indication of his feelings, and he disappears from consideration for over a third of the work) to the indisputable villain of the film. He moves from Norris' audacious

and zealous thinker of half-truths (or perhaps, half-thinker of truths) to a garrulous dandy whose motives and morals are as repugnant as his wardrobe. Marcus becomes a man completely without convictions despite his proclamations. He remains the most independent, alienated figure in both novel and film (for even Zerkow seeks his ambition via human contact, i.e. Maria), perhaps even moreso in the latter, which downplays, to some degree, his attraction for and involvement with Selina.

Presenting Marcus as villain constitutes the same sort of alteration to the narrative that evoking sympathy for McTeague does. In short, it is a movement away from the distanced, impartial depiction of the novel. Whereas Norris' outlook largely confirms his belief in an omnipresent, domineering natural force, Stroheim's, while to a significant degree supporting this, tends to rely on a moral premise. The burden of responsibility, therefore, becomes much more clearly defined on the screen, compelling the audience to respond in terms of right and wrong, to acknowledge aggression and victimization.

This effect is achieved in Marcus, as stated, primarily through additions to the plot and "adjustments" to the character. His killing of the newborn pups establishes his capacity for insensitivity as his dandy-like appearance bolsters a boorish, arrogant nature. While the reader can tolerate Marcus with amused condescension, the film-viewer can only recoil in unsettling revulsion. In the course of the film, this notion is reinforced by various types of crude behaviour on his part such as nudging Trina with his elbow habitually, his expression

of numerous facial grimaces, fingering his ulcerated tooth, sticking his finger in his ear, and picking his nose. His reaction to McTeague's wedding gift to Trina, the love-birds, is equally indicative of his low-breeding, for he begins cleaning his ear "in a characteristic gesture" (s.p. 180) and spits.

Marcus' bad manners, however, are only one way Stroheim chooses to alienate the character from the audience. By inserting scenes or altering events the director furthers his cause. The early incident where Marcus is shown as pugnacious enough to be willing to fight two men, one as he gets on the streetcar (no less than the conductor), the other, a passenger, as he leaves it, is enough evidence of his impulsive, temperamental nature. His antagonism remains at all times unchecked by concern for personal safety, as the encounter with the passenger, who is described as a "big heavyset fellow" (p. 81), is intended to suggest, a quality which becomes significant in his future clashes with McTeague. The novel says as much of him:

> When the great railroad strike occurred, he promptly got himself engaged as deputy-sheriff, and spent a memorable week in Sacramento, where he involved himself in more than one terrible melee with the strikers. Marcus had that quickness of temper and passionate readiness to take offence which passes among his class for bravery. But whatever were his motives, his promptness to face danger could not for a moment be doubted. (p. 156)

As with the case of McTeague's compassion, Stroheim is faced with the prospect of presenting a single aspect of character, here, tempestuousness, which is stated in the novel, by inserting incidents into the narrative. In some instances, the added scene is a variation of one in the novel. Marcus' near-fights with the conductor and the passenger are not unlike his account of his reaction to "a certain dispute with an awkward bicyclist" (p. 15):

> Marcus quivered with rage. "Say that again," says I to um. "Just say that once more and"--here a rolling explosion of oaths-- "you'll go back to the city in the Morgue wagon. Ain't I got a right to cross a street even, I'd like to know, without being run down --what?" I say it's outrageous. I'd a knifed him in another minute. It was an outrage. I say it was an outrage."(p. 15)

The distinction between the incidents bears mentioning. The novel incident suggests, in part, some degree of wrong done to Marcus Despite his hyperbolic response, Marcus was, in fact, in some danger from the inept cyclist. His dealings in the film are both his own fault. He is late for the streetcar first and then later holds everyone up by "taking his time" in getting off. Whether or not this slight difference is intentional, it still helps to alienate Marcus from the audience in a way that the novel does not. Similarly, it intensifies the contrast between him and McTeague, as villain and hero respectively.

The pivotal incident for completing the process of alienation is the picnic where Trina suffers an injury which necessitates her seeing a dentist. The impression given by the novel is that the injury was purely an accident. The only reference to the act, however, is within

Marcus' explanation to McTeague. His anxious and emphatic delivery offers the possibility that Marcus himself was, in some way, at fault. Stroheim employs this speech in a psychological interpretation of Marcus. First, he chooses to include the accident as a scene. In it, Marcus is pushing Trina on a swing. She is reaching a great height. Suddenly, Marcus "pushes her ferociously" (s.p. 99), an action which results in the rope breaking and Trina damaging her teeth. Marcus' informing McTeague of the tale is followed by this title, taken directly from the novel: "It's a wonder she didn't kill herself. It is a wonder, it is for a fact. Ain't it now? Huh? Ain't it? Y'ought to have seen!" (s.p. 102, N. p. 116). By reading this novel passage as "he doth protest too much," Stroheim emphasizes the rationalization and self-deceptive logic that he would expect in a villain and ensures Marcus' complete rejection by the audience.[11] It is curious to note how Trina's initial response to the event is transformed in the film. She exlaims in a title, "It's your fault, Marcus, now I'm disfigured for life" (s.p. 100). As the scene ends, she is crying and holding her tooth, and she repeats "I'm disfigured for life" (s.p. 100). In the novel, on the other hand, she only refers to it as a "dreadful disfigurement" (p. 24) in her anxious appeal to McTeague. Stroheim's alteration here serves the same function as the influence of McTeague's mother on the youth did. Just as the latter depicts the way that life would have been different had McTeague never left the mine, so Marcus' treatment of Trina indirectly results in the ensuing tragedy between McTeague and Trina, as it necessitates their meeting. And it

is made clear in the film that Marcus is fundamentally at fault in his treatment of Trina here.

Stroheim's Marcus continues his villainy throughout the work. In the picnic scene much later on when a "friendly" wrestling match is staged between Marcus and McTeague, the former is to blame for the violence, for his aggression is cognitive and intentional whereas his opponent's is a natural, instinctive reaction of self-defence. Further, whereas Norris suggests through Trina's deduction that Marcus was responsible for Mac's suspension from practice, Stroheim "states" it cinematically by showing the torso of a man from shoulder to waist knocking on the door of the "State Board of Dentistry." In the other hand he holds a cane. By paralleling this with the following scene, in which Marcus knocks on the McTeagues' door to inform them of his imminent departure, Stroheim makes it clear that "the way in which he holds the cane and knocks with the knuckle of his right middle finger should be enough to identify him as the same man" (s.p. 229).

One feature of Stroheim's handling of Marcus that is not noticeably unsympathetic, however, is his presentation of a particular fantasy or dream that Marcus harbours, one for which there is no basis in Norris whatsoever. Early evidence of his dream occurs as he sits in the bath reading a story from the Saturday Evening Post "with illustrations of cowboys in chaps and with lassoes "(s.p. 73). Ironically, following this there is an "Insert of the page with the title, author's name and one illustration, Marcus turns to the next page, which shows an illustration of two cowboys, one with two guns, and the other with his hands up" (s.p. 73), a position similar to that which he ultimately has over McTeague. Whether dream fulfillment or ironic prophecy, the

effect remains the same. Another instance of this occurs at the park on George Washington's birthday. As the two couples (Marcus, Selina, Trina, McTeague) excitedly ride the merry-go-round, "Marcus is very gay and he hits the horse with his cane as if to make it go a little faster" (s.p. 137) which foreshadows his pursuit on horseback that ultimately leads him to Death Valley. The third allusion to the cowboy life follows not long after. The night McTeague becomes convinced he has "got" Trina, upon going into Marcus' room to inform him, he finds that his friend "with drawn-up knees, is reading some Zane Gray [sic] story " (s.p. 145). Further, although there is no indication in the screenplay, in the actual completed film Marcus is shown holding a six-shooter with a serious expression in this scene, presumably acting out the events contained in the "Western Story Magazine".[12] Such incidents, granted, are only peripherally suggestive, but if any credence can be lent to the notion that Marcus, in Stroheim's eyes, is truly an aspiring cowboy, whether consciously or sub-consciously, then a case may be made for the fact that Marcus is the only significant character from the novel to become self-actualized, to achieve his objective, albeit ironically.

In general, however, Stroheim's Marcus is an immature, resentful, self-centred individual who harbours a contempt for a world in which he cannot flourish through his own merits. His anger is directed toward Mac when Trina wins the lottery. Herman Weinberg cites this occasion as one of the major triumphs of Jean Herscholt's performance as Marcus:

> "Come along, Mac," he says to McTeague, "we're to sleep with the dogs tonight, you know"--referring to Old Grannis's dog hospital where Marcus works. The look on Marcus' face as he says this, the world having turned to ashes in his mouth at the thought of losing not only his fiancée to McTeague but the lottery winnings that went with her, this look is something to see and goes Norris one better.[13]

However, the superfluity of scowls and loathing glances on Marcus' part throughout the work help to ensure that only one response can be evoked--admiration for the actor but not the character.

In the process of adapting a novel to the screen, then, Stroheim has imposed some alterations in characterization. Of the three major figures, only Trina remains basically unchanged. McTeague and Marcus, under Stroheim's auspices, become "hero" and "heavy", respectively. This shift toward a more extreme contrast between "hero" and "villain" may be the result of a directorial intention of ensuring that the work be accessible to the average viewer, that it conform to the conventional standards of characterization of the day, in which the figures were either stock or stereotypical. However, from a more promising point of view, such transitions may have occurred as the product of a particular reading of the text, a sort of critical interpretation of one artist's work by another artist, resulting in a re-working of the original text. It is most likely that the latter condition prevailed, for Stroheim expressed open contempt for the conventional feature film of the day and pronounced his intention of rejecting its dictates. He would most probably have been interested in the changes described above for the dramatic potential they represented in terms of enhancing the conflict, which should be a primary ingredient in a nine-hour film.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER I

[1]"The Concept of Character in Fiction". In Fiction and the Figures of Life. New York: Vintage, 1971, p. 35.

[2]Ibid., pp. 35-36.

[3]Frank Norris (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 72.

[4]All references to the novel are from Frank Norris, McTeague (Greenwich, Conn: Fawcett Publications, 1960).

[5]Frank Norris (New York: Twayne, 1962), p. 72.

[6]Stroheim (London: Studio Vista, 1967), p. 39.

[7]Norris devotes only two paragraphs at the novel's opening to McTeague's upbringing, which refers to his father's alcoholic demise, his mother's ambitions for him, and his apprenticeship to a "charlatan", each of which Stroheim uses as a basis for his introductory section.

[8]One of the first signs of "writing on the slate" occurs the night of Trina's first visit as a patient. As McTeague "holds a dingy mirror" it is said that "perhaps for the first time in his life he is looking at himself closely from all sides, full face, profile, etc." (s.pp. 113-4) (All further references from the screenplay are taken from Stroheim, Erich Von, Greed (edited by Joel Finler) (London: Lorrimer Publishing, 1972). Quotes from the screenplay will be indicated by an "s" preceding the page reference). In this way, the director suggests both a major development on the part of the character and implies Trina's control over him from the onset.

[9]A curious thing happens at this point in my print of the film. As Trina's tears drop on the slate, before she actually wipes it, there is a close-up of the tears falling on the names written on it. Suddenly, the slate fades out and a pair of hands holding the letter which informed McTeague of his suspension from dentistry fades in. Since there is no basis for this in the screenplay, and the purpose of such a shot is only peripherally referential (for it recalls the cause of the couple's misfortune) one can only assume it was the result of an editor's intervention, whether intentional or accidental.

[10]Audience sympathy would have been with McTeague in his relationship with Trina long before this. Despite the gaiety of the wedding celebration (discounting the passing of the funeral procession), McTeague remains curiously alienated, an outsider at his own marriage. While kisses and congratulations are bestowed upon the bride, the dentist is uncomfortably aloof. It is not until the departure of the Sieppes , when Trina's mother kisses him and asks him to "pe goot to her", that he has any close physical contact with a guest.

[11]Stroheim uses this approach a number of times in the film. Basically, it involves taking an incident or statement from the novel and inserting a preceding one which either qualifies or re-defines the original. One such case is McTeague's desire for the large gold molar. Through his employment of numerous tooth images in the prologue of the film, the director makes the tooth a logical ambition. This will be further elaborated in the next chapter.

[12]Herman Weinberg, The Complete Greed. (New York: Arno Press, 1972).

[13]Ibid., Introduction (unpaginated).

CHAPTER II

TECHNIQUES OF CHARACTERIZATION

During the silent era, a psychological study was a rarity. The "silents," because of their technical limitation, were forced to deal with character depiction on a relatively superficial basis.

William Jinks, The Celluloid Literature

The best motion picture actor is one who has an inborn talent, lack of self-consciousness, and has travelled from gutter to throne, but been engaged to act while still in the gutter. If not in reality, then through imagination, through great reading. Whether he or she be a tragedian or comedian, each must possess a keen sense of humour. Besides, I must like them personally to be able to direct them. There cannot be a smooth product where in the making jolts or breaks tear the threads.

Erich Von Stroheim, "The Seamy Side of Directing"

In film, as in literature, character is revealed through action and dialogue. Even in silent film, where communication between characters is expressed through either mime or titles, this statement holds true. However, there are also other means available exclusively to film for conveying character, just as there are literary devices, such as the pun, which have no purely cinematic counterpart. By nature, the image on the screen is at once all-encompassing and selective. The indifferent eye of the camera captures everything within a given framework defined by the director. An entire panorama can be delivered in a second and then excluded with a close-up. Similarly, in a mob scene, detail is not always sacrificed in the interest of expansiveness. Thus, the actions and reactions of its individual members can become significant.

This, however, may work to the film's detriment. Consider the handling of Nathaniel West's Day of the Locust in a film by John Schlesinger (1975). One of the powerful effects lost in the transition from novel to screen was that of the mob. From West's prose, one perceives the crowd's sudden movement from an enthusiastic herd attending the premiere of a film to a frenzied swarm ostensibly avenging the death of a child. The homogeneous descent upon Homer Watson by an autonomous, uniformly motivated, and pulsating mass in the film lacks the overwhelming awesomeness of the text and does not convey fully the sense of scale. The primary reason for this, of course, lies in the immediate definition of the mob in visual terms, thus obliterating the anonymity preserved in the book. This condition is further enhanced through extensive use of close-up shots. The mob in the film, then, is destined to be recognized as a collection of

individuals whereas in the novel, in a triumph of synecdoche, the only individuals within it who are described are those victimized by it. Schlesinger's failure, then, was a thematic one--he failed to fully capture at the film's climax the sense of surrendered individuality within the mob as well as he had in the recurring shots of Tod's epic mural.

This tendency of film to break down the mass, conversely, may be used to further the cause of the narrative. An interesting case in point is found in another novel to screen translation, "To Kill a Mockingbird" (1962), directed by Robert Mulligan. There is a scene in which a lynch mob attempts to break into a jail at night in order to execute a black man accused of raping a white girl. The efforts of Atticus Finch, the softspoken lawyer who defended and now guards the prisoner, to dissuade the vigilantes prove futile. Suddenly, his daughter, Scout, appears and, recognizing one of the group, in her naivety, proceeds to refer to the particulars of his daily life. The mob, having lost its anonymity, is dispelled, and tragedy is averted.

A significant thing about the mob in film is that it may represent character pressed to both extremes. On the one hand, when it seeks to stress the absence of distinctive members, it depicts the exclusion of character. On the other, on a collective basis, it expresses a particular "character" of its own, a sort of composite Everyman. In each case cited above, the mob serves as a means of releasing a tension caused by an external threat. Homer Simpson's crime is punished not so much for its severity as its intrusion into the "hype" of the premiere and its invasion of the California Nirvana image. The lynch mob that endeavours to execute Tom Robinson is propelled by a sense of indignation

arising out of a seeming violation of the barrier between black and white rather than an urge to mete out justice for a crime.

In a sense, paradoxically, the mob in film presents character in its simplest form, as it identifies the group with one particular trait of human nature (Prejudice in "To Kill A Mockingbird", Worship and Self-Righteousness in "Day of the Locust"). Although Stroheim's handling of the mob in "Greed" possesses neither the comprehensiveness of "Day of the Locust" nor the narrative import of "To Kill A Mockingbird", it does, at times, attain a certain thematic and/or visual impact within its context. It should be noted that there is a distinction between what I term a mob scene and a crowd scene. There are numerous crowd scenes (such as that which gathers around the travelling dentist at the mine, or visits Seal Rock the day Marcus and McTeague do, or attends the theatre performance) which exist purely for the sake of credibility. Others, like the symbolic funeral procession or the shot of schoolgirls piling on top of each other after discovering Trina's body, are remarkable for the visual effect they represent.

While the mob in scenes in "Greed" lack the aggressiveness of those in the two films above, they nonetheless possess a certain amount of particular thematic import. In each case, Stroheim depicts the insensitivity of the mob to the suffering of others by highlighting its animosity. There are three primary examples of this: the auction in which Trina and McTeague sell their possessions, the mob which surrounds the shack after Maria's death, and the actions of the posse when Marcus speaks of his familiarity with the McTeagues. Curiously, since one would not expect Norris to be involved with such peripheral concerns, it is only the last of these three examples which has no

basis in the novel. The "hype" of the first mob is so great that even Miss Baker succumbs to the lure of a "bargain." The novel, however, goes yet further, when some of the patrons denigrate these possessions. In the second example, the director goes the novelist one further; while the police are trying to disperse the mob which has formed around Maria's shack after her murder, there are six representative members "with excited faces" (s.p. 280) who, "filled with morbid curiosity" (s.p. 280) advance "towards the curtain in terrible awe " (s.p. 280). In the last example, as Marcus relates his version of the McTeagues' relationship, the members of the mob encircle and slowly close around him in an effort to hear every word. Each of them represents the fascination of the human psyche for the unordinary and the voyeuristic appeal of another's calamity.

The mob, then, in many ways, is the exact opposite of the individual character. Nonetheless, primary and secondary characters usually remain distinctive when in midst of one. There is an interesting shot of the auction which presents, of all the bidders, only Heise, Maria, Grannis and Miss Baker in full frontal depiction. The rest of the bidders are shown either from the back or in profile. Such an instance is an example of the fact that secondary characters, such as those of the two subplots, are awarded equal importance on the screen to that in the novel, despite the fact that the transition usually implies the exclusion of events and characters not directly involved in the main plot (as in the case of "Wuthering Heights" (1937)). Furthermore, very minor novel characters, such as Heise, Selina, and the lottery agent,[1] achieve a certain distinction visually that is

absent in the prose. This partially stems from what Lubitsch was attempting to define when he said that "only Stroheim took time to pursue the foibles of his main characters, and to pause to investigate the incidental people who entered the scene."[2] But also, simply attributing a face to a minor or incidental figure may automatically grant him a distinctive status. Superbly handled, an insignificant figure one passes over in a novel may become unforgettable on the screen. The lottery agent is a perfect example of this.

There are, of course, specific techniques Stroheim employs to develop character. Of these, two seem to me particularly important. The first is the manner in which he introduces his characters and the importance that this initial exposure assumes within its context as an expression of the nature of the individual. Secondly, he attributes to his primary and secondary characters certain dreams, daydreams, fantasies, and visual manifestations of their ambitions and desires. Through the application of these techniques, Stroheim allows character development to occur within his secondary figures, thus ensuring both increased depth and a greater adherence to the novel.[3]

McTeague's introduction has already been shown to be important to Stroheim's interpretation. The miner's discovery and subsequent care and concern over a helpless bird establish the character's compassion and the sympathy with which the director, and subsequently, the audience, views him. Despite the fact that the novel states that the friendship of Marcus and McTeague "had begun at the car conductor's coffee-joint " (pp. 14-15), Stroheim chooses another setting for introducing Marcus into the story. In the film, they encounter each other inside the

boarding-house where Marcus resides and McTeague will eventually reside. The third person present is McNally, the owner, a Stroheim invention. The description here is important:

> Marcus has a dog in his arms, which barks at Mac as he appears from the foreground. Close-up of Marcus with his dog, he looks curiously at the stranger. Close-up of Mac from Marcus' angle, looking down the steps. Mac looks from Marcus to McNally questioningly, asking whether he can see the corner room.
>
> Shot from Mac's angle, shooting up the steps, with McNally pointing to himself, saying yes, he will show it to him.
>
> Medium shot of all three. Marcus descends the steps as Mac starts to ascend. They meet on the steps while McNally waits for Mac a little ahead of them. Mac and Marcus look at each other as they pass.
>
> Close-up of Marcus from behind as he steps into frame and turns, looking back at Mac.
>
> Shot from his angle of McTeague and McNally taking one step higher.
>
> Mac turns and looks back after Marcus.
>
> Shot of Marcus from Mac's angle as he turns away, opens the door and exits into the street. (s.p. 64)

The dog here is one side of the conflict between two neighbourhood animals, a Scotch collie and an Irish setter, which Stroheim uses as a parallel for the ensuing animosity between McTeague and Marcus (as Norris does later). Hence Marcus' dog barks at the first sign of McTeague. The meticulous detail that Stroheim pays to the scrutiny that Marcus and McTeague give to each other is not as easy to interpret. Is the pair's reaction upon meeting the product of a natural affinity, a reserved attraction, or a detached mistrust? Or is it symbolic of their

respective roles (McTeague ascending, Marcus descending)? Because of the uncertainty involved, stemming from the ambiguity often expressed in film screenplay, as the language is primarily skeletal, this is a case where only the original film footage could resolve the issue, but this sequence, unfortunately, belongs to the seven hours that were cut from the complete version. It would appear that Stroheim would have preferred to depict a mixture of all three reactions, citing the ambivalence that remains at the core of many human relationships.

The next major scene interweaves the characters of Marcus, Grannis, and Zerkow: the first belonging to the main plot, the other two each to one of the two subplots. Marcus is now five years older and is employed by Grannis at the dog hospital. As he enters, Grannis is shown studying a dozen new-born puppies. His complacent demeanour over the blind and helpless creatures recalls McTeague's behaviour over the bird: "They lick his hands instinctively. He puts them back in the straw and with a deep sigh rises out of shot " (s.p. 66). In this scene, Grannis' character is revealed, or rather, suggested by excision, by what is not shown. For Stroheim as for Norris, the old man is a quiet, insignificant individual who has avoided confronting the serious, and sometimes painful, aspects of human experience through sheer timidity. Realistically, the dogs must be disposed of, but Grannis, in his meekness, lacks the callousness to do so. For this, he has Marcus. All the same, however, both his presence and his acquiescence indicate complicity. But it is the complicity of a coward, of a man who fears commitment. Notice how Stroheim uses the camera to plot this evasiveness: after Grannis puts the animals back, "with

a deep sigh he rises out of shot" (s.p.66); when Marcus asks him about the dogs, he turns away from him to answer; as the task is being performed, "He turns towards the cage again, then quietly turns back, covering his eyes for a second with his hand, then he goes off towards the entrance"(s.p.67); when he gets outside, he "turns for a second, looking back, then quietly turns again and walks on past camera"(s.p.67). As the two come out of the alley near the hospital, "Marcus comes towards camera while Old Grannis stops for a second, then walks up the street in the opposite direction, away from camera."(s.p.68). Clearly, Grannis' continuous dodging of the camera's field of vision reflects his avoidance of the "business"of life, which comprises such aspects as love, suffering, and death.

Though unnamed in the screenplay, Zerkow is obviously the man with the junk-wagon who removes the carcasses of the dogs in a half-filled sack. He is described as a "dirty, greasy, mean-looking individual driving an emaciated horse " (s.p.67). His acceptance of the sack is both a depiction of the sort of activity he occupies himself with and a foreshadowing of his death clutching a sackful of metal debris which he believed to be the gold service. This association with emaciation in "Greed", it should be noted, is not peculiar to Zerkow. Mother McTeague was already presented as an exhausted, gaunt woman who finds solace in a magazine advertisement that promises success to those who answer it. Thematically, this image of emaciation is connected with the leitmotif of the bony, outstretched hands playing with the gold, supporting the director's notion that avarice is an emotion that feeds on itself.

One can also find numerous other instances of the importance of

character introduction in the film. Miss Baker is shown initially in an embarrassed encounter with Grannis, after which she hastens to her room, "reliving in her imagination the terribly exciting adventure she had just had" (s.p. 70), just as Grannis subsequently does. Through the use of parallel editing, the incident serves to establish Miss Baker as Grannis' female counterpart. Though Maria is shown in the background of this scene shaking her head at the behaviour of the two, it is really her next appearance in the film which offers her in the major role she assumes, that of Zerkow's supplier of junk and possession of knowledge of unlimited wealth. Even the introduction of Trina is important. She is first introduced by Stroheim collecting $4.50 from her uncle for the dolls she has made, after which she "gives a slight smile, indicating satisfaction at her own industriousness " (s.p. 76). Such a subtle foreshadowing is far more effective than Norris' introduction of Trina in the scene where she first consults the dentist. Furthermore, it should be stated that although Stroheim's introductory scenes do nothing to further the plot, the first impression they create regarding a character remains with the spectator throughout the film.

For Stroheim, it is not enough to reveal the nature of his characters through their behaviour in daily life. He must also go inside their minds and present before the viewer perceptions in the form of visions, dreams, or distorted hallucinations. Mother McTeague has already been considered in this light from her envisioning of McTeague as a business executive to her mental substitution of him

for Dr. Potter as he performs a dental operation on a patient. This obsession is the cause of all ensuing events, for it drives McTeague away from the mine.

Before discussing McTeague's visions, it is necessary to examine his ambitions, for just as his ambitions are rooted in his mother's wishes, so his visions are derived from, and interwoven with, his ambitions. In establishing Mac's major ambition, Stroheim refers directly to the novel:

> It was his ambition, his dream, to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive. He would have it some day, on that he was resolved; but as yet such a thing was far beyond his means. (11)

By the time Stroheim introduces the gold tooth as an object of desire for McTeague, it has already become a recurring symbol. Dr. Potter has a smaller-scale model hanging from his carriage, presumably to signify his profession to illiterate patrons. There is also the pocket watch with the large tooth as a fob given to McTeague with a twenty-dollar gold piece by his mother. The contrast expressed by the money in one hand and the tooth in the other represents the two distinct directions his ambitions could take (pursuit of symbols vs. pursuit of things). What McTeague achieves, in effect, is a synthesis of the two--hence the gold molar. Because Stroheim is faced with conveying this ambition visually, he must first justify it and then give a history for it. Although the coin-tooth synthesis would suffice, the director chooses to further elucidate. Since Mother McTeague's ambition was transferred to Dr. Potter, the dentist's tooth

satisfies both requirements--for McTeague, the dangling tooth would be a symbol of the successful dentist. The history becomes opportunity as Mac discovers a larger one in a sign store in San Francisco. The owner of the store asks Mac "Did you want that tooth tonight, Doc?" (p.94)fairly early in the screenplay, thus establishing this ambition as an ongoing process. The reaction of Mac as he gazes at the object is of one "lost in utter ecstasy" (p.94). Upon his return home, he stares up at the bay windows of his office, and "The large gilded tooth dissolves in, suspended from an iron rod and hanging between the two windows" (p. 96). In this instance, the vision serves to convey material from the novel which might otherwise have been expressed through the title.

When Trina eventually buys him his tooth as a birthday present, it is referred to as "his sign, his ambition, the one unrealized dream of his life" in the novel and "his greatest ambition in life" in the screenplay, the latter being for the director's use only, as it is one of those qualitative observations which cannot be reproduced visually. In this case, it can, at best, be implied through the large degree of "ecstasy" exhibited by Mac. It is curious to note that Stroheim should describe the tooth in Norris' words at the end of Chapter Eight-- "a huge, vague hulk, looming there through the half-darkness in the centre of the room, shining dimly out as if with some mysterious light of its own." Although a film-maker could appreciate the visual potential of such a literary metaphor, one wonders how such an effect was created in the complete film, or whether it was at all.

Did Stroheim simply have the tooth hand-painted as he had the gold pieces Trina so vehemently coveted? Or did he achieve the effect through lighting only? Or was it the statement of intention by a man so obsessed with fidelity that the illusion of it would suffice?[4]

At any rate, the gift of the tooth to McTeague meant that he was essentially without ambition. Psychologically, the dentist's attainment of the tooth not only realized the superficial "success" he strove for, but also, and more importantly, accomplished what he believed to be his mother's ambitions for him. He had become a peer of Dr. Potter, equipped with the symbol of the trade. As shown previously, the influence of McTeague's mother in Norris is incidental, whereas in Stroheim's film, her ambitions for him both anticipate and foreshadow Trina's. The acquisition of the sign being achieved, he could now turn from his mother to his wife or, as Stroheim set up the parallel, from the tooth fob to the gold piece.

Trina's method of cultivating, among other things, ambition in McTeague was designed "to move so cautiously and with such slowness that the dentist was unconscious of any process of change " (p. 136) In this process of socialization, she began with matters of etiquette. Eventually, he displays evidence of a well-bred manner. Stroheim focuses in particular on one of his animal habits to reflect his social level. Before McTeague first encounters the dentist, he has finished a large meal which he devoured ravenously. The arrival of Dr. Potter and its commotion bring the miner out of the cook house. As he comes out, "He wipes his mouth again with the back of his hand in his characteristic way " (s.p. 48), having done so earlier after

spitting. During the filmed version, as Trina sits on his lap sharing a glass of beer and listening to his argument against a university education as a pre-requisite for admission to Dental School, McTeague "starts to wipe his mouth with the back of his hand, she hands him a napkin which she is holding " (s.p.198). The achievement of this scene is that it conveys the domineering influence Trina exerts over Mac by using one of the recurring visual motifs, that of the hand, as a means.

McTeague also begins to have ambitions--"very vague, very confused ideas of something better--ideas for the most part borrowed from Trina." (p.137). He imagined owning a house and having children, one of "whose name would be Daniel, who would go to High School, and perhaps turn out to be a prosperous plumber or house painter " (p.137). Daniel would marry and have children and the dentist could see "himself as a venerable patriarch surrounded by children and grandchildren" (p.137). Stroheim transforms this into a vision in the film in which a white-haired McTeague and Trina are surrounded by grandchildren, son, who plays the concertina, daughter-in-law, gilded tooth, and a pair of canaries in the gilt cage.

The death of Trina, even more than the sale of his golden tooth, extirpates the remainder of Mac's ambition. The possibility of a family has been completely eradicated in the same way that the surrendering of the gold molar represents, for McTeague, a denial of achievement in the dental profession. With the loss of his ambition, McTeague's instincts assume control and he becomes the hunted animal. Both Norris and Stroheim go to great lengths to depict this--from his

return to the mine, to the resumption of his previous routine, to the "something" which makes him uneasy and compels him to flight. The degree to which this "something" irritates him is evident with his abandonment of the "million-dollar find" of gold with Cribbens. McTeague's portentous instinctual sensations climax as he attempts to cross Death Valley. The day before he is caught by Marcus, Norris' McTeague's fears manifest themselves "between waking and sleeping" as "all manner of troublous images" (p. 293). He imagines himself walking back to camp with Cribbens after discovering the gold, still plagued by "something" behind him:

> He looked, as it were, over the shoulder of this other McTeague, and saw down there, in the half light of the cañon, something dark crawling upon the ground, an indistinct gray figure, man or brute, he did not know. Then he saw another, and another, then another. A score of black, crawling objects were following him, crawling from bush to bush, converging upon him. They were after him, were closing in upon him, were within touch of his hand, were at his feet--were at his throat. (p. 293)

It is not so strange, after all, that Stroheim, despite his penchant for presenting the imaginary visions of his characters, should choose to exclude this one. Rather, he shows a confused and frightened man facing the unknown alone, something far more sympathetic than a psychotic delusion. Why should he alienate his central figure in the final moments? Furthermore, such a vision would be too reminiscent of his father's fatal attack of the delirium tremens in the early stages of the narrative, in which he imagined himself beset by crawling

creatures. For Stroheim, grotesque visions are either the product of obsession or vice, neither of which he attributes to McTeague, hence the innocuous dream of the gold molar and the family.

For Trina, however, imaginary visions become the trappings of monomania. She moves from moderate thrift to obsessive avarice without any "non-actual" perceptions. Before her winning of the lottery, she has no overwhelming ambition. Afterwards, though, she begins "saving for the sake of saving, hoarding without knowing why" in Norris, who attributes the affliction to the fact that "a good deal of peasant blood still ran undiluted in her veins, and she had all the instinct of a hardy and penurious mountain race "(p.98). As she amasses her fortunes, there is no need for projected imaginary re-inforcement. The gold itself is its own provider, unless one considers the hand-painting of all gold objects in the original film as serving an "imaginary" role.

The first indication of a dream-vision occurs after Maria's murder when Trina dreams that she is being hounded by the dead woman, her throat slit and bleeding. Although the screenplay, like the novel, only refers to the dream, there is a still in The Complete Greed which suggests that Stroheim felt that the cinematic potential it represented made it worth including the dream as an actual scene. In another case, found in both novel and film, when Mac does not return from fishing, and she is disconsolate, "she had a clear-cut vision of her husband's body, bloated with seawater, his blond hair streaming like kelp, rolling inertly in shifting waters." As Stroheim depicts it,

> Dissolve in to a rocky section of the beach (not the one where Mac was fishing). Mac is standing on the rocks,trying to hand in a fish. He leans over quite a bit, loses his balance, and falls into the ocean. The water closes over him. (s.p. 299)

By indicating the fact that the setting for the above vision is different from that where McTeague was actually fishing, Stroheim is emphasizing the distance between the real and the imaginary. A third instance illustrates the importance privation plays in these projections. As Trina examines her depleted funds, Stroheim has her fancy the safe in Uncle Oelbermann's office "open with piles of gold in one section. There is a light on them and they gleam." (s.p. 305) This causes her to withdraw her money which subsequently brings Mac to her and indirectly causes her own death.

In the case of the two subplots, Stroheim employs this cinematic device with dissimilar implications. In the Maria-Zerkow narrative, the bond is based on Maria's vision of a gold dinner service alleged to belong to her family for generations, but now lost. The miser Zerkow is convinced that Maria knows its whereabouts, whether cognitively or unconsciously, and marries her in the hopes that she will one day reveal it. His ensuing persistent urging of her to recount the description of the service brings him no closer. Consequently, there is an ongoing tension in his relationship with her which craves release. Unlike the shared dream of Grannis and Miss Baker, the visual manifestation of their respective dreams is not shared in common. Stroheim is quick to illustrate this when Maria first recites the details of the service. As she speaks, there is a close-up of her blank face,

indicating that the following is what she sees:

> Dissolve in to a large leather trunk of weird, unnatural form, against a mysterious background, one side curved, the other straight, indicating that it is only a hallucination. White, ghost-like hands ending in a will-o'-the-wisp, with nobody whatsoever attached to them, open the top. There is a dazzling light coming from the trunk. The hands take out the dishes so that each one of them can be seen--soup tureens, pitchers, great big platters, cream-jugs and bowls with handles carved like vines, drinking mugs and gravy dishes. Dissolve out. (s.p. 87)

Continuing her narration, she describes the punch bowl with a ladle hanging from it: "Four hands lift the punch bowl just described out of the trunk, indicating its weight. It is heavily carved and of an odd shape to indicate its unrealness " (s.p. 88). In the description, "She strikes at an imaginary object with the knuckle of her right middle finger " (s.p. 88). This is followed by a "Dissolve in to one hand holding the immense punch bowl from above so that it does not touch the table; another hand strikes the punch bowl in the centre with its knuckle, three times " (s.p. 88). This curious interplay between reality and fantasy is furthered by the vision of "a tremendously large church bell with a rope attached to it, seen against the sky with fantastic clouds in the background, swinging rhythmically but apparently not suspended from anything. The bell swung to and fro three times " (s.p. 88). After this, the shot focuses on "Maria's face with wide open eyes, listening to the imaginary ringing of the bell " (s.p. 88).

Zerkow, like Comus, remains the figure outside looking in. As Maria listens to the bell ringing, he is craning his neck to hear. When he finally projects an image onto a wall, it is a rigid, realistic one:

> Dissolve in to a tremendously large table with a mirror top standing on a black floor with a real wall in the background. On it is piled the gold plate service, this time of a realistic shape, unlike that which Maria imagined. A vision of Zerkow comes into shot, dressed exactly the same as he appeared when seated at the table, with even his hat on. Standing on the other side of the table, facing camera, he looks over the gold plate. A vision of Maria appears, dressed as she was when sitting in the chair. She looks at Zerkow who turns, sees her and makes a gesture as if to say: "This is all yours?" Maria nods. "Yes" with wide open eyes. Zerkow seems to appreciate the fact. Dissolve out. (s.p. 88)

It is apparent that Stroheim's Zerkow, unlike Norris', would be quite content to generate the distorted, fantastic realm of Maria's madness. Sanity is such a small price to pay for the ability to touch imaginary riches. The next time she reiterates her tale, the vision will become unrealistic in a different way; "Dissolve in to a banquet table with imaginary gold service plate on it, but this time we are using a convex mirror instead of a concave one and the imaginary plates will all be drawn out lengthwise, whereas in the former scene they were all drawn out in width. Dissolve out." (s.p. 161) The junk-dealer's persistent inability to enter the hallucinatory world causes him to break down and sob on the table.

At the birth of their child, Norris' Maria goes into a "state of dementia" (p. 168). As she emerges from this fever, her fixation on the gold service disappears. Where Stroheim differs from Norris is the transfer of this madness to Zerkow. In midst of her stupor, Zerkow recites the formula he has so often heard from her. The vision she projects becomes even less tangible:

> Slow lap dissolve to a strange background covered by weird shadows. The hundred pieces of gold plate are swinging on invisible wires or elastic, each is separately suspended from an invisible vertical wheel. They start swinging, slowly at first, then faster and faster until they circle about in a mad tempo. Slow lap dissolve to the same background, still with the weird shadows but without the gold plate, fog drifts in until the whole scene is filled. (s.p. 205)

This is how Stroheim visually depicts the process of Maria's cure from her mental obsession. It is literally blocked from her mind by the fog. The image of the fog as a healing, purgative force is as potent as the stifling, oppressive yellow haze Chief Bromden envisions under a paranoiac delusion at the beginning of Kesey's One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest. Meanwhile, in his anxiety, Zerkow gazes at the thrashing Maria. Suddenly he has a vision of his own. He is standing in a distorted, Caligariesque graveyard in a ditch. Using a shovel, he uncovers a large trunk and opens it. Inside, he finds a gold pitcher and a gold bowl which he "holds up in the air so that the weird light strikes the two objects " (s.p. 206) Upon emerging from this trance, he realizes that it was merely a projection and once again breaks down.

Upon Maria's cure, Stroheim's treatment of her undergoes a change which deviates from the Norris text. The novelist writes, "Neither Zerkow nor Maria was much affected by either the birth or the death of this little child " (p. 168). Stroheim's approach to the matter, however, differs. Unburdened of the myth of the gold service by the birth of her child, she is revealed in the film as a woman governed by maternal instincts. In the words of the screenplay, at the funeral service in the junkyard, "Zerkow shows no sign of mourning or grief, but Maria is crying " (s.p. 210). She then searches about and her eyes light on a dying geranium in a pot, which she removes to place on the coffin, a gesture Stroheim later uses as von Rauffenstein in Jean Renoir's "La Grande Illusion". Zerkow is content to place the coffin at the back of the wagon, but "with tremendous pleading in her tear-dimmed eyes she pulls the coffin away from him, pressing it to her body " (s.p. 210). It is clear that, despite her previous actions, Stroheim wants audience sympathy to lie with Maria. Whether this alteration to the basic text results from Stroheim's realization of the heightened melodramatic potential such a scene offers, or whether it stems from a genuine compassionate affinity for the character on his part, the achievement of it is that it makes her subsequent murder by Zerkow all the more heinous and pathetic to the spectator, who is aware of the tragic consequence of human action operating here.

The deluded visions of Maria and Zerkow, then, define not only their respective characters, but also the nature of their relationship.

As Maria's become further removed from reality, hence more elusive for Zerkow, whose own visions remain more or less rooted in reality (insofar as they remain projections of an actual service), the tension mounts and the gap between the pair widens. Once Zerkow loses his grasp, the instability of a weak marriage becomes intolerable. His all-excluding self-consuming fixation on the service that results culminates not only in Maria's murder and his own death, but also with the most fantastic vision of all, the one not shown but implied by Stroheim, one rooted to an infinitesimal degree in reality, in which the hapless Zerkow transforms a sackful of tin cans and metal debris into that prize he so uncompromisingly seeks.

Grannis and Baker, on the other hand, are not seeking anything. They simply keep running into each other while avoiding everything else. Although there is not a direct reference to either Maria's or Zerkow's vision of the gold service in Norris, the one shared by the old couple is suggested twice. The first occurs as the pair sit side by side at the reception after the wedding of Trina and McTeague. Grannis thinks to himself:

> How different he had imagined it to be! They were to be alone--he and Miss Baker--in the evening somewhere, withdrawn from the world, very quiet, very calm and peaceful. Their talk was to be of their lives, their lost illusions, not of other people's children. (p. 123)

As they sit, they are aware of each other in the following manner:

> Timid, with the timidity of their second childhood, constrained and embarrassed by each other's presence, they were, nevertheless, in a little Elysium of their own creating. They walked hand in hand in a delicious garden where it was always autumn; together and alone they entered upon the long retarded romance of their commonplace and uneventful lives. (p. 124)

When the two finally unite, the comment is made that "It had come at last. After all these years they were together, they understood each other " (p. 228). This is followed by a near verbatim account of their habitation in the "little Elysium", emphasizing the fact that they are "Far from the world and together " (p. 228).

Stroheim's literal translation of this vision raises some interesting considerations about the translation of novel to film. The process is a little like making a metaphor literal. Virginia Woolf expressed her misgivings about some forms of translation when she asked how a line such as "O, my luve is like a red, red rose" would be handled. Basically, the difference between Norris' depiction and that of Stroheim is that the former's is analagous and the latter's factual. Norris' characters have entered their imaginary world in essence, symbolically, whereas Stroheim's have entered it in fact. Proof of this is the detail in which Stroheim expresses their movement away from reality:

> Shot from their angle of the window and the dreary street, it is pouring with rain. Lap dissolve in to a scene from the same angle, taken in natural colours. Through the window we can see a gorgeous apple and

> peach orchard in bloom. Mr. and Mrs. Grannis dressed in their Sunday finery, walk arm in arm towards camera. They stop for a second, imbibe the scent of the blossoms, sigh happily and look at each other. He points to the bench next to them and they sit down holding hands. Lap dissolve out. (s.p. 294)

The distinction is a fine one, but, whereas the novel characters "create" the imaginary world, Stroheim's figures transform the rain-soaked, dreary habitat of their present into it. What is significant is that they have produced a realm in which evasion is unnecessary, in which they can "walk arm in arm towards camera" (294), simply through mutual projection of desire.

Despite their meekness and timidity, Miss Baker and Grannis remain the only of the primary and secondary characters to attain some form of happiness together. One of the means which the director uses to indicate this is the mutually held vision. Prior to their union with each other, the spectator is never given a subjective viewpoint on either part, as if to illustrate their reserved and withdrawn natures. When the couple pass each other in the hall of the boarding-house, Stroheim shows each returning to his room and shutting his eyes "as if reliving in his imagination the terribly exciting adventure he has just had " (s.p. 70). We do not see what goes on in their minds because their characters do not allow it. Their success with each other is based on the common nature of their imaginary, self-enclosed world. Unlike the couples of the other subplot, Zerkow and Maria, who never share the same vision of the gold service, or of the main plot, whose only shared vision occurs

after their decline, when they leave their apartment on the day of the auction and imagine their wedding day, Grannis and Miss Baker have perfectly-matched imaginations, providing the only instance of real joy (though based on fantasy) in a very bleak film.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER II

[1]Heise is an exceptionally large man; Selina has severely protruding "buck-teeth", the lottery agent is a cadaverous creature "with the mien of an undertaker." (s.p. 154)

[2]Herman Weinberg, The Complete Greed (New York: Arno Press, 1972), Introduction (unpaginated).

[3]There are, in addition, other minor techniques of characterization operating in the film. One such method already discussed in other contexts is the emphasis on the characteristic gestures of McTeague (wiping his mouth with the back of his hand) and Marcus (sticking his finger in his ear). To this we add Trina's wincing eye and placing of her finger to her lips when scheming. The significance of McTeague's and Trina's as contrasting references to oral gratification is obvious, but Marcus' merely succeeds in demonstrating his bad manners.

Another interesting touch is the association of major and minor characters with reading material, a notion expanded from evidence present in the novel. Although it seems to serve no essential purpose to the narrative, Stroheim presents literature as an extension of personality to some degree. In a sense, for him, you are what you read. The evidence in the screenplay is rampant. McTeague's mother finds an avenue for her fantasies of her son's success in an old magazine. Wedged in the door of Miss Baker's apartment is a copy of "The Christian Science Monitor". Grannis spends his leisure time binding (ironically) back issues of The Nation and The Breeder and Sportsman. Marcus reads stories of cowboys' adventures in The Saturday Evening Post. Maria gathers old newspapers and old Saturday Evening Posts to sell to Zerkow. McTeague carries his concertina "wrapped up in a newspaper (The San Francisco Call) showing the headline" (63). The significance of the tendency, again, may be negligible, but it is prevalent enough in the narrative to warrant mentioning, if only to illustrate the attention paid to detail by the director.

[4]An example of this is the scene in which Marcus throws the knife at McTeague. With his characteristic proclivity for realism, Stroheim hired a professional knife-thrower for the shot. However, Gibson Gowland, the actor playing McTeague, refused to stand in. Despite the fact that various members of the crew (including Stroheim) acted as "dummies", thus proving its safety, the actor remained steadfast. Finally, the director had to resort to trick photography. Although it is obviously so in the extant film, Stroheim is said to have commented that it was as good as if the professional had been used.

CHAPTER III

IMAGERY AND SYMBOLISM

By juxtaposing similar qualities in violently dissimilar things, language gets its revenge on the apparent disorder of life.

George Bluestone, Novels Into Film

The things surrounding men do not merely act upon them . . . men act on their surroundings too and while they allow things to change them, they in return change things. The clothes and household goods of a man permit a sure conclusion to be drawn as to his character. Nature forms man and man forms nature and this, too, is a natural process. Man set down in the middle of an immense world, cuts himself a little world out of it and hangs it full of his own images.

Goethe, Contributions to Lavater's Physiognomic Fragments

Literary critics are much more receptive to symbols than film critics. Perhaps it is merely custom, the product of a millenium of perceiving language as nothing short of sacrosanct, of heralding the literary image not for the thing to which it alludes but for the essence of the thing it approximates. By contrast, the visual image is confined by its own nature: in defining, it is defined. This suggests one possible distinction between the two. The literary image tends to approach the symbolic more easily; the cinematic projection is more susceptible to perception as an image and an image only. One of the reasons for this stems from the basic difference between the two arts, the filmic emphasis on the visual and the literary emphasis on the representational. In a broad sense, a word image is already in symbolic form, letters are arranged in such a way that communication occurs. The written word "table" does not necessarily evoke a corresponding mental image on the part of the reader, but a conceptual counterpart for it. The visual image, on the other hand, supplies the mind with a representation of an actual table. Keith Cohen approaches this notion when he states,

> In the novel, . . ., the mental image (signified) is elicited by a verbal sign (signifier), itself an obvious abstraction far removed (in the present terms) from the filmic image; the verbal sign is in no way a substitute for the mental image, but rather a vehicle toward it. In the film, on the other hand, signifier and signified are identical (the sign for a table is a table); hence the ease with which the

> filmic image becomes a substitute for the spectator's constantly fluctuating mental image.[1]

In the case of the literary image, a manifestation of a "table" can occur in the mind's eye only through the influence of the imagination. Such determinates, although abstract, are not arbitrary. It is clear that the literary image stimulates the imagination while the visual image largely excludes it.

Before discussing this distinction further, some mention should be made of the relationship between imagery and symbolism. M.H. Abrams refers to three uses of the term "imagery," the first of which, where it is "used to signify all the objects and qualities of sense perception referred to in a poem or other work of literature,"[2] will be applied here, in a cinematic context. For a definition of symbolism, I shall again turn to Abrams. He says that "a symbol, in the broadest sense of the term, is anything which signifies something else"[3] and later, speaks of two types, "private" and "personal", distinguished basically by the degree of cultural acceptability they possess. These meanings, when compared, lead me to the conclusion that the difference between a literary image and a symbol is equivalent to that between film and literature, that the image is primarily referential and the symbol representational.

For the purpose of this study, it would be both excessive and foolhardy to attempt to devise a schemata of the imagistic and symbolic network operating within "Greed" based on the distinction between the referential and the representational. The reason for this

is the high incidence of recurring images operating in both capacities (e.g. a "hand" shown in close-up may simply be an instance of a visual motif or it may fulfill a symbolic role in addition to this). Consequently, it is my intention to examine the occurrence of cinematic imagery and symbolism in this film without distinguishing between them, in the interest of simplification, all the while acknowledging the validity of such a distinction. I shall outline in this chapter the translation of certain imagistic patterns from novel to screen and the addition to or alteration of this material with symbolic impact. Although there are four primary and numerous secondary strands of imagery woven into the novel, my major concern is with three of them--hands, gold, and animals. The fourth, primary strand, that of machinery, is doubtless a significant one, but its thematic or stylistic function is not as great as that of the other three.[4]

Before turning to them individually, I shall discuss an instance where all of these motifs operate collectively. It is a tribute to Stroheim's talent as an artist that, in the earliest sequence of the film, each of the four types is incorporated. From the opening long shot of the mine, the camera moves to a medium long shot of "a giant ore-crushing machine in operation" (37), beside which two men are working. The next shot is an "iris in on a large hand holding a big chunk of quartz gold with a strong gold vein through it" (37). The owner of that hand turns out to be McTeague, who then places the rock into the car (suggesting from the onset a mere occupational attraction

to the metal). Within seven shots, the miner discovers a small bird on the track and proceeds to hold it in his hand "very tenderly" (s.p. 39). Thus, the director not only establishes his major patterns of imagery, but also achieves a thematic inter-relationship between them with the contrast between McTeague's reactions to the gold and to the bird as they rest in his hand. Furthermore, he unifies the images in a manner not found in the novel, for while a reference to his canary occurs on the first page (p. 9), and a description of his hands on the second (p. 10), no mention of gold is made until the following chapter (p. 21).

Hand imagery in "Greed" fulfills at least three functions: first, it acts as a focal point for introducing a scene; second, it is associated with a characteristic gesture of one of the figures; and third, and most importantly, it reflects, in some way, the thematic concerns operating in the work. Since the second chapter dealt with the characteristic gestures of some of the principal characters, we need not refer to this device in depth here. I shall, therefore, discuss the hand first as either an introductory transitional object or as a focal point within a given scene, and second as a thematic symbol.

After the opening scene, the next significant use of the hand for an introductory purpose is the scene which begins with Marcus' hands opening the lock of the dog hospital (s.p. 129). This motif of hands and doors recurs in the film with heightened importance. The next instance depicts a gloved hand knocking on Marcus' door, which belongs to the man we discover to be the cadaverous bearer of good

hands.

tidings, the lottery agent. The most significant example of this device, previously discussed in the second chapter, is the gloved hand holding a cane which knocks on the door of the "State Board of Dentistry". In the following scene, Marcus is shown holding a cane and knocking on the door of the McTeague's flat. Not only does Stroheim set up a parallel using this device, he also remains relatively true to the novel in the process. In Norris, it is never stated that Marcus was responsible for the suspension of the dentist's practice, except through the conclusion drawn by Trina. Here, it is never explicitly shown, although the above direction indicates directorial intention as such.

Stroheim's use of the image of the hand for an introductory purpose often becomes a valuable means of creating transitions from scene to scene. The wedding scene begins with a close-up of the wedding ring in McTeague's hands (s.p. 174). The auction of the McTeague's possessions is opened with an iris on a hand holding a gavel. The occasion of Trina's murder in the kindergarten is introduced with Trina's clutching a scrubbing brush. On a more removed level, McTeague's "Wanted" notice is tacked up by two hands using a hammer and a tack. The anonymity of the individual involved suggests both Stroheim's association of the hand with the job and the intervention of unknown forces into the fates of the characters.

There is a great deal of hand-shaking in both novel and film. The close-up of McTeague and Trina clasping hands at their first meeting is a memorable instance. The fervent mutual declaration of eternal friendship by Marcus and McTeague when the former gives up

Trina to the latter is another example. On the day of the picnic, when the two are avowed enemies, they are urged to shake hands and forget. Finally, with Marcus' departure, the pair shake hands to say goodbye. In the first two instances, the sentiments behind the handshakes, while sincere, are to prove transient and ephemeral; in the latter two, there is an underlying, destructive tension involved which culminates in Death Valley when the "friends" are locked in a metaphoric handshake for all eternity by the handcuffs.

The hand also proves to be representative of the internal frustrations and inner natures of the characters. When Marcus first hears of McTeague's love for Trina, he buries his hands deep in his pockets (s.p.124). At the wedding, his hands are clenched angrily behind his back, the one restraining the other. Similarly, Trina's erratic hand movements in her early encounters with Mac reflect her nervousness in sexual matters. Even in medium close-up, her hands remain on camera and because of their motion become the focal point of numerous relatively static scenes. On her wedding night, in a departure from her characteristic gesture, Trina's hand to mouth posture reflects her discomfort at the prospect of consummation of her marriage. Furthermore, when Trina learns of Mac's suspension from dentistry, there is a close-up of her hand squeezing the sponge she is holding tightly and the water dripping from it. Perhaps the most inventive thematic use of hands occurs after Trina steals money from McTeague's pocket as he sleeps. As she sits in the bed rubbing cold cream over her hands, it becomes apparent that the motion reflects the traditional symbolic gesture of the miser. The scene

closes with an iris on the hands.[5] McTeague, however, displays somewhat different reactions. His is more the case of his body's responding to stress in like manner to his mind's inability to understand and his mouth's inability to articulate either the cause or the cure of his anguish. McTeague's hand is always a fist--one thinks of the futile restraint employed before he kisses the unconscious Trina; the clenched fist striking threateningly at the ticket seller; the smashing of his fist to his palm after the dentist realizes he has "got" Trina; the displaced, unrelieved, confused anger at Marcus expressed by the raised fists seeking an outlet in the dental office; the close-up of his clenched fist looming menacingly over Trina as he attempts to extricate money from her; and ultimately, by the sweating lowered fists "knotting themselves like wooden mallets" (s.p. 349) in the desert as Marcus holds a gun to him.

Thus Stroheim, in a fine display of synecdoche, illustrates that a character's nature can be expressed through a reference to his hands. Norris, too, employs this device. McTeague's suspension, for example, prompts Miss Baker to remark, "It's just like cutting off your husband's hands" (p. 194), a statement which, given the degree of importance attached to these "prehensile" appendages, is tantamount to castration. Stroheim, however, does not include this line in the screenplay. The nearest he approaches its implications is the scene where husband and wife ponder their fate anew in the dental office. As Trina enters, McTeague sits in the chair, and it is stated that "his hands lie idly in his lap" (s.p. 240). Of course, without a close-up, this idea is difficult to convey. For the other characters

in Norris' triangle, it is a physical disfigurement which results. Trina loses a couple of fingers, thus disabling her from carving and Marcus has two fingers of his left hand shot away in a gunfight "to his intense satisfaction" (p. 296). Stroheim adapted Trina's amputations to the screen (although in the extant version there is barely any indication of it), but he chose not to include Marcus' loss, perhaps merely because of the difficulty in portraying it. The ultimate instance of manual impotence, again, is the union of the fates of McTeague and Marcus, symbolized by the handcuffs.

There need not be any extensive discussion devoted to gold imagery in "Greed", since it basically approximates the presentation in the novel. One could easily substitute Stroheim's name for Norris' in the following comment:

> Norris saw the symbolic possibilities of gold, and he came remarkably close to realizing them. He was not thinking of a one-to-one equivalence of gold and greed. There is nothing greedy about McTeague's desire to have a big gilded tooth in front of his dental office. Rather, the gold tooth is the symbol of his "dream" of perfect contentment--perhaps not unlike other men's dreams of a heaven with streets paved with gold. In McTeague, Norris was thinking in terms of a complex of emotional meanings for gold that run all the way from McTeague's dream of the good life to the diseased desire of Zerkow.[6]

The gold imagery, while generally conventional and hence, far more obvious than the hand imagery, has some interesting touches despite this. In addition to the frequent presence of gold objects throughout the novel (the gilded tooth, McTeague's gold for fillings, the gilded

cage), the various appellations (Gold Gulch , Gold Mountain), and the beautifully ironic statement of McTeague's, "Gold is where you find it" (s.p. 327, N. 273) each preserved in the complete film, one finds some innovative definitions on the director's part. Some appear subtly, such as the sign in the dental office written in gold leaf, or the gold bridge in Trina's mouth; others, such as the imaginary gold service, work more powerfully than in the novel due to inventive presentation. Similarly, Stroheim achieves in one shot what can only be described as a "visual simile". On an occasion before there is any strife in their marriage, as the couple are taking a walk, Trina shows interest in looking through a telescope. After she tells McTeague that what she sees is wonderful (s.p. 198), the screenplay called for a "shot from her angle of the moon in iris, coloured gold and yellow " (s.p. 198). There is no doubt here that the suggestion is of a gold coin.

However, there are some shortcomings in Stroheim's intentions with regard to gold imagery. How, for example, would he be able to convey the direction in the screenplay which speaks of the gilded tooth "shining out dimly as if with some mysterious light of its own"? (s.p. 172) His inclusion of this is understandable; first, because it occurs on the night when the tooth was given to McTeague by Trina and second, because it is a direct quotation from the novel, where it is found at the end of Chapter Eight (p. 109). This raises some interesting considerations. Such an effect would be difficult to translate to the screen, particularly at this early stage in its history, although it is readily acceptable in print. One can only

conclude that inclusion of this direction was more to satisfy Stroheim's obsession for uncompromising fidelity to the text. In this instance, however, it could barely be more than self-delusion for, while dialogue, background information, and transitory passages from the novel are ideal for titles, such symbolic expressions remain largely outside the perception of the spectator.

Perhaps the most effective device Stroheim used in the film was the hand-colouring of the gold. This is why the moon Trina perceives is "coloured gold and yellow " (s.p. 198). Unfortunately, uncertainty exists, I believe, as to the degree to which the director intended to use it. At the film's premiere in December 1924, according to Herman Weinberg, all the gold pieces (including the objects that looked like gold, for example, the couple's brass bedstead) were hand-tinted, frame by frame, a gold colour. From the evidence in the screenplay, it is not likely that Stroheim wanted it that way. Perhaps in the editing process, certain excessive whims were indulged. In the screenplay, however, there are fewer indications of hand-colouring. It is clear that the director knew from the beginning that he was going both to employ the device and exercise some discrimination in its application. On the first page of the text, with the shot of the hand holding the quartz with the gold vein running through it, one reads in brackets "Natural colours or hand coloured?" (s.p. 37) It is possible that the director wanted to distinguish visually between the metal in its natural, hence uncorrupted, state, and its manufactured, value-endowed and thus potentially destructive state. This is substantiated by the other instances of the colouring in the script which comprise,

in addition to the shot of the moon, three separate scenes, each involving Trina's compulsive miserliness with her gold coins. (s.p. 253, 256, 304). Stroheim's final shot of the gold, spilling out of the canvas bag into the sands of Death Valley, speckled with the blood of the mule, is as powerful a finale to the imagistic strain as the handcuffs are to the hand motif; leaving the viewer with the symbolic association with blood-money planted in his mind.

In McTeague, Norris uses animal imagery as a means of paralleling the relationship between Marcus and McTeague. The growing rivalry between the two, for example, is reflected in the animosity between an Irish setter and a Scotch collie, who snarl viciously in one another's presence. However, when the two finally encounter each other without being restrained, after circling and growling, the pair engage in harmless displacement activity "as if by mutual consent" (p. 153). Stroheim's use of this parallel reflects his understanding of Norris. At the picnic, when both men circle each other in the wrestling match, Stroheim states in brackets, "Their movements mirror those of the collie and the Irish setter" (s.p. 212). True to character, the director makes other references to dogs in the film. Other examples include Marcus' line, "Come along Mac we've gotta sleep with the dogs tonight you know" (s.p. 159) on the evening everyone learns of Trina's lottery winning; Marcus' angry soliloquy delivered amidst the whimpering of dogs (both examples being taken from Norris); his insertion of a comment by the butcher when Trina buys tainted meat for Mac: "It's hardly fit for dogs" (s.p. 291); and finally, McTeague's plea for money from Trina after his abandonment

of her: "I wouldn't let a dog go hungry" (s.p. 311) (also found in Norris).

Likewise, the bird in the gilded cage in the novel is a metaphor for McTeague. Having already established the character's affinity for birds in the mine scene, the director picks up on this and shows the canary singing in midst of McTeague's comfort and security, as found at the opening of the novel. The first sign of trouble in Stroheim's presentation is the dentist's kissing of the unconscious Trina in the chair, signified by the canary's erratic movements. Stroheim extends this motif further by introducing a second bird to represent Trina. The night of her marriage, as she holds fears of fulfilling her marital duty, McTeague is shown with his back to her, staring at the cage. Suddenly, she sees only the birds and, comprehending the significance and terrified at the prospect, retreats into the room. The plight of the lovebirds continues to reflect the couple's own. When Marcus appears to announce his departure, his Persian cat steals in to scrutinize the birds. The parallel is exact, for as he departs, the shot of Marcus fades out and the cat appears. Later, when McTeague receives his letter of suspension, the cat attacks the cage, further illustrating the identity of the "informant." The remainder of the lovebird shots are purely direct correspondence,i.e., they kiss as do their human counterparts, the pair have a row when Trina and Mac fight, the female bird's death accompanies Trina's, the male's foreshadows McTeague's.

The cat as a symbol of evil is employed in later Stroheim films (those owned by the Queen in "The Merry Widow" and, most notably, by Queen Regina in "Queen Kelly"). In "Greed", too, there are other instances where the cat serves as an indicator of the evil operating within a scene. Some examples are the dead cat which Zerkow finds while digging for Maria's gold, the pair in the butcher's shop that hover around the tainted meat that Trina eventually buys for Mac, and the black cat owned by Trina in the kingergarten, which senses the imminent danger approaching with McTeague. Curiously, it is only the latter cat which appears in the novel, thus proving the entire motif to be a Stroheimesque touch.

Finally, it should be noted that Stroheim does not use animals purely to signify human relationships that are disastrous. His comic sense is apparent in the scene when Old Grannis and Miss Baker finally overcome their timidity and express their affection for one another. As the two sit in his room and Grannis kisses "her faded cheek", Stroheim shows concurrent events in the street outside:

> A streetcar passes, a garbage wagon goes by in the opposite direction, an Italian organ grinder stands on the sidewalk with two small monkeys that jump up and down while some kids stand watching.
> Quick lap dissolve to the monkeys kissing each other.
>
> (s.p. 285)

There are, as stated, numerous other symbolic shots that have not been discussed, many of them central to the film. However, as the majority of them depend on a singular effect rather than a cumulative one through recurrence, I have chosen not to discuss them. What has been offered is an analysis of the three major types of imagistic patterns, outlined in such a way that it becomes apparent that the concerns of the director are not unlike those of the novelist. As one critic said about Norris,

> More important to him than perfect prose was the creation of sharp and vivid pictures, images that remain in the mind long after one has forgotten how graceless the style is. He felt strongly, like Conrad, that art makes its primary appeal not through the intellect but through the senses, especially the visual sense. Indeed he once described the novel as a group of well-formed pictures: "The great story of the whole novel is told thus as it were in a series of pictures, the author supplying information as to what has intervened between the end of one chapter and the beginning of the next by suggestion or by actual resume."[7]

The same, of course, can be said of Stroheim. The final shot of McTeague's isolation drives home visually the point to the spectator in a manner reminiscent of John Grierson, noted socio-economic documentary film-maker and advocate of truth in film, who said "the greatest image in rhetoric is the single man against his horizon, seeking his destiny."[8]

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER III

[1]Keith Cohen, Film and Fiction/The Dynamics of Exchange (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979), p. 76.

[2]A Glossary of Literary Terms (New York: Holt, Rinehart and Winston, 1971), p. 77.

[3]Ibid., p. 168.

[4]In the process of this limited examination of the film's imagery, some stylistic and symbolic elements will be ignored. For example, Stroheim's penchant for "pathetic fallacy" (the weeping willow's swaying rhythmically at Father McTeague's funeral, the prevalence of rain in the McTeagues' declining fortunes) will not be considered. Similarly, symbolic"montage" shots, such as the funeral procession and the hand sawing wood during the wedding, will not be studied.

[5]One recalls here the earlier iris out on the concertina in McTeague's hands as the pair sit on the sewer.

[6]William B. Dillingham, Frank Norris: Instinct and Art (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1969), p. 117.

[7]Ibid., p. 107-8.

[8]Andrew Tudor, Theories of Film (London: Secker and Warburg, 1974), p. 66.

CHAPTER IV

POINT OF VIEW

Even the most faithful portraits, the best likenesses, if they are works of art, reproduce not only the sitter but the artist as well. A painter has many ways of painting his own self into his pictures.

Bela Belags, Theory of the Film

One of the by-products of modern literature is an immediate suspicion of the narrator. No longer can a successor to Trollope's benevolent, Thackeray's self-conscious, Eliot's sagacious, or Fielding's fraternizing persona be accepted at face value. In their wake, one finds the likes of Nabokov's Humbert Humbert or Faulkner's Benjie and Jason Compson. Even a speaker modelled after those early novelists, such as that found in Fowles' The French Lieutenant's Woman, achieves, in his ludic attempt to combine all of these qualities, a parody of them. Consequently, the modern reader, in effect, acts as a sort of personnel officer, judging the novel as a resumé and asking himself "Who is speaking? Are his observations valid? What are his qualifications?"

The problem is severely minimized in the instance of film because one is not usually aware of the presence of a narrative voice. "In fact," Keith Cohen says, "nothing in a film says 'I' in the manner, say, of one of Thackeray's novels."[1] In addition, he refers to Claude-Elmonde Magny, who "speaks of the absence or at least the effective ellipsis of an authorial voice."[2] Nonetheless, in any art form, one presupposes the existence of some point of view, and film, particularly narrative film, is no exception. Who, then, narrates a film?

One way to approach the question is to consider the method of presentation. In his excellent work on the technique of narration, The Rhetoric of Fiction, Wayne C. Booth distinguishes between "telling" and "showing" in the narrative form. For him, as for most critics, it is the latter which is the more demanding on the artist and

which leads to the superior work of art: To illustrate this, Booth quotes Ortega y Gasset,

> When I read in a novel "John was peevish" it is as though the writer invited me to visualize, on the strength of his definition, John's peevishness in my own imagination. That is, he expects me to be the novelist. What is required, I should think, is exactly the opposite: that he furnish the visible facts so that I obligingly discover and define John to be peevish.[3]

Undeniably, the film also relies heavily on this kind of "showing", and it is not limited strictly to visual concerns. Concepts also must be derived from the visual facts, as in the case of the tooth shining "as if by some mysterious light of its own" in "Greed." Consider, then, the perspective from which the spectator is "shown" a film. The film is remarkable for the ease with which point of view is shifted. Transitions intolerable in fiction are commonplace in film. Of course, it was not always this way. The early silents were produced as static presentations subservient to the dictates of the dramatic unities, since the general basis for observation was the spectator's viewpoint from third-row centre. It was only with such pioneers as Porter and Griffith that it became standard procedure to alter the position of the camera. Obviously, while the camera remained stationary, so did point of view, both in the physical and the figurative sense.

One speaks, then, of technique of narration and of point of view. When there is "telling" involved, one becomes more aware of the source than one would if one were being shown. Similarly, when

the camera is moving, one realizes that someone is responsible for its motion, if only an expert cameraman. Applying Booth's notion of "undramatized" and "dramatized" narrator to "Greed" may elucidate this point. When the narrative unfolds indifferently before the camera, there is what Booth would call an "implied author," a figure whose presence, while not verified, is at least understood. This type of narration is prevalent in the Norris novel, where it appears in the factual, journalistic format the work largely comprises. In film, it seems to me, a suitable counterpart for this narrative voice is the medium shot, which is the most natural and undisturbed (like the third-row centre perspective) viewpoint. Objective in its import, the technique is found in "Greed" in scenes such as McTeague's handling of Trina's dental injury in his office and Trina's counting her gold alone in her room. I do not intend to dwell on this narrative element--in a sense, it is the most straightforward of all--but mention it to illustrate the variety of perspective inherent in the film form.

Another means of narration in film is the presentation of a character's point of view. This usually occurs as a temporary shift in perspective, most emphatically from an objective medium shot, serving a purpose of either mere variety (i.e., presenting another way of seeing the action) or, more importantly, of expressing the action as a character himself might see it, but not necessarily as he might understand it.[4] In literature, one finds a parallel in the third person limited or unlimited omniscient narrator, both of which apply to this method of filmic narration (depending on

whether the camera adopts the viewpoint of one or more characters). In "Greed", the narration utilizes an omniscient technique in presenting the action from multiple points of view. Many examples of this have already been referred to in the section on the visions and dreams of the characters. However, there are numerous other instances which may be cited. The panning of the camera down Trina's body as she sits unconscious in the chair conveys McTeague's intentions just as her appearance becoming hazy and going out of focus before he kisses her expresses his loss of control over his passionate desires. Later, when Marcus and McTeague visit the Sieppe family on George Washington's birthday--we see from McTeague's angle a close-up of Trina indicating, with her gloved hand, "the clumsy gold bridge" (s.p. 133) in her mouth supplied by the dentist (possibly hand-coloured in the released version).[5] Two other examples are the observed shot from Trina's perspective of the crestfallen McTeague suspended from his occupation taken through a double veil and the parallel views of the moon by Trina and the sun by the fugitive McTeague.

By far, however, the most interesting narrative voice in the film is that of Stroheim. In many ways, it negates, or at least restricts, the statement by Keith Cohen quoted previously. One is conscious, in a general sense, of an "ethos" operating within the work. This is accomplished in both an implied and explicit manner. When the director inserts additional scenes or alters existing material from the original novel, for a reason other than its

translation to a new medium, he is imposing his own concerns over those of the novelist. This is often the case with many filmic adaptations--the alterations imply the interventions of another artist. With Stroheim, however, implication is not enough. Throughout "Greed", there appears a sort of authorial commentary, not unlike that of George Eliot, in which he directly states, in visual (and occasionally, literary) terms, his assessment of the character's plight or moral state.

In an introduction to an interview with Stroheim, Jim Tully comments,

> More than any person in the film world, Eric [sic] von Stroheim has stirred the sadistic tendencies that are said by psychologists to lie dormant between the conscious and the subconscious mind. He was repugnant, and yet, people paid money to see him. He became famous by being despicable. He was despised and admired. It was during the height of his vogue as an actor that a phrase was coined concerning him that is worthy to endure. It was "the man you love to hate."[6]

Such was Stroheim's image, one which, while largely cultivated by studio PR, was definitely advocated by the director himself. The strongest evidence of this is this account of his heritage which he offered after his immigration to America according to Peter Noble :

> Erich Oswald Hans Carl Marie Stroheim von Nordenwald was born on September 22, 1885 in Vienna, where his father was a Colonel in the 6th Regiment of Dragoons,

> and mother a lady-in-waiting to Elizabeth, Empress of Austria.[7]

This belief was promoted in his early acting days, and maintained from his apprenticeship with Griffith through his entire subsequent career as actor and director. The myth was finally shattered in an article by Denis Marion entitled "Stroheim, the legend and the fact" in which he reveals that,

> His father's name was Benno Stroheim. He was not Austrian by birth, but was born at Glenvilly, then in Prussian Silesia and now the Polish town of Glivice. Starting out as a dealer in felt and straw then in feathers, he later became a manufacturer of straw and felt hats. He was a practising Jew, as was his wife, Johanna Bondy, born in Prague, where they were married on August 3rd, 1889.[8]

Aside from the fact that his "roots" bear a direct relation to his work (for example, the recurring theme of a corrupt and decaying aristocratic society, such as that of Old Vienna, found in films such as "The Devil's Passkey," "Foolish Wives," and "The Wedding March"), his fabrication of a personal myth presents some interesting insights into the artist. Since he worked within a milieu that thrived on "images" and reputations, it was essential that his own be exceptional. As the German officer in Griffith's "Hearts of the World" (1918) and Count Karamzin in "Foolish Wives" (1921), Stroheim created a villain who draws the fascination and repugnance of the audience in equal doses. But his notoriety did not stem from merely his acting roles. Peter Noble quotes "Life Magazine" as reporting that,

> He earned the reputation of being a madman for realistic detail . . . He once kept four hundred people on a set for three days waiting for a pet dog to sneeze! Making another film, he spent 11,000 dollars to have medals designed for a mythical army.[9]

One cannot, then, discount the importance of a public image in the relationship of an artist to his work in a popular art form.

Stroheim's various personal interests are implied throughout the narrative, but there are two in particular which I will examine: his penchant for expressing in detail the sexual mores of his characters, and his obsession with the grotesque. Each of these components in "Greed" provides a definite sketch of the "auteur," particularly when considered in conjunction with earlier films such as "Blind Husbands," "The Devil's Passkey," "Foolish Wives," and with his later masterpiece "The Wedding March".

If it cannot be stated that Stroheim invented sex in Hollywood, it is hard not to agree with Oswell Blekeston, who said that "Stroheim taught the Americans how to make love".[10] While the sexual element in "Greed" is not as predominant as most of his other films, the changes imposed on the Norris text, such that its emphasis is significantly heightened, indicate this influence of the director. By the point in the narrative where Trina enters into McTeague's life, where his sexuality is first brought into consideration in the novel, Stroheim has already made two allusions to McTeague's sexual timidity. The first occurs during his apprenticeship with Dr. Potter. In a scene clearly intended to be comic, "Two bums, a boy about eighteen and a girl about sixteen"

(s.p. 61) become patients of the travelling dentists. The girl's coyness and suggestive smiles force the embarrassed and clumsy McTeague to switch with his mentor. Stroheim later combines this sexual ineffectiveness with naivety when the dentist mistakes a flirting glance from a young girl for an indication that she has lost something.

Although it may be argued that Stroheim's use of additional scenes to depict McTeague's inexperience is simply a visual equivalent for the information given in the novel, it cannot be discounted that the use of such precedents heightens the impact. A suitable comparison might be the desirability that Booth cites of "showing" over "telling." At any rate, these two incidents, while essentially comic, pave the way for the tension that results from the sexual undertones in the scene where Trina and McTeague meet.

Both novelist and director express the encounter in the same words ("The two shake hands dumbly" (Novel-23, Screenplay-107)), but Stroheim must rely on other means to convey the uneasiness found in the novel:

> McTeague and Trina were left alone. He was embarrassed, troubled. These young girls disturbed and perplexed him. He did not like them, obstinately cherishing that intuitive suspicion of all things feminine--the perverse dislike of an overgrown boy. (24)

Although Stroheim's work cannot express such concepts, it is doubtful whether he would wish to do so. The director's McTeague

would not be burdened with an instinctual "perverse dislike," but he would be sexually passive out of reservation and demureness. Subsequently, Stroheim confines his treatment of this scene to a skeletal one, although the visual product is loaded with import:

> Close-up of Trina from McTeague's angle. She sizes him up unembarrassed.
> Close-up of McTeague acting very embarrassed and nodding his head.
> Close-up of McTeague's huge hand shaking Trina's little one.
> Close-up of McTeague.
> Close-up of Trina. (s.p. 108)

As the relationship develops, it becomes clear that Stroheim's handling of McTeague's sexuality differs essentially in its intent from that of Norris. The novelist is more interested in McTeague as a case study for sexual determinism when discussing that aspect of his nature. Subsequently, his commentary tends to be general and put on a cosmic scale, as the following passage demonstrates:

> Trina was McTeague's first experience. With her the feminine suddenly entered his little world. It was not only her that he saw and felt, it was the woman, the whole sex, an entire new humanity, strange and alluring, that he seemed to have discovered. How had he ignored it so long? It was dazzling, delicious, charming beyond all words. His narrow point of view was at once enlarged and confused, and all at once he saw that there was something else in life besides concertinas and steam beer. Everything had to be made over again. His whole rude idea of life had to be changed. The male virile desire in him tardily awakened, aroused itself, strong and brutal. It was resistless, untrained, a thing not to be held in leash an instant. (p. 26)

Stroheim, however, is not as concerned with universal implications in the sexuality of his characters. In his hands, McTeague becomes less a case study and more a dramatic, if not tragic, figure. His sexuality is more individual in nature, and less a representative of the collective. Stroheim's McTeague is far less certain about the meaning of his experience with Trina. After her departure from her first appointment, he "unconsciously"(s.p. 10) raises his hand and gestures as though he were shaking hers. Following this, "He stands there helpless, then seems to be trying to find out what has come over him" (s.p. 11). It is this confusing and powerful, yet undefined, force within McTeague that Stroheim chooses to highlight instead of providing the doctrinal explanation found in Norris. Nonetheless, it is a sexual awakening, but the effect is far greater on the screen. As the scene continues with material added by the director, one sees depicted in McTeague that which Stroheim presents best. Discovering a hairpin on the floor, the dentist picks it up to examine it more clearly. There is an eerie effect in the screenplay as he moves from one object to another, symbolizing the progression from his characteristic detachment to an obsessive commitment:

> He stands there with the hairpin in his hand, realizing that it is hers. Then he seems to realize that it is only a hairpin and has nothing to do with her; it's just a lifeless object. He turns impulsively and throws the hairpin into the wastebasket, then turns back toward the moveable rack to straighten out his instruments, and sees Trina's tooth. He picks it up with the same helpless expression. Then he suddenly gets an idea, he bends down, takes a piece of newspaper

> which is sticking out of the wastebasket and tears it off. He wraps the tooth carefully in the paper and looks around to make sure that no one saw him do something so foolish. He puts the tooth into his waistcoat pocket then, under the influence of some unseen force, he sits down in the operating chair.
>
> Medium shot of McTeague seated in the operating chair with the hand-piece and two arm-braces visible. He fingers the part of the right arm-brace on which Trina's hand has rested. He closes his eyes and grits his teeth, with a jerk, he puts his head into the head-rest, gripping both arm-braces with his hands where her hands have lain.
>
> Close-up of his face. He opens his eyes and stares into space. Iris out. (s.p. 110-1)[11]

Sexual tension becomes predominant again on the night of the couple's wedding. In a scene which Stroheim has sandwiched between two shots of a hand sawing wood, the spectator witnesses Trina's fears of fulfilling her marital duty. Of course, these anxieties are present in the novel as well, but they become more impressive on the screen for a variety of reasons. One is their directness--they come to the audience with a heavy rationale explaining their cause. Another is the use of symbolism, such as the hand sawing wood and the juxtaposition of the couple with the birds in the cage. While the former motif creates tension out of its sheer incongruity, the latter expressed Trina's fear of imprisonment by and with McTeague. When the dentist overcomes her restraint "with his

immense strength" (s.p. 188) and "kisses her full upon the mouth" (s.p. 188), an action taken directly from Norris, Stroheim inserts a

> Close-up of Trina's feet in satin slippers, standing on McTeague's feet and then slowly coming up on tiptoe until they assume the position of a toe dancer. (s.p. 188)

Trina's acquiescence and surrender to her husband here act as a form of sexual release, a winding-down of the tension. The last shot of the scene gives it an alluring dimension absent from the novel:

> . . . Camera begins to back up as she sits on the bed, and continues to move slowly back through the arch until the curtains can be seen at either side of the screen. Mac approaches and closes the curtains; his feet can just be seen through the slit at the bottom as he returns to Trina. Horizontal barn door down. (s.p. 188)

The separation of the couple, in the director's mind, would necessitate a transfer of sexual energies on both parts. Stroheim would likely have been delighted to find in Norris the fact that Trina's passions were shifted completely to her love of gold progressively through the narrative. From her habitual polishing of the coins, she begins to bury her face in a heap of them "with undeniable physical delight" (s.p. 256) and later kisses them (s.p. 304), and ultimately, she undergoes an orgy with them in her bed. Although the latter scene occurs in the novel, the emphasis Stroheim affords it, resulting not so much from a lengthening of duration as a change in intensity because of its explicit nature, makes it far more striking on the screen.

In the case of McTeague, the director works more subtly. Having established an aggressive domineering sexual expression, Stroheim must provide a feasible replacement for his drive, after the couple's separation. Although Norris, too, has McTeague drink excessively in the novel, it is really the consequence of heredity and the manifestation of the brute in a snowball effect--as the alcohol brought out the brute, the brute brought out the alcohol. It is true that these conditions also pertain to Stroheim's McTeague, but equal importance must be conceded to the idea that alcohol is also the object of displaced sexual energy. The following description of Mac alone in his room carries a similar suggestiveness to Trina's "orgy" with the gold coins:

> Close-up of the bird cage; the two birds are having a row. Close-up of Mac watching them. He takes another swig and then puts the bottle down on the bed. He thinks a moment and looks up. His eyes twinkle meanly as he speaks:
>
> Title: "--Five thousand and she wouldn't give me a dime--" Back to the scene as Mac clenches his fists and growls:
> Title: "Oh--if I get my hands on you--"
> Back to the scene as he clutches the air in front of him, then takes the bottle and downs another shot.
> Medium shot as he lies back on the bed. Iris out. (s.p. 314)

The notion that alcohol becomes a replacement for human contact is best signified when Mac wanders the streets the evening of Trina's

murder consuming the amount of alcohol necessary to lower his defenses against violent action:

> Medium shot as Mac appears in the alley. A man and a girl are kissing each other. Embarrassed, they break apart and walk away. Mac moves into the place where they were standing and takes out his flask.
>
> (s.p. 316-7)

Such a scene achieves, perhaps with more success than the preceding one, a "montage" effect, without having to resort to crosscutting, and establishes further the strong connection between alcohol and sensuality.

The second distinctive feature that indicates a special interest of Stroheim is his obvious flair for the grotesque, already established in his earlier films. One thinks of the scene in "Foolish Wives" where Mrs. Hughes, the wife of an American ambassador, is angered at a French soldier for his discourtesy in not retrieving the gloves she had dropped, and the subsequent revelation that he is armless, and of Baron Sadaja, the aged, crippled foot fetishist in his later feature "The Merry Widow", as notable examples of this proclivity in the director's other work. As Jim Tully said of him, "Too self-centred and intense to see life whole, he yet transcribes more or less faithfully that part of it which he does see."[12] In "Greed", bizarre characters abound. Some, like Zerkow and Maria (and even Old Grannis and Miss Baker), are taken directly from Norris. Others must be changed or added. Selina, Trina's cousin, is given protruding

buck-teeth to the point of exaggeration. The lottery agent who bears the tidings of good fortune in Norris is at first "a strange man in a drab overcoat" (p. 50) and then "a man of the world, this agent. He knew life. He was suave and easy. A diamond was on his little finger" (p. 87). The figure in the film has a gaunt, cadaverous face with a bandage covering what appears to be a boil shown in close-up as he delivers the proclamation to Trina "with the mien of an undertaker" (s.p. 154). The minister who performs the marriage of Trina and McTeague does so with bloodless apathy, avoiding any semblance of reverence in the ceremony. The photographer present is hunchbacked (reminiscent of the hunchback whose hump Stroheim as Count Karamzin rubs for good luck in the casino in "Foolish Wives" and Bartholomew, the thwarted lover in "Merry-Go-Round").[13] Heise the harness-maker is gargantuan while his wife is little more than a midget (Stroheim derives a great delight in shooting the two side by side from the back). The list reads like a retinue for a freak show.[14]

The world McTeague inhabits in "Greed" is as much a creation of Stroheim's as it is of Norris. In his translation of a novel to the screen, the director has not merely included his own interpretation of that work. He has revitalized the material with his own sensibility, injected a vision into the product as personal and definitive as a thumb print. For example, one observes an established Stroheim theme, that of the cruelty, hypocrisy, and indifference of man towards his fellow man, operating in the narrative in a way that it does not in the novel. Numerous instances are found in the various mob scenes

previously described in Chapter II. In addition to this, there are other Stroheimesque "touches." Dr. Percy, when he condescendingly purchases the gilded tooth from McTeague for five dollars, reveals a wallet crammed with bills. When McTeague is destitute, a policeman orders him off the park bench on which he rests, and proceeds to sit on it himself. To Stroheim's credit, he achieves this while keeping the narrative of the novel intact. Similarly, he does not accomplish this by excluding Norris, for many of the novelist's thematic concerns, such as that of greed as a destructive force, are maintained. The fact that Stroheim ultimately chose the title "Greed" for the work combines all three of these aspects of his translation to which I have been referring--fidelity, interpretation, and personal vision.[15]

There are, in addition, numerous other ways involving these three characteristics by which the director puts himself into his work. From the material already examined, it is possible to get a clear indication of what Stroheim feels towards his characters. However, he also chooses to employ external sequences which function as a running visual commentary on the action. There are two examples of this within the narrative, each thematically related to the other.[16] The first begins as a metaphor for the basis of the relationship between Zerkow and Maria. As Maria tells Zerkow of the gold service, and he breaks down, the scene is replaced by an

> Iris in on some gold coins lying on a black velvet floor, two greedy hands playing with them in a miserly fashion (in natural colours). This will be our leit-motif

of Gold and Greed. Iris out. (s.p. 161-2)

The scene recurs when the miser proposes to Maria and she accepts. With the third appearance of the shot, its scope has enlarged. It is found after one of Trina's counting sessions with her gold, establishing a parallel between the obsessions of Zerkow and Trina. In the other symbolic shot, occurring when Mac and Trina are forced to move from their apartment and sell their possessions, a gilded, hand-coloured hand (thus combining Gold and Greed again) closes on the figures of a man and woman:

> They are so small that we can only see their heads, shoulders, arms and legs extending from each end of the hand. Their bodies are also hand-coloured flesh colour and the woman has long black hair. Their arms and legs are flailing wildly as they struggle to get free. Then the hand closes with a greedy movement, slowly but surely crushing the life out of the two beings. Their struggles stop and their limbs hang limp. Iris out. (s.p. 251)

If one of the functions of art is to allow the spectator/participant to experience life as the artist does, then Stroheim is an artist. Though, as Jim Tully indicates, an inflated ego can be the product of such an endeavour, one cannot deny the director's success in this capacity. One emerges from a showing of "Greed" with an accurate understanding of how Stroheim views the world, a sign that point of view played a leading role in the drama, and substantiates the claim at the beginning of the film that it was "personally directed" by Erich Von Stroheim.

FOOTNOTES: CHAPTER IV

[1]Keith Cohen, Film and Fiction/The Dynamics of Exchange (New Haven and London: Yale University Press, 1979) p. 71.

[2]Ibid., p. 70.

[3]Wayne Booth, The Rhetoric of Fiction (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1961) p. 96.

[4]An interesting extension of this notion is Robert Montgomery's 1946 film from Raymond Chandler's novel of the same name "The Lady in the Lake", in which the action is completely subjective (i.e. seen totally through the eyes of the hero).

[5]This, of course, is a direct reference to her characteristic hand to mouth gesture, displayed generally when there exists a threat to her hoard. The glove, too, plays an interesting role in that it suggests, at this stage, an absence of any abnormal passion for gold, because it prohibits direct contact of the precious metal with the hand.

[6]Jim Tully, "The Man You Love to Hate". Motion Picture Classic XIX May, 1924. p. 20.

[7]Peter Noble, Hollywood Scapegoat (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 4.

[8]Denis Marion, "Stroheim, the legend and the fact." Sight and Sound, Vol. 31. Winter '61-2. p. 23.

[9]Peter Noble, Hollywood Scapegoat (New York: Arno Press, 1972), p. 40.

[10]Ibid., p. 82. quoted from Film Quarterly (Spring, 1947).

[11]There is a curious counterpart to this scene later in the screenplay, for which there is some basis in the novel. It occurs in the scene the evening of the picnic on George Washington's birthday. McTeague is to spend the night at the Sieppes, in Trina's room, and when he is alone, he finds the clothes Trina wore as a patient in her

closet, and "with an unreasoned impulse, he opens his huge arms and gathers the garments close to him, plunging his face deep among them " (s.p. 139). This action is followed by the title, "What a night that was for McTeague, what a never to be forgotten night " (s.p. 140), a reference to the more innocent title, taken from the novel, that followed the picnic ("What a day that was for McTeague, what a never to be forgotten day-" (s.p. 136, N p. 58).

[12]Jim Tully, "The Man You Love to Hate." Motion Picture Classic XIX May 1924, p. 20.

[13]With typical Stroheimesque humour, the photographer is shown laughing hysterically during the wedding celebration when Mr. Sieppe spanks his children for misbehaving.

[14]There are numerous other examples. The owner of the house the couple want to rent is so overweight that he cannot walk and the auction sale of the couple's possessions is attended by "funny types of all descriptions " (246).

[15]The role of names in the film is not insignificant. The name of the butcher shop at which Trina buys the tainted meat is "Semite Market", which might be an attempt by Stroheim to preserve some of the anti-Semitic overtones of the novel (e.g. Zerkow the Jewish miser). Further, the name of the kindergarten where Trina works and is eventually killed is "Lester Memorial School," Lester being Frank Norris' mother's maiden name.

[16]Of course, shots such as the funeral procession which passes as McTeague and Trina are married offer a sort of "commentary", but their presence is incorporated, to some degree, into the action of the narrative rather than occurring externally. Further, when the action does occur externally, but does not

bear a precise symbolic purpose, such as the numerous shots of the hand sawing during the wedding ceremony and festivity, there is no real commentary. Although this is an adaptation of an event in the novel, the effect produced is far greater on the silent screen. Were the sound of the hand sawing wood to be permitted to intrude into the wedding, the result would have been more annoying than effective. However, in the absence of sound, Stroheim's use of a visual motif would have produced an eerie, awesome effect on the viewer.

CONCLUSION

"It is a direct attack on the old methods of literary art. We shall have to adapt ourselves to the shadowy screen and the cold machine. A new form of writing will be necessary."

Leo Tolstoy.

I

Upon considering the transformation of McTeague to "Greed", or any other novel to film, clearly one can discuss the differences between the two either as a result of the translation to a new medium or the handling of the novelist's material by a new artist. The former of these is by far the more influential and immediate--in a sense, translation implies alteration as a given. The transition from one art form to another, then, involves some change by its own nature. A translator of Tolstoy, say, knows that no matter how good his translation is, something of the spirit of the original Russian will be lost. He begins, therefore, with this limitation in mind and simply does the best he can. For this reason, some measure of a critic's judgement of a film version of a novel may properly be based on the degree to which it approximates the original. But not too much--absolute fidelity would probably detract from the new work, in the same way that a photocopy is only desirable when the original is inaccessible, and would leave the spectator with an uncomfortable sense of aesthetic déjà vu.

The film-maker, unlike the translator, can insert, remove, and alter his material in the process of translation to achieve his end. The good film-maker knows when to rely on the novel and when to rely on his artistic sense for a suitable adjustment.[1] It is easy to observe that Stroheim need not have attempted to be so all-encompassing in his filming of Norris' novel. There are means of capturing the essence of a novel while sacrificing the detail. McTeague, in fact,

was first filmed in 1915 under the title of "Life's Whirlpool", a now-lost four-reeler starring Halbrook Blinn and Fania Marinoff. Obviously, the presentation of the stories in the two would differ greatly, as two corresponding stills would illustrate. Even the change in the title, in some way, reflects the different approach taken by each.[2]

It has been consistently argued throughout the paper that the film-maker translating literary works to the screen is constantly faced with the problem of finding visual counterparts for either conceptual terms or symbolic metaphors, in addition to the necessity of presenting the "surface" material. One of the most curious examples of this difficulty being minimized is the early silent "Battle Hymn of the Republic", directed by Larry Trimble. In it, one witnesses the composition of the song by Julia Ward Howe in a trance. For each line of the work, a visual equivalent is projected onto the screen. As Vachel Lindsay describes it,

> The pictures that might possibly have passed before her mind during the trance are thrown upon the screen. The phrases they illustrate are not in the final order of the poem, but in the possible sequence in which they went on the paper in the first sketch.[3]

For example, for the line "Mine eyes have seen the glory of the coming of the Lord", one sees "a gracious picture of the nativity."[4] Even here, of course, one encounters the problem of the accuracy and/or validity of certain visual representations, but it is probable that, ideally, this is the sort of fidelity that Stroheim often sought, albeit in a work of far greater scope and size.

But it is also clear that Stroheim consciously transformed the material of the novel in certain distinctive ways. Basically, these changes stem from two roles the director serves in putting a novel on the screen, that of the adaptor and that of the artist. Some aspects of adapting come easily, for Norris and Stroheim share a strong fidelity to life as they see it, despite their respective differences in perception. But it is, in the end, only one side of life, as Jim Tully above observed of Stroheim. If there was to be a passage to serve as an epitaph for the work of both artists, it might very well be from Norris himself:

> It is not difficult to show that a man may be as accurate as the spectroscope, and yet be like a Chinese diplomat . . . He thinks he has gone to life for his material, and so must be original, new and true. It is not so. Life itself is not always true to life--from the point of the artist.[5]

Margaret Kennedy once observed that,

> Most writers prefer to work on an ill-written, second-rate book, towards which they have no conscience, but which has some situation or character which has caught the imagination.[6]

Although McTeague is neither ill-written nor second-rate, it is easy to see how the imagination of the impressionable Stroheim, who was a young extra waiting for parts from D.W. Griffith when he first read it, was caught by it. It had in it the major components found in any Stroheim work--certain grotesque elements, high drama, sexual undertones, and a misanthropic view of a world filled with corruption and misfortune. Stroheim was undoubtedly attracted by such components,

and as we have seen, his imagination developed, extended and intensified them in its own distinctive way. As an adaptor or translator, he attempts to bring material from one medium to another relatively unaltered. As both interpreter and critic, he re-structures and re-organizes the text so that it better conforms to the new medium and remains accessible to the audience. Finally, and most importantly, as an artist, he re-creates the literary material so that it expresses a personal vision, and carries his indelible signature.

In the process, certain shifts occur. Despite Stroheim's stated intention of absolute fidelity, his art differs completely from Norris' in terms of effect. If the following distinction by Susan Sontag is valid, it could serve as a dividing-line between the respective arts of Stroheim and Norris, with the director belonging to the first type and the novelist to the second:

> Some art aims directly at arousing the feelings: some art appeals to the feelings through the route of the intelligence. There is art that involves, that creates empathy. There is art that detaches, that provokes reflection.[7]

Stroheim's handling of Norris, as I have shown, involves either a movement away from the centre towards the extremities, as in his treatment of Marcus and McTeague as villain and hero, or an expansion of material in the novel that results in a more dramatic emphasis on particular imagistic or symbolic strains. The same symptom appears in his handling of the basic theme, that of the ravages of greed, and

the alteration of the title is typical of his approach. In each case, Stroheim develops the materials of the novel towards certain dramatic extremes that are likely to elicit strong emotional responses.

II

Stroheim's venture with "Greed" was to prove unequalled in the history of cinema for its scope. The editing of the final product alone took a year, for which the director was not paid. Thomas Quinn Curtis, a personal friend of Stroheim's, believed that if the film had been edited and released immediately, the studio might have complied with the director's wishes for a work closer in length to the original. The issue of artistic failure looms around the question of duration in film like a willing scapegoat. But one does not hear of the same difficulties in literary endeavours. Publishers, for example, did not run about excising massive chunks of Proust's Remembrance of Things Past or Joyce's Ulysses. Similarly, producers do not threaten to withdraw funds from a production of Shaw's Man and Superman for its length. No, it seems the public-at-large, when it is at all aware of such works, either gives them the nod or tolerates them as a necessary evil, much in the same way that it views dentists.

Happily, popular tastes are changing. Endurance is now a virtue, length seems to be gaining ground. One notices, for instance, the increase in the size of the popular novel in the past few decades, a sign that novelists may have learned that more area may be covered if they spread their ideas a bit more thinly. In the visual arts, the

long film is not so inexcusable as it once was. Recently, one finds Bertolucci's "1900", said to be originally over five hours in duration and now a scant four and, at a more accessible and popular level, on cinema's bastard brother, television, numerous "mini-series" adapted from novels crawl insufferably over the space of a week, and their length is comparable to that of "Greed". Here, of course, one finds that length is exploited for a commercial purpose, and subject to a formulaic treatment, illustrating that great length is acceptable only when there is no loss of intensity or of quality.

With "Greed", however, as with any "film maudits", there is no choice. One can only accept it as it exists. As for speculating about the relationships of the extant film to the original, it is best to consider Stroheim's comment upon seeing it at the Cinémathèque in Paris in 1950:

> It was for me an exhumation. It was like opening a coffin in which there was just dust, giving off a terrible stench, a couple of vertebra and a piece of shoulder bone.[8]

It is impossible to miss the contempt housed in that voice. But it is the contempt of an artist who felt that twenty-five years of his life were taken from him. There is a profound sadness in the loss of his greatest work, a despair which is reflected in his lament:

> It was if [sic] a man's beloved was run over by a truck, maimed beyond recognition. He goes to see her in the morgue. Of course, he still loves her but it's only the memory of her that he can love--because he doesn't recognize her anymore.[9]

His was the plight of Copernicus, whose theories were suppressed by the Church because they attacked the tradition. Stroheim was not offering mankind a new universe, and his accusers were advocates of yet another, baser, religion, but he, too, attacked the tradition. What a pity that, on his deathbed in his villa in France, he could not have touched, like Copernicus, the full and newly-released product of his imagination.

FOOTNOTES: CONCLUSION

[1]Even Stroheim sometimes slipped up in "Greed", as in the instance of McTeague's singing to himself, referred to in the novel, when Stroheim has musical notes and the words appear "in animated fashion" (s.p. 130) simultaneously with their being sung.

[2]Norris had two working titles which preceded McTeague--The Golden Tooth and The People of Polk Street. Contrary to Weinberg's belief, it was, in fact, Stroheim who chose the ultimate title of "Greed" over "McTeague".

[3]Vachel Lindsay, The Art of the Moving Picture (New York: 1970), p. 102.

[4]Ibid., p. 102.

[5]Frank Norris,"A Problem in Fiction" in Frank Norris, The Responsibilities of the Novelist (New York: Doubleday, Page & Co., 1903).

[6]Quoted in George Bluestone, Novels Into Film (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1957), p. 90.

[7]William Jinks, The Celluloid Literature (University of Florida, Gainesville: Glencoe Press, 1974), p. 174.

[8]Herman Weinberg, The Complete Greed (New York: Arno Press, 1972), Introduction.

[9]Ibid.

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VITA

Surname: LAND Given Names: KEVIN ARTHUR

Place of Birth: HAMILTON, ONTARIO Date of Birth: FEBRUARY 11, 1956

Educational Institutions Attended, with Dates of Entering and Leaving:

UNIVERSITY OF WATERLOO	1975	to	1979
UNIVERSITY OF VICTORIA	1979	to	1981

Degrees, Diplomas, Etc., Awarded, with Dates and Names of Institutions:

B.A. (Honours)	1975	University of Waterloo

Honors and Awards:

Father Anthony Firetto Award	1978/9
University of Victoria Fellowship	1979/80

Publications:

"An Interview with Eli Mandel". ION No.2. Winter/Spring 1980, pp. 13-30.

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Name

4/21/91

Date