Illusion and Reality:
The Paradox of Pain in \textit{La Grande Illusion}, \textit{King of Hearts}
and \textit{Au Revoir, Les Enfants}

An Honors Thesis (ID 499)
by
Mary K. Hostetter

Thesis Director

Dr. Donald Gilman
Associate Professor of Foreign Language and Coordinator of French

Ball State University
Muncie, Indiana
May, 1991
TABLE OF CONTENTS

I. Introduction..................................................1
II. Chapter One: *La Grande Illusion*.........................6
   A. Narrative.................................................7
   B. Characters............................................9
   C. Theme and Structure.................................13
   D. Cinematography.....................................17
   E. Conclusion........................................19
III. Chapter Two: *King of Hearts*............................22
   A. Narrative.............................................23
   B. Characters...........................................25
   C. Theme and Structure.................................28
   D. Cinematography.....................................33
   E. Conclusion........................................35
IV. Chapter Three: *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*..................36
   A. Narrative.............................................37
   B. Characters...........................................38
   C. Theme and Structure.................................40
   D. Cinematography.....................................44
   E. Conclusion........................................45
V. Epilogue: *Sophie's Choice*.................................48
Notes..........................................................55
Bibliography..................................................56
I. INTRODUCTION

The French film may be the most imaginative and the most stimulating of its generation: a subtle blend of effective and oftentimes poetic dialogue; evocative visual imagery; perceptive social analysis; complex fictional structures; rich philosophical implications; wit and charm. Such is the case with three particular French anti-war films: La Grande Illusion, King of Hearts (Le Roi de Coeur), and Au Revoir, Les Enfants. All three films reflect varying viewpoints about war, its conflicts, its sentiments, and its outcomes. But most importantly, the three films focus on one similar theme: conflict.

Throughout the history of mankind and the course of natural events, harmony is an elusive ideal. Adam and Eve enjoy an earthly paradise; but, through their Fall and their subsequent expulsion from the Garden of Eden, they adjust painfully and regrettably to a reality of turbulent change that contrasts with an illusion of tranquil constancy. Heroes recognize the ache and violence of human existence but continue to seek the beauty and stillness of an illusionary peace. Moses seeks a promised land from which his people are destined to defend. Odysseus returns to Ithaca but, reunited with his father Laertes and his son Telemachus, sheds the single fear of regret that acknowledges the impending death that he must endure. Don Quixote flails windmills in order to demonstrate an inspired heroism that self-examination destroys at the time of death.

Conflict, then, forms part of human existence; and,
whether such oppositions are reflected in the cut-and-throat of debate or in the sordid violence and unrelenting annihilation of holocaust, the pain inherent in the confrontation produces, conversely, within human consciousness, the recognition of harmony and thereby stimulates man, like Plato's winged character, to attain a rest or peace associated with beauty, and truth, and goodness.

In producing *La Grande Illusion* (1937), *King of Hearts* (1967), and *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* (1988), Jean Renoir, Philippe de Broca, and Louis Malle rework this ancient theme of the reality of conflict and the illusion of peace. All three concentrate on the devastation of war and its physical and psychological torments: the loss of life; dismemberment and bodily suffering; the guilt and shame that accompany the necessity to destroy in order to survive. But the negation of war obsesses those engaged in conflict: escape from battle; the creation of illusions and imaginary worlds; the naïveté that is conjoined with immaturity, ignorance, and innocence. A common core, then unites these opposing values and perhaps even explains some of the irrational actions associated with conflict. And through the use of paradox these cinematographic auteurs present thematically and visually the apparent contradictions of the inevitable reality of war and the illusionary ideal of peace.

Jean Renoir, in his classic film *La Grande Illusion*, suggests the nature of this paradox through the very title of the film. He includes class divisions, coupled with language
barriers, to present the conflict of values and of those who are opposed to war. He visualizes the paradox of human suffering that is momentarily hidden by delusions, but is externally present by war's impeding reality. The inner conflict between the film's primary characters is internal, creating the delusion, which in essence is the overall illusion.

De Broca, on the other hand, is more light-hearted in his approach to war in his film King of Hearts. Although the movie is a comedy, it, too, encompasses the complexities and devastations of war. Through the illusion of comedy, de Broca casts his characters in mentally insane roles, where they are eventually perceived to be more sane than "normal" people. Through this lietmotif, de Broca concentrates on the moral aspect of war and, ironically, its absurdities. But unlike Renoir, de Broca seems to focus greater attention on the individual, who is placed in a unique surrounding and in an interesting situation. The vision of war is somewhat obscured by the activities of the lunatics. But at the film's close, they are sadly reminded that mass destruction does exist, does exert dramatic effects, and does disturb the sanity of human consciousness and the innocence of the harmless human being. De Broca then shifts from the seriousness of Renoir's portrayal of class conflict and, through the use of paradox and comedy, depicts the absurdity of war instigated by the "sane" and the pleasure of peace recognized and realized by the "insane."

Finally, Louis Malle, one of today's most influential
contemporary directors, has encompassed every emotional aspect of war in his film \textit{Au Revoir, Les Enfants}. The film in many ways, is the most touching and the most psychologically penetrating of the three because of its gripping penetration of the terrifying reality of war and its emphasis on guilt and shame that is inevitably inflicted. In penetrating the dynamics of a guilt-ridden conscience, Malle depicts the anguish incurred by the uncommitted, the ravenous exploitation perpetrated by opportunists, the hurt afflicted by those who seek solace in following the rules and in ignoring the principles of morality, and the destruction of the Jews. A portrayal of shame then evolves from guilt, emerging forcefully and dramatically through the conflict between the spirit of the law and the letter of the law. Innocent and ignorant, the protagonist matures and endures the pain that he inflicts, unintentionally but devastatingly, through blind and obsessive self-interest.

Within all three films, war becomes theme and technique that enable these directors to probe the dimensions and operations of human nature. Conflict is a universal constant that binds humankind in an unrelenting and perpetual pain. Socially, morally, and psychologically, the afflictor and the afflicted co-exist and become representative of the suffering that is part of the human condition. Each of these directors examines, in different but valid ways, the anguish that evolves from violent conflict: Renoir stresses the social barriers which prompt mistrust and hate, and which result in hurt; de Broca demonstrates the senselessness of
destruction that is ultimately unjustified and immoral. Malle directs attention to the psychological perspectives of bestial brutality, cowardice, shame, anguish, and an absorbing self-interest that motivates human action. In spite of the diversity of themes, each director employs the paradox of the illusion and reality of war that portrays the suffering and anguish inherent in human existence. Themes, moreover, must be actualized through techniques. Accordingly each film presents, and calls for an analysis of, (1) the narrative; (2) the psychological perspective of various personages that evolve from characters and interaction with situations and persons; (3) the use of images and words; (4) cinematography. Each director draws upon the resources of his craft and, as we shall see, presents the horrors of war and the heroism of human endurance.
II. CHAPTER ONE: LA GRANDE ILLUSION (1937)

When a film critic called Jean Renoir "one of the four or five great 'auteurs' in all the history of the cinema," (1) he was not referring to the director's "literary" quality so much as recognizing that Renoir put his own creative "authorial" stamp on each of his films. Jean Renoir is probably one of the most internationally popular and widely respected film makers. A film by Jean Renoir speaks about and to the human condition: It shows human beings caught in complicated social and psychological problems; it presents complex personalities whose many sides are revealed by comparison with other similar - yet different - characters; it describes the conflict of values in terms of historical change and of opposing social classes; and it conveys intricacies of social relationships through emphasis on aesthetic patterns of similarity and difference and of parallelism and exchange.

Although much of Renoir's work develops a realistic and often satiric portrayal of social life, he also seems to express an "inner realism," or an implied truth that emerges through the artistic arrangement of documentary detail. Renoir's La Grande Illusion documents the class struggles between friends and foes during a time of duress and anxiety-war. The great "illusion" of the film is the plot's "peaceful" focus and the way it escapes the difficulties and realities of World War One. Renoir seeks for solutions in this film and makes a plea for an end to hostilities.
A. NARRATIVE

One of the undeniably magnificent films in the history of world cinema is Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, which comments on the barriers that divide people, classes, armies, and countries. Renoir produced the film during the middle of his career, after the early silent films, but toward the end of his European work before his departure for the United States in 1940 (forced upon him by the circumstances of World War Two). Conveniently, *La Grande Illusion* takes place during wartime in Europe.

The film opens during World War One as Maréchal, played by Jean Gabin, and Boëldieu, enacted by Pierre Fresnay, are shot down by German flying ace Von Rauffenstein, played by the highly-acclaimed Erich Von Stroheim. Maréchal and Boëldieu survive the crash and are invited to lunch by Von Rauffenstein before ground troops arrive to cart the French officers off to a prisoner-of-war camp.

Although Maréchal and Boëldieu are compatriots, Boëldieu distinctively has more in common with Von Rauffenstein, as both of them are members of the white-gloved aristocracy. After lunch, the Frenchmen are billeted in barracks, where a French officer - and a Jew - Rosenthal (played by Marcel Dalio), befriends the two, along with several British officers who have also been taken prisoner. The newcomers join the others in constructing an escape tunnel beneath the barracks. A French victory on the Western Front, however, is a sign that the war is turning in favor of the French.
Maréchal, Boëldieu, and the other French prisoners are transferred to another prison, where they again confront Von Rauffenstein. Now confined to a neck brace after sustaining an injury in combat, the Commandant warmly welcomes the Frenchmen, pointing out to them that his prison is virtually escape-proof. He treats his prisoners with great deference, having them to dinner and extending what meager courtesies he can offer. He talks extensively with Boëldieu about the impending end of the gentlemanly class of officers that, caused by the war, will dispense with the honor and dignity of their rank and parentage.

Entrapped somewhere between his loyalty to a member of his class - Von Rauffenstein - and to his country, Boëldieu once again agrees to assist his fellow prisoners in their escape attempts. During a roll-call, Boëldieu is found absent, is chased by the guards while he plays a flute, and is shot by Von Rauffenstein after he refuses to return. Boëldieu's antics cover the escape of Maréchal and Rosenthal, who argue after the latter hurts his ankle. They find shelter in a barn, where they are discovered by Elsa, a German peasant, whose husband and brothers had been killed in the war. Her only survivor is her daughter Lotte. Elsa takes care of the two, and on Christmas Eve, she and Maréchal recognize and realize their love for each other. However, Maréchal and Rosenthal must succeed in their escape, and they leave Elsa for the safety of Switzerland. Maréchal vows to return to Elsa after the war. But will he? In French, a language she cannot understand, he tells her he
will return. His promise is never fully received. Will it ever be kept?

Thus, La Grande Illusion structures itself into two parts: the first, light-hearted; the second, colder and grimmer. The first segment focuses on the living situation of the prisoners-of-war, which, as the story-line unfolds, portrays the conditions as above-standard and better than average, with clean barracks and somewhat healthy food. The prisoners-of-war appear to be granted freedoms that exceed normal expectations. Structurally, the second half shifts attention to a different camp. Word is received on the French victory in the Western Front. When Maréchal, Boëldieu, and Rosenthal are transferred to Von Rauffenstein's "castle," a definite change of atmosphere replaces the lighter, more appealing structure. The looming darkness and ominous mood of the castle, alone, result in an aesthetic change. The new surroundings reflect a turning point for the film, in which escape becomes necessary for Maréchal and Rosenthal.

B. THE CHARACTERS

Critics of the cinema have frequently commented that it is easier to create evil than to respond verbally and visually to an art of both good and evil. However, Renoir overcomes this difficulty, performing the task with perfection. History informs the substance and structure of this movie. An encounter Renoir had during World War One provided the story idea and the basis for the characters of
La Grande Illusion. Having been wounded in the leg, he was transferred from the trenches to a flying squadron, and he soon became a pilot. Once, when he was in danger of being shot down by German fighters, a Major Pinsard, who was an ace fighter-pilot, came to Renoir's aid. In 1934, they met again by chance, when Renoir was on location shooting another film. Pinsard's subsequent war experiences were remarkable.

...As for La Grande Illusion, the origin of the film was an anecdote which I got from a brother-in-arms...who had really been a war hero, a character who had escaped seven, eight times...I put...(his stories) on paper, which have nothing to do with the film, but they were an indispensable point of departure. (Renoir) (3)

The relationship between Maréchal, Boeildieu, Rosenthal and Von Rauffenstein centers attention on the breakdown of class barriers. While there is no real protagonist, all four characters combine into one big "Luis clos," or melting pot of similarities and differences. Maréchal, a mechanic and commoner, is basically disgusted by the war and serves as a rebellious type. While the viewers may see him as the protagonist, such a perception is more apparent than real, as he interacts and assumes other roles. Showing kindness for those around him, Maréchal is human, and his caring and compassion for others outweigh his disgust for the war. His soliloquy with a cow toward the end of La Grande Illusion is perhaps an important key to Maréchal's persona. He pours out his soul, confessing his distaste for war and his longing to be in a world where war does not destroy relationships. In developing his feelings about war and its destructive effects on the human condition, Renoir emphasizes it more in a scene where Maréchal, Elsa, and Lotte surround the
Christmas tree. A slow zoom to Maréchal's expression on his face solidifies his longing to stay with the new-found happiness and contentment. However, he knows he must leave. He is outside the war; and, as a commoner engaged in a war created and fought by aristocrats, he has no need to conceal his feelings and emotions.

Maréchal's comrade, Boëldieu, on the other hand, is at the pinnacle of the social hierarchy. He is virtually imprisoned by his code, rules, and duties. By appearance alone, the viewer detects that he belongs to, and perpetuates, the upper echelons of power and wealth. However, Boëldieu's role serves as a crucial axis in the film's cycle. Through his sacrifice that destroys the barriers between the men in the prisoners' camp, Boëldieu arrives at an understanding that garners him a gentlemanly death. His sacrifice entails betraying the only aristocratic ally he has, Von Rauffenstein. To aid in Maréchal's and Rosenthal's escape, Boëldieu must create a front by which the two can escape. As he does so, Boëldieu is shot by Von Rauffenstein, who is bound by the code of war.

Boëldieu's character and social situation parallel Von Rauffenstein's beliefs and attitudes. Although the two men fight on opposing sides, they are identical in following the same social demeanor. They both wear a monacle and white gloves; socially, they share the same prejudices and snobberies, and enjoy identical wines, foods, and horses. Von Rauffenstein is caught in a "Catch-22" dilemma when he is forced to comply with his duties as a commander. The supreme
The irony of La Grande Illusion is that the German commander must kill Boeildieu - a man with whom he feels most calmly allied - because the rules of war demand that he shoot escaping prisoners. After the horrible and nefarious act, Von Rauffenstein stares longingly out the window of his prison/castle. In realizing the importance of compassion, he cuts the only other living thing in the domain...a blooming geranium.

The final character of these four principal characters is Rosenthal, a Jew whose family owns banks, land, and several chateaux, but whose religion excludes him from acceptance in a higher social class. At first, Rosenthal does not seem to be a character of significant proportions. Cheerfully ready to spread his good fortune to those living around him, he exerts a false superiority to his compatriots, whose families cannot, like his, send food parcels of caviar and pâté de foie gras. Being both Jew and capitalist, he defends his race. The overcoming of division and prejudice transcends national boundaries and political states. However, once Rosenthal is paired off with Maréchal for their "great escape" from the prison, his role expands. The two must make their trip together, despite their differences, and Rosenthal experiences a type of catharsis. While being brought up in the upper, social classes, Rosenthal learns to appreciate his material wealth and to accept the lower classes as a similar race.

While the two females in La Grande Illusion play minor roles, they exert influences on the film's thematics. The
farm in which the two are housed emits a warmth and serenity removed from the horrors and devastation of war. When Maréchal and Rosenthal discover the farm, they soon discover that their new-found peacefullness is only possible at the termination of the war. Elsa's warmth touches the soldier Maréchal, as does her little daughter, Lotte with her sparkling eyes. The humaneness of Elsa's farm contrasts with the sterility of the prison. Straw in the barn instead of stone in the castle's walls, peasant clothing instead of military uniforms, both of these opposing images denote the striking differences between the peace of the countryside and the conflict of society. As the war wages, Elsa and Lotte appear to be oblivious to the situation at hand. They have their own lives to lead and a not a war to wage.

All of the characters in La Grande Illusion detract from the situation at hand, which is the war. Not only are the four men involved in the war, but they equally aspire to escape from it. The situation into which the men are placed is unique to the actual happenings in the war. In fact, the roles in which Renoir places his characters totally alienates the viewer from the war and its atrocities. Renoir, instead, creates a narrative where the characters interact, perceive others' differences, and adapt to their particular situation and painful dilemma.

C. THEME AND STRUCTURE

A theme common in almost any Jean Renoir film is one of the struggle within and against class barriers. Although
concerned with the horror and ironies of war, and with the futile waste of lives, *La Grande Illusion* probes into class allegiances and divisions. It exposes the crumbling social structure of the period, touching on self-defeating nationalism, anti-Semitism, and outmoded concepts of military honor. In *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir seeks for solutions in the rearrangement of society and the good will that could exist among individuals.

A case in point is the relationship between Maréchal, Boelldieu, Rosenthal, and Von Rauffenstein, which focuses on the disintegration of class barriers. The four men are all different from each other with regard to the social hierarchy, but the imminent breakdown occurs when they are put into a situation where survival is the only focus. The climax of the movie occurs where Maréchal and Rosenthal make their "grand" escape for freedom, and Boelldieu acts as the sacrificial lamb for the two. Very simply, the differences and loyalties become the terms in which escape is understood by the compatriots and the means by which the escape is managed. Renoir's theme requires no more than a basic comprehension of class distinctions coming together for one common cause. Symbolically, the prison's various levels provide an outlet to compare with the two sides to any given class. The levels provide an imaginary ladder by which one may climb, up or down, offering a transition, or escape, from one point of view to another.

Most of Renoir's film, however, deals with the issue of escape, whether it be the flight from the prison, or fleeing
from the realities of war. The task of leaving is both
difficult and easy: difficult to imagine in that the
prisoners cannot foresee a way to leave the prison; and
sometimes easy to accomplish, where escape becomes a somewhat
simple task in the case of Maréchal and Rosenthal.
The immediate success of this film is its ability to render
metaphors concrete. Renoir has the capability to solidify
his underlying meaning with normal occurrences, emotions, and
situations. Symbolically, the film rests on the final
flight from Germany, the war, reality, and finally, even the
film.

The escape forms an integral part of a cat-and-mouse
game within the larger game of war, which Renoir clearly
portrays to be unnecessary, artificial, and an illusion of
meaningful but futile activity. Meanwhile, real human
relationships continue themselves, as the viewer is left with
the understanding that Elsa and Lotte will survive on
their own without Maréchal's aid, and that Von Rauffenstein
will have to confront his guilt for the rest of his life. As
the end suggests, the illusion is also the end of wars.
By 1937, Renoir's sentiments were beginning to look like
battered illusions, and the time seemed to have come to
remind viewers that they were a part of a common humanity.
La Grande Illusion takes national divisions at their most
intense time, in a wartime prison camp with differences of
nationality, language, class, religion, and race, and
portrays a common humanity through those differences as well
as the struggle of a new order to emerge from the ruins of
Throughout *La Grande Illusion*, Renoir uses both the aural and the visual potential of a device that actualizes a continuity through leitmotifs forming several themes. For example, the scene in which Maréchal expresses his love for Elsa in the farmhouse on Christmas Eve, one would be hard pressed to miss the meaning of the Christian festival, which urges peace on earth and goodwill towards man, in an anti-war movie. Of course, the sequence on the mountain farm has been built up by the film; it was not discovered by accident of the scenario or its unmotivated design. Its tenderness has been earned and serves as an appropriate comment on war and class in the entire film. Indeed, no other sequence judges so effectively the futility of war, the stupidity of national enmities, or the burden of class struggles and strifes.

Perhaps most indicative of the film is the drag-show sequence in which the French prisoners entertain each other dressed as can-can girls in the latest imported French frocks. Just before the show, the French prisoners receive word that the German army has captured the French town of Douamont. Despite their sadness, the show must go on - to show their "espirit." However, in the middle of the drag-show, the French have received word that the allies had recaptured Douamont. The can-can boys rip off their wigs to cheer; they all sing the "Marseillaise." The situation reveals the irony and paradoxes about a notion such as patriotism, simultaneously serious and silly, yet deadly and
tawdry.

It is, of course, another sign of Renoir's brilliance that he has constructed the dialogue film around the ironies of language that separate or bind people together effectively as national boundaries. The scene in which Maréchal vows to return demonstrates visually and empathetically that his language barriers are detriments to his happiness. Indeed, linguistic differences are national indicants as well as personal individualities.

Meanwhile, the new high-security camp introduces its prisoner to a "true" camp, with barriers and guarding military. The shift from one camp to another makes a natural alteration of tone - a smooth transition that hits with cold, harsh reality. However, nationalism surfaces. It calls for the unity of all Frenchmen across class barriers and depicts voluntary sacrifices by the aristocratic spirit on behalf of a more democratic France.

D. CINEMATOGRAPHY

A combination of social realism and a strongly interpretive perspective that verges on romantic pessimism and that treats life as a form of theatre, La Grande Illusion projects a poetic realism which creates characters and situations as metaphors for aspects of society or the human condition. However, its emphasis on the director's visual interpretation of reality, its use of camera angles and composition in depth to create a desired atmosphere, and its frequent reminders of the ambiguous interplay of art and
and life, prepare the way for future cinema efforts.

The very first shot of La Grande Illusion begins on a close-up of a gramophone, scratching out a popular French melody, followed by a tilt up to an aviator in uniform who is singing the melody. The shot is then followed by a pan across the room as his attention is distracted, establishing an officer's mess during the First World War. The officer, Maréchal, is told he must carry out a mission at the expense of having the opportunity to see his "girl." The opening scene instantly conveys the conflict between civilian desires and military necessities, which really do not serve as the keynote of the first scene, but rather as a dominant theme throughout the movie.

The scene in which liberation seems near for the allies also exhibits Renoir's technique of establishing shots with frequent cuts to symbolic people or situations, all of which are set to music. Von Rauffenstein's prisoners respond to the truth from the front by singing the "Marseillaise." Indeed, the camp's gaieties make this war film somewhat straightforward in its approach, encompassing the emotions of war and their influence on people.

Some of these effects in the film appear perhaps more "literary" in the sense that they transpose effects attainable in writing the juxtaposition of French and German bars; the symbolism of Von Rauffenstein's geranium - the only flower in the fortress - or the aristocratic white gloves; Boeïldieu's solitary climb up the fortress tower; the repetition and cumulative effect of the song "Il était
un petit navire" in different circumstances. From a cinematographic perspective, some of the effects exploit the technical capacities of film as a medium, manipulating the camera's capability to move quickly among planes, thereby bringing out facial expressions and small gestures.

Renoir's technique also encompasses the juxtaposition of simultaneous action in two places. For instance, Boeïldieu's climb overlaps the escape sequence by dissolving one image into another, and by choosing different angles of vision. Renoir also comments visually on dialogue by using the teacher's wig and the clown ruff. To intensify suspense, Renoir accelerates the rhythm of short individual shots and draws attention to emotions through a sustaining of longer shots. For example, the scene in which the French troops learn of the Front's recovery of allied territory is characteristic of Renoir's ability to "capture the moment."

E. CONCLUSION

At his death in 1979 at the age of 84, Jean Renoir left behind forty films, directed over 45 years from 1924 to 1968. (4) Certain films such as La Grande Illusion stand out, but the whole body of his work has been treated to great critical acclaim. In an extraordinarily productive life, Renoir also wrote four novels, a couple of plays, an autobiography of his famous painter-father, August Renoir, and a provocative collection of incidental writings. (5) Thus, Renoir, is the one of the handful of acknowledged "masters" of the world cinema. Like so many twentieth-
century literary artists, Renoir exploits his artistic medium in order to represent reality to its fullest possible extent. In sum, he combines realistic and theatrical dimensions to comment on human nature and civilized behavior.

The "illusion of La Grande Illusion is war itself as well as all of its complexities. Not only does the film reflect French sentiments during the First World War, it also alludes to situations and issues that prevailed during the Second World War. Renoir proceeds with his disillusioning task by studying war - not in the front line, but rather in the prison camp, where captors and captives are thrown into the lion's den of inaction. Renoir's social commentary about war pervades the entire film and reflects Renoir's pacifistic sentiments.

The film swiftly states Renoir's view of man's life as a state of being rather than one of undertaking. It also perfectly expresses his view on the absurdity of divisions among people. No wonder Goebbels banned the film. First shown in 1937, the film was an international success, in spite of its being banned in Italy and Germany. Hitler's Minister of Propaganda, Joseph Goebbels, called it "the cinema enemy number one." (6) In 1940, while Renoir was teaching and directing in Rome, Italy joined Hitler in the war against France, and the director was forced to flee. The film negative was seized by the Germans and was found much later by American forces in Munich. (7) A 1946 reissue was criticized for being kind to the Germans and for
anti-Semitism, which was entirely to miss the spirit of Renoir's tribute to tolerance.

The film is a work of rare perfection with its understatement, incisive characterizations, muted tensions, and excellent performances. *La Grande Illusion* established Renoir's reputation as a pioneer of composition in depth and realism. The story line is a magnificently suspenseful escape plot that gathers momentum from the failed tunnel escape to Boeildieu's sacrifice and final tense, argumentative walk toward freedom of the two survivors. Punctuating the escape plot are episodes - even when comic - heighten the feeling of tension.

*La Grande Illusion* is probably one of the truly great films of its time, and still remains so today. When one encounters the vast majority of films which deal with the subject of war, *La Grande Illusion* has become somewhat of a cult favorite. The camera is an instrument for recording physical history, and Renoir's film was able to capture both approaches. All four actors in the film give strong performances in this beautifully directed and written film. In this time of threatened nuclear annihilation, the film glows with the optimism of a period in which it was easier to believe that feelings of brotherhood could surmount international barriers and thereby prevent the onslaught of war.
III. CHAPTER TWO: KING OF HEARTS (1967)

In the years following World War Two, a new generation of Frenchmen became addicted to the movies, leaping back to the 1920s and the 1930s to echo the past with bizarre innovations for the future. One such producer/director was Philipe de Broca, who, in his film King of Hearts delved into the world of psychology, as most directors did during the "Nouvelle Vague" of film-making.

As a medium of observation, film is suitable for handling intimate psychological subjects and topics as an almost clinical recording of human behavior, with every nuance of expression and gesture enhanced by the close-up. With a highly controlled flow of images, film is uniquely able to reflect the flux of mental and emotional experience. And madness, which raises basic questions about the nature of these experiences, has been a popular subject for film makers. For example, American audiences were taken aback by films like Apocalypse Now, One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest, and A Clockwork Orange for the way in which insanity was portrayed and the violence it involved. But, at the same time, films like Harvey and Dr. Strangelove poke fun at insanity and reveal that it might be an improvement over being sane.

In his movie, King of Hearts, Philipe de Broca, for example, elaborates extensively on the clinically insane and, ironically, on the advantages of madness. While King of Hearts is an anti-war statement about its complexities, the film, too, is a statement about the madness in the
in the world. Unlike *La Grande Illusion* and *Au Revoir, les Enfants*, de Broca's film is a comedy, a spoof entailing every form of comedy possible, from satire, to play-on-words, and even to slapstick.

Because *King of Hearts* is a comedy, it can achieve its goal of entertaining audiences, yet at the same time, incorporating his various themes of war, illusion, and insanity, similar to *La Grande Illusion*. The moralistic paradox that the insane are saner than those designated sane is projected in a light-hearted, entertaining fashion. These qualities alone contribute to the popularity of the film with American audiences toward the end of the 1960s. During the time in which Vietnam Conflict sentiments were becoming more radical and more vocal, de Broca's film ridiculed war, in general, from an international perspective.

A. NARRATIVE

As the first title card appears on the screen, the viewer learns that at the "Great War" draws to a close, the Germans are retreating, and the Allies are advancing. *King of Hearts* is set in a small town in the north of France, where the villagers await their liberation. In spite of the evident, grim conclusion of the war, the Germans plant a bomb in the small French town before retreating, in the hope that the explosion will destroy the Allied forces as they advance. As quickly as the townspeople learn of the implanted bomb, they scurry to safer dwellings. They flee in
terror, forgetting that the inhabitants of the lunatic asylum are still in town.

Private Charles Plumpick, a gentle, French-speaking Scotsman and a man given to poetry, is sent by his Scotish regiment to locate and defuse the bomb, provided, of course, that he can find it. Such an assignment is ridiculous and even centers on madness, for Plumpick is an ornithologist (requiring him to study birds), and knows nothing of disengaging bombs. However, because he speaks fluent French, he was "volunteered" for the job. A few of the enemy remain in the town and chase Plumpick until he hides behind the walls of the local insane asylum, where the mental cases become convinced that he is "The King of Hearts." The Germans leave, and Plumpick suffers an accident that knocks him briefly unconscious. When he awakens, the inmates have left the asylum and have returned to their prior vocations before they were committed. In fact, they have taken over almost convincingly enough that Plumpick does not realize who they are for a period of time. A duke and duchess are the community's social leaders, while Madame Eva runs the local brothel. And one of Eva's most beautiful "girls" is Coquelicot.

Plumpick eventually discovers the true identity of the "inhabitants" when he continues with the nickname, "King of Hearts." The inhabitants enthrone him as king of the community. When questions arise as to who will be his queen, Madame Eva has the logical choice, Coquelicot. While the insane asylum patients are worried about the happiness
of their new king, Plumpick is more worried about the detonation of the bomb. Plumpick's questions are answered with perplexed expressions and strange answers. Finally, after accepting the fact that he is going to die with the rest of the inhabitants, Plumpick embraces Coquelicot in his final farewell. As he is saying "goodbye," the way in which the bomb will be set off dawns on him. Plumpick successfully defuses the bomb, thereby restoring the security of the town and assuring a safe return for the inhabitants.

The Scotish regiment marches to the town to congratulate its fellow hero-officer, and discovering that the town is in grand celebration. The Scotish commander, having no idea that he is surrounded by lunatics, declares an overnight stay for his troops, and they participate in the festivities. Eventually, the two opposing armies, the Scots and the Germans, annihilate each other. The lunatics, realizing the total desecration of human life, understand that their life inside the asylum is their only hope for survival. They return, leaving Plumpick and his bird to be honored by the liberating troops. The final scene is one of the naked Plumpick, standing, a bird cage in hand, at the gates to the asylum, seeking sanctuary among the only people whom he perceives to be sane.

B. THE CHARACTERS.

Through the portrayal of the Germans as the stereotyped, broad-brow, commanding, and lacking knowledge, the characters in *King of Hearts* are theatrical. On the other hand, the
released from the asylum were created as figures of royalty and as harmless dreamers with unrecognizable human or symbolical counterparts of so-called "normal" human beings. Throughout King of Hearts, joyful, childlike delusions are shown to have greater merit than the ordinary thinking of the so-called sensible, rational adults, who, caught up in the world of commerce, forget the importance of the individual. This sentiment accurately describes the film's protagonist, Charles Plumpick. At the beginning of the film, Plumpick is a man of "commerce," in a situation that is beyond his control. In fact, Plumpick, an ornithologist, holds the stereotypical perceptions of the lunatics from the asylum. He does not take them seriously and uses them for personal gain when he is hiding from the Germans. But as his character further develops, Plumpick sees the insane people as sane, with only minor flaws.

As Plumpick initiates his relationship with the duke, duchess, and Madame Eva, he slowly begins to accept the lunatics for their qualities, naivety, and minor bouts with apparent insanity. In fact, he slowly crosses the barriers of their insanity and becomes somewhat "insane" himself. In a situation where he recognizes the unrelenting decrease of time to defuse the bomb, he takes up with the lunatics and enjoys the day, in somewhat of a "carpe diem" sequence.

In discovering the folly of the villagers, Plumpick endures some self-adjustment and adapts to the lunatics. He learns to think freely, as it were, about the promises and false delusions of his life. Coquelicot seems to exert a
critical influence upon his thinking and subsequent action. Although reluctant at first to execute his primary goal of defusing the bomb, he relinquishes his final search for it when he falls in love with his pre-selected bride. Thus, Plumpick's true identity is revealed during his walk through the town, removing every piece of military equipment and every piece of his clothing that enables him to return to the lunatic asylum.

Plumpick's fiancée, however, serves as the movie's theorist, in that she is the one to convert the Scotsman to accept the ways of the insane. Indeed, Coquelicot's mannerisms and demeanor shed light on her personality. In fact, she does not seem "insane" by clinical terms until later in the film. When Coquelicot is introduced in the brothel, her whole presence defines her as innocent and still a child in an adult world. It is her naïve responses and her timid actions that attract the attention of Plumpick.

Coquelicot's meeting with Plumpick changes her. In wanting to marry this man, she becomes more aggressive in her actions and approach. When the two are faced with death, however, Coquelicot's philosophy on life provides the obvious premise for the entire movie. Plumpick realizes that they have three minutes left together before the bomb explodes. And, with that, Coquelicot responds, "What is three minutes?" And this rhetorical but personal question alludes clearly to the necessity of leading life as it happens, not as it promises.

The other characters encompass one entity in themselves.
The insane fall into their own "niches" as if they had belonged there some time ago. While the circumstances are hardly realistic, the members of the insane community develop a town that thrives on happiness and nonchalance. When faced with the threat of dying, the lunatics return to a situation that they know is not an illusion. In fact, it is reality for them instead of a world encompassed by violence and war.

C. THEME AND STRUCTURE

For the film artist, madness is a subject that probes the darkest and most hidden side of our being and mental state. And a parallel to that particular theme is the changing view of madness reflected in war films. Many war films depict conflict in a highly stylized, romantic manner, as one can see in La Grande Illusion and Au Revoir, Les Enfants. And films such as these often represent explorations into the personal experiences of war. Such films probe the inner, psychological responses of individuals within and outside combat, and they frequently focus on madness.

Delusion and fantasy must be nourished and are at times even referable to realistic pursuits; and this seems to be the case in Philipe de Broca's King of Hearts where Plumpick's assignment to defuse a bomb requires the aid of some insane villagers who have been deemed mentally incompetent by society. The film conveys a sense that the adult world is corrupt, and that the old order must give way to a restructured, youthful vision of reality.
Through the relationship between Plumpick and the lunatics, *King of Hearts* demonstrates the victory of humanity over technology and war. And along with the power of youth and the birth of a new order (the youthful-like prisoners and a re-born country), these qualities are then orchestrated within a psychological interpretation of madness.

*King of Hearts* is almost guaranteed to be remembered by anyone who saw it when it was issued in 1967, during the height of the Vietnam Conflict. In reference to the time period in which the film was made, madness was a common theme in both American and foreign films. Madness in the 1960s was hardly negated; instead, it was, in fact, a special journey, one of potential enlightenment into the true nature of things. The images of madness presented in *King of Hearts* have a unique relationship to fluctuations in psychological and psychiatric theory and practice. Particular elements of a film, such as plot, characterization, or the visual text, reflect clinical impressions of madness, whether it be a disturbed character or a script revolving around psychological issues. Meanwhile, broader social and cultural factors have also played a part in this relationship as one can see with the relationships between Plumpick and the insane villagers.

For example, the scene in which the inmates at the asylum take on their former "personalities" and professions before their committal to the asylum indicates some hints of schizophrenia. While the history of madness is tied closely with the history of the institutions that have cared for the
afflicted, *King of Hearts* deviates from this common theme. Ironically, the lunatics all seem to suffer from the same "ailment," rather than having separate, exclusive diagnoses. Psychiatry, at one time, was attacked by film as a political institution, used for the repression of individual differences, and madness was viewed as a label attached to those who were rule-breakers. Such an idea finds perhaps its most effective advocate in de Broca; for the viewer learns of the former identity of the patients, which eventually reveals the reasons for their being committed.

While focusing on psychological issues, *King of Hearts* also makes a statement about war. The theme that "war is hell" becomes exceedingly obvious when Plumpick decides to stay with the lunatics. At the beginning of the film, one learns that Plumpick is not happy with his situation as he is talking to his bird. Actually, he is quoting Shakespeare to his bird in an effort to kill time. When Plumpick learns from his commander that he has to make his journey into the town, one questions the reasons for this assignment. His questions go unanswered, except for the fact that he speaks fluent French. Never mind that he does not know how to disassemble a bomb, but because he is learned, he lands the job.

The riveting theme of war is strengthened when the German soldiers return to the almost liberated town. Mistaking fireworks for a holocaust, the Germans and the Scots kill each other in one mass battle of bullets and bloodshed. The incident affects the lunatics more than it
does the townspeople who have returned. The casualties are the cost of war, and their deaths are swept aside. The mad are no longer figures of fun, for they have witnessed devastation in their "perfect" world.

Another theme common in this film is a conflict with class barriers. The "barriers" in this film are the sane versus the insane. While La Grève Illusion and Au Revoir, Les Enfants concentrate more on racial barriers and tensions, de Broca centers on more of a concentrated prejudice. The lunatics in their own "never-never" world are content and satisfied with the lives they have created for themselves, developing the illusion that they are sane in their proper surroundings. Once the clinically sane arrive, their territory becomes invaded, and the lunatics return to their unhappy life in an insane asylum.

The lunatics follow their daily tasks as if they were sane, satisfied citizens of the community. In fact, what is unusual about this film is the lack of violence until the end of the film. Although the amount of time they have spent in the asylum is not known, the lunatics possess an innocence that reveals their sensitivity toward violence. When they retreat to the asylum, they instantly lose their "character" and become bleak, senseless, almost mindless, and they are left to resume their lives as part of the world of the clinically insane.

This view of a fantasy world which de Broca impresses in the minds of his viewers becomes a harsh reality. While the soldiers are at war, the townspeople (or lunatics) are at
"play" and do not fully realize the severity and complexity of war. In King of Hearts, de Broca poses the ancient question: Who is crazier, the people who accept life's brutality, or those who reject it? Although the antics of the lunatics eventually become decidedly tedious, a great deal of charm remains and even pervades the film. The moral point that the insane are saner than those designated sane is expressed in a light-hearted, entertaining fashion. However, the film adopts a strangely immoral tone at the end with the annihilation of the soldiers.

Like La Grande Illusion, de Broca's King of Hearts incorporates several different languages in the film. While language barriers present difficulties at the beginning and serve as the premise for the entire reason for Plumpick's journey, language also serves as a barrier. Although the film is technically a French film, English/Scottish and German are spoken to enhance the realism of the film. As the film centers on a fantasy world, de Broca implements this form of realism to draw attention away from the conflicts and complexities of war.

War may be intolerable, but it is not basically any crazier than a natural disaster or a crop failure or an economic depression. The lunatics can be happy in this film, mainly because it is set during World War One. If one would place the lunatics in the context of World War Two or the Vietnam Conflict, there would be no symmetry, no light-heartedness, and, of course, no film. More importantly, King of Hearts clearly embraces a penetration of the truth
concerning the mentally ill. Institutions for such people are not happy places, and in the America of the Nineties, the mentally ill seen on any city street or isolated farm are certainly not the happy band of King of Hearts.

D. CINEMATOGRAPHY

To obtain an appropriate structure for King of Hearts, Philippe de Broca utilized Louis Malle's technique of vast numbers of close-ups. While dealing with a film on the mentally deranged, one can capture more in a close-up than in action shots requiring long-pans and zooms. Unfortunately, when compared with La Grande Illusion and Au Revoir, Les Enfants, King of Hearts does not necessarily fall into the category of best production work.

De Broca neglects to uplift the film with eye-catching material. Instead, he uses banal, oppressive camera techniques which, in the view of some critics, lowers the quality of the film. However, his use of the old medieval town with its castle-like walls and courtyards was perfect for the film's setting. In fact, as the story unfolds, the initial scenes are the works of a clock and the symbolic knight striking the midnight hour. Of course, the knight and the clock itself become critical props in this film based on deadlines and the so-called lunatics' royal society.

De Broca also captures a somewhat psychedelic sequence while the lunatics are returning to their respective former lives. Slow pans with nonverbal action convey an interesting arrangement of piecing together the lunatics' former careers.
The soundtrack aids in de Broca's technique with carnival-like music and several crescendos and decrescendos to emphasize his cut to stronger, more "political" issues.

What seems especially unique about this film when compared to *La Grande Illusion* and *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* is the characters and their acting. Catherine Bujold, for example, who plays Coquelicot, films marvelously well. Her facial features, versed with hair that frames her face, enable the camera to capture an image of truly great beauty. Indeed, de Broca's camera work with Coquelicot's character underlies her basic premise in the film: to be innocent, but provocative, and to be naïve but profound.

On the other hand, with other characters, the use of the close-up is not to the advantage of each individual character. Perhaps, one exception is Plumpick's dilemma. Since he is forced to endure extreme pressure to save the lunatics to whom he has become so attached, his facial expressions tend to reveal his doubts and his complex decisions and thoughts.

While perhaps not a brilliant piece of film work, de Broca manages to use some of the familiar techniques which his contemporaries have used. Because the film is a comedy, too, it leaves room for fewer cinematographic feats because more concentration should be placed upon action shots. And with action shots, a more distant camera angle should be used. De Broca manages, however, to assemble and create a solid piece of comedy, without endangering the plot and surrounding theme of the movie.
E. CONCLUSION

Philipe de Broca once said that film always has a moral, a responsibility to be altogether beautiful and to make people more generous, more hopeful, full of love for what they have. (8) In light of his viewpoint about film, *King of Hearts* complies in many ways with his perspective of the "ideal movie." *King of Hearts* is slow-moving at first, but with a purpose - to draw in its viewers to the general, everyday life of the lunatics. De Broca not only makes a statement about the mentally ill, but he voices his anti-war sentiments in humor and amusement, something which is not all that common in anti-war films.

De Broca, while poking fun at given situations during wartime, also comments on the problems with war - such as devastation and obliteration of the human race. It is his social commentary which carries this film to the plateau of great films. Because of the timeliness in its American release (during the Vietnam Conflict), the film became somewhat of a cult classic for college students, something of which *La Grande Illusion* and *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* cannot boast. While focusing on common lifestyles and bleak futures for the mentally insane, it also comments on the problems between those who agree with war and those who oppose it. *King of Hearts* serves as the precursor to later films which incorporate comedy with serious wartime matters. For those who are willing to open themselves to humorous treatment of this all-too-serious subject, *King of Hearts* is both touching and life-affirming.
IV. CHAPTER THREE:  

**Au Revoir, Les Enfants** (1988)

Autobiographies are puzzling enterprises. Some childhood incidents linger on the surface of memory with uncanny accuracy. Others sink under the dust of years, distorted, or simply abandoned. In the process of reconstruction, the autobiographer must impose adult understanding on a child's experience and find order in the confusion and conflicts of unconnected events. By rendering the past intelligible, the author necessarily destroys the immediacy and the irrationality of the lived experience.

What child cannot remember when he or she did or said precisely the wrong thing, irretrievably, irreparably? The instant the action is completed or the words are spoken, the child burns with shame and regret. But what that particular child had done could never be repaired. Such moments are rare, and they occur most often in childhood, before the child has been trained to think before he or she acts. *Au Revoir, Les Enfants* is a film about such a moment, about a quick, unthinking glance that may have cost the lives of four young adults.

At one time or another, one has had some form of traumatic childhood experience. However, none could be as horrific as Louis Malle's, which he transposes into his film, *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*. While Malle's film does not come from the same time period in which *La Grande Illusion* and *King of Hearts* were produced, his film does represent many of the same themes and reflections on war. The film is an honest and heartfelt quasi-autobiography from Malle's deep, dark past.
A. NARRATIVE

Set in January, 1944 during the Nazi occupation of France, eleven-year-old Julien Quentin is sent to a provincial Catholic boarding school after spending the holidays with his mother. Three new boys enter the school, one of them, Jean Bonnet, who is in Julien's class. Smart, stand-offish, and a fine pianist, Bonnet is viewed with suspicion by others and with jealousy by Julien. Julien is a bright student as well, but he is no match for Bonnet.

Julien suspects some mystery in the secretive Bonnet's background. The truth, which he slowly discovers, is that Bonnet and the other "new" students are Jews whom the priests are hiding from the Gestapo and the Vichy French. The sheltered Julien, still a child, barely grasps the implications. He has to ask his older brother the reasons of the Jews' guilt. "Being smarter than us, and killing Christ," is the answer he receives. After a few days, however, Julien and Bonnet become friends, sharing a dinner with Mme. Quentin, jazz music during an air raid, and an adventure in the woods, where they lose their way and are rescued by Nazi soldiers.

Julien's discovery of Bonnet's secret identity is not revealed until he searches through Bonnet's books and finds his real name as "Kipplestein." One morning, a Gestapo officer appears in class to round up the Jewish students. When he mentions the name "Kipplestein," Julien inadvertently looks toward Jean. The officer notices this unintended sign and arrests Bonnet. Eventually the other two boys are
discovered. As the three boys and the principal are led away, Jean turns toward Julien in a glance that could be one of forgiveness. The camera rests on Julien's face, and Louis Malle, in a self-narrated sequence, explains that he will never forget what happened to him as a child during those few days in 1944.

While one may need time to regroup after viewing such a powerful film, the emotions involved are not in themselves a test of a movie. The most meretricious, manipulative picture can pummel the viewer into submission with unnerving ease. But Malle's film - probably the most personal he has ever made - goes out of its way not to tug on the heartstrings. Instead, it is a film of marvelous restraint, and its simplicity is a form of tribute.

B. THE CHARACTERS

At the very beginning of Au Revoir, Les Enfants, the viewer is uncertain as to the destiny of each character. The viewer is introduced to Julien, a mother's boy who is spoiled and expects only high accolades and the utmost attention of his classmates and teachers. One learns, however, that Julien is flawed and has secrets of his own, which slowly but surely are revealed throughout the film. Julien is a bed-wetter and, being spoiled, suffers periods of great anxiety for acceptance and fits of jealousy when he is not recognized. Julien's jealousy especially arises when he is surpassed by Bonnet's superior capabilities. Julien's character is unique to this film, however, in that he matures
immediately by the plot's close. Through Julien, Louis Malle basically accepts the simplistic life of a boy going through his academic career in a Catholic school and accepts the world as a naïve, eleven-year-old boy would accept it.

Jean Bonnet, on the other hand, exudes innocence and portrays the victimized scapegoat during a time of immense fear and duress. Bonnet is not only Jewish, but he also has to accept his new surroundings, which provide him with a tremendous task to achieve. He is talented, however, thereby differentiating him from the other schoolboys and making his task of acceptance even more difficult. While Bonnet is not popular with the other students, he befriends Julien. Bonnet is a little dreamy and thoughtful—absorbed in himself and his imagination, as a bright adolescent should be.

It is Jean's secret that develops, and eventually discloses his only flaw, and ironically is the only means to survive. Jean's attempts to integrate himself into a Gentile world is a remarkable feat for an eleven-year-old boy. Indeed, his need to endure more than any young boy his age is testimony enough to treat Bonnet as the tragic hero in an ongoing drama of reality.

Both characters and their relationship determine perhaps the film's main emphasis. A scene in which the two develop a bond occurs one cold, early spring day as they go exploring in a nearby forest. Darkness falls, shadows seem ominous, and an unsettling wind bristles in the trees. The two become disoriented and are almost lost. Nevertheless, they weather their adventure, set aside their differences (which, in
actuality, are their similarities), and concentrate on finding their way back to the boarding school. The boys are ironically discovered by a group of Nazi soldiers who take them back to the school. Julien appears grateful but cautious, and Jean is terrified but does not reveal it.

The two boys' interaction is crucial in many ways to this film's impact on the viewer. And the relationship, too, is an important technique in portraying the injustice and persecution from which Jews suffered during the Occupation. Aspects of theme and structure emphasize that particular focus even more forcefully.

C. THEME AND STRUCTURE

Au Revoir. Les Enfants centers attention upon several basic ideas: class privilege, betrayal, and the loss of childhood, all of which Louis Malle treats with consummate understatement. But the movie also focuses on the illusion of daily circumstances which then form sub-themes of cowardice, earthly reality, oppression, fear, and, ultimately, guilt. While La Grande Illusion does not concentrate necessarily on guilt, it does focus on the oppressed and on the reality of common occurrences so prevalent in wartime. King of Hearts, though, centers more on guilt and somewhat deviates more strongly from oppression. In elaborating on these particular themes, Malle targets the innocence of childhood and the devastating effects of the war on important periods in one's life. The film rarely evokes much more than an inherent emotion of one particular child
who experiences one horrific event in his life. No film describing the oppressed under the Nazis, especially children and, even more particularly, Jewish children, can be devoid of tensions. But Malle does not go much beyond or beneath the given tensions: On the contrary, he seems to rely on them to establish and maintain a rapport with his audience.

For example, the building of tension with the viewing audience relies upon a sequence later in the day that presents Jean who joins Julien, his mother, and brother for the best meal in a restaurant that rationing will allow. Two uniformed Vichy guards enter the restaurant in which the three are dining. As a distinguished older man attracts the guards' attention, characters and viewers discover that he is a Jew, and the two soldiers loudly threaten both the man and the proprietor. The scene itself is one of tension that augments until a German Nazi officer orders the police to leave. Although one would tend to predict that the officer would then arrest the man himself, he returns instead to his Sunday meal without a second thought. For Jean, the ordeal is a close call with reality. For the yet unsuspecting Julien, it is just a Sunday afternoon meal with his mother.

Louis Malle paints a complex picture of morality in this war film. While he wrestles with the war itself, he also reflects on the problems of class struggle and the concept behind the occupation during the war. By the illusion of daily circumstances, Malle initially structures the film around the life of a single child. However, it is that single child which represents literally millions of those who
were oppressed and left haunted by the war and its aftermath. While the common occurrences basically mean nothing at the time to Julien, they are cold, harsh realities for Bonnet. Having to accept his "mark" by being Jewish, he is thrust into a situation that is beyond his control. Through this type of class struggle, Malle penetrates into the realities of a young boy who receives a rude and terrifying awakening into the realities of war and the harsh shame of unrelenting guilt.

Meanwhile, "What is a Jew?" The question is asked by Julien to his older brother, who makes a statement that is painful to one's ears today, but was not all that uncommon forty-five years ago. The scene in which Bonnet attempts to receive the holy sacrament of communion is testimony to Malle's dilemma. Bonnet tilts his face, open-mouthed, almost yearning to receive the holy wafer. But is the boy merely seeking acceptance by the other boys? Or, is he trying to pass as one of them? Or, is something else implied? Tragedy awaits, and irony abounds.

While considerable focus is directed on the relationship between Julien and Jean, other hints at class struggle subtly pervade the film. While Julien's belonging to a bourgeois family does not only mean being protected against hunger and having to be exhorted to practice charity and sharing by the priests, Malle states in his film that it means accepting injustice and dealing with the threat of privilege, represented by the poor who resent the humiliation of class differences. One of the most vivid characters
focusing on this aspect in the film is Joseph, an adolescent with a bad leg who works in the school kitchen, and who observes with a mixture of envy and contempt the self-involved games of the young schoolboys.

The rich boys have ways of dealing with the poor - by making bargains of mutual corruption and forging bonds of dependency in which they ultimately have the upper hand. The boys give Joseph food and money in return for cigarettes; they need him, but they treat him as a servant. Joseph survives by trading and bartering in the black market and by stealing from the school. Mocked by the boys, hated by the cook, (who may have also been stealing from the school, but against whom there is insufficient evidence), Joseph gets caught and implicates the boys with whom he makes "business" agreements.

Joseph's seven "clients" are placed on probation, but he is fired and has nowhere to go. The headmaster bitterly notes the injustice of this treatment. But he himself is entrapped in the system. Throwing the boys out would not only upset their parents, but it would also harm the school which depends on the tuition paid by the bourgeois. Although it is a minor sequence in the film, Malle subjectively comments on the social structure. By exposing how uncontrollable and binding the class struggle was in the Catholic school system, he makes a statement about earthly reality and how much it can be a harsh reality.

As Jean Bonnet is "discovered" and is led from the classroom, and when the boys say "goodbye" to the priest who
is also being arrested, they plead the excuse that they could do nothing in the face of superior force. The open-ended question at the conclusion of the film is whether they have learned anything. Far more guilty is the nun who fails to help save another Jewish boy who is hiding in the infirmary. In her, Malle exposes the conventional morality of people who almost instinctively comply with the authorities even when a life is at stake. The outcome has obviously haunted Louis Malle for at least forty years: the non-Jewish boys survived, the Jews died in Auschwitz, and the good priest died in Mauthausen. Clearly, Malle still suffers guilt. If not for the part he played, then at least for the failure of so many of the French, and of members of his class, in particular, to save the victims of the Nazis.

D. CINEMATOGRAPHY

Au Revoir, Les Enfants owes much of its power and force to its cinematography. The film begins slowly, with pans of the courtyards and Mme. Quentin's sending-off of her son to the school. A good portion of the film concentrates on the life of the school and the relations between the pupils and the staff, which contribute to the reality of guilt and shame.

As the camera zooms slowly in on Jean, the viewer suddenly notices Bonnet's differences before it is ever revealed in the film. It is apparent that he has some great secret, and it shows in his eyes. Julien, on the other hand, is portrayed primarily in action shots where his character
and lively personality are revealed. Numerous close-ups are used in this film, which add to the intensity of the great secret to be discovered during the climactic sequence in which Julien unknowingly reveals Jean's identity.

Malle's sense of color is rather unique to the film as well. The story takes place in the winter, and the colors he uses are cold: They are clear and sharp, with the sun shining most of the time. Usually war films contain dark images, which are muddy and oppressive. In fact, La Grande Illusion and King of Hearts utilize these same techniques to create an oppressive and depressing atmosphere. The dreary castles included in both films parallel the school grounds in Au Revoir, Les Enfants and evoke both the oppression inherent in war and the necessity of withdrawal in order to survive.

Malle's genius for composition gives ordinary scenes of ordinary life (at bathouses, music lessons, or in the old white-sheeted dormitory of the school) a vibrant intensity. A certain serenity pervades Au Revoir, Les Enfants. And Malle never makes a false or sentimental move by subtly displaying his themes and seemingly attempting to coax superbly honest performances from his child actors. The almost placid surface of his movie is deceptive, and one may not realize how much is seething underneath. Everything points to one harrowing, inevitable moment.

E. CONCLUSION

The illusion of Au Revoir, Les Enfants contributes to the poignancy of a film that is, at the same time,
devastating. Several events are reported with the vague detachment of the boy who is not quite able to grasp the meaning and drama that the adult Louis Malle and his audience recognize all too clearly. Jean Bonnet, either to test his rescuers or to express a desire to be fully with his school friends, joins the line to receive the eucharist during a Catholic Mass attended by parents and other adults. The priest pauses, not sure if he should follow his own religious convictions and risk revealing the boy's identity, and then passes over him rather than exerting the courage to give the host to a non-Christian and to violate the letter of the law for the greater benefit of sharing the Christ-like spirit of the law. Malle does not directly comment, nor does he explain the motivations in the film. Rather, as one watches through the eyes of Julien, one is well aware of the tensions in both the priest and Bonnet.

The supreme injustice of the film, which is the long and utterly sober climax, is, of course, the triumph of evil. The Gestapo official in his thick belted coat, accompanied by tall Aryan-type soldiers, arrest Jean, two other Jewish boys hidden by the priests, and the director. All have been denounced by Joseph, who has chosen collaboration as the way of survival and revenge. After the Jews have been arrested, Joseph and Julien confront each other in a scene of great magnitude and power. Joseph is blustering and apologetic; Julien is speechless. This is, for him, it would seem, the real discovery of evil. It comes not from the outsiders - the Germans - but, so to speak, from within his own world and
from another boy he knew.

In this frightening and beautiful film from Louis Malle, a schoolboy must learn his lessons early. Whether the film is an attempt for Malle to do penance for his mistake or to alleviate his guilt for exposing the young Jewish boy so many years ago is irrelevant. What exists is the heartwrenching story of what effect the German occupation in France had on children in the 1940s. Malle, himself, insists that it is a childhood film and not a way to manipulate an audience into re-working and remembering the horrors of war. Instead, the film depicts lost youth as an illusion and the transition from childhood into manhood for an unsuspecting boy who grew up during World War Two.
V. EPILOGUE: SOPHIE'S CHOICE (1982)

French films that continue to reach American audiences represent only a minute fraction of total French production. If those French films, in particular, seem more inventive than American films, in general, it must be remembered that those particular movies form a very small and select group from which all of the poor quality movies are discarded and ignored. When comparing American films with those from any other nation, one must therefore always keep in mind this disproportion created by the vast numbers of Hollywood films and a familiarity with only the best foreign films.

Nevertheless, themes transcend national boundaries, especially one as empathetic and penetrating as war portrayed in La Grande Illusion, King of Hearts, and Au Revoir, Les Enfants, and in the American film, Sophie's Choice, based upon William Styron's novel and produced in film by Alan J. Pakula. All of these films result in presentation and subsequent disintegration of barriers, which, created by stereotypes, politics, and language, create conflict and inflict pain. War is a reality constant that, through self-delusion and re-location, explains escape but entraps one's humankind in a prison of physical pain and psychological anguish. Like its French counterparts, the American film Sophie's Choice centers on individuals and the effect that war has exerted on them. Illusion becomes a lie, a mental misrepresentation, that obscures the painful results of war. But the core of suffering that unites the illusion of deception and the reality of pain is present, forceful, and unrelentingly destructive on the social, moral, and
psychological well-being of the protagonists in this film.

*Sophie's Choice* involves a Polish-Catholic woman, who was caught by the Nazis with a contraband ham radio, was sentenced to a concentration camp, lost two of her children during her interment, and was then somehow spared death. Sophie eventually immigrates to Brooklyn, New York, and falls into the arms of an eccentric charmer by the name of Nathan. Sophie and Nathan move into a boarding house, where the rooms just below them become occupied by Stingo, a Thomas Wolfe "wanna-be." Stingo, a naïve, young boy from the South, accomplishes his odyssey in the North. He takes an all-night train to New York, opening himself up to the "Big City's" riches, women, and romance. He eventually becomes entangled in Sophie's and Nathan's lives and develops a strong bond of friendship with them.

Stingo, as the movie's narrator, falls in love with several things: with the image of himself as a writer, with his idealized vision of Sophie and Nathan's romance, and, inevitably with Sophie herself. The young man grows from an adolescent dreamer into an artist who can begin to understand human suffering as he watches Sophie and Nathan play out their doomed, romantic destiny. Stingo's role as the primary narrator enables him to remember these people from that particular summer in Brooklyn and to also reflect upon himself at an earlier age.

A second narrator, contained within Stingo's story, is Sophie herself, who remembers the impact of World War Two, and who shares her memories with Stingo in a long
confessional. Although Sophie's stories detailing her choices and her fate are truly sad, and exuberant joy in telling them suggests a perception that results in a revelation for both Stingo and the viewer. At first, one does not notice that Stingo's journey back into adulthood is replaced, in the film, by Sophie's journey back into the painful memories of her past. Like *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*, the movie becomes an act of discovery, as the naïve young American, his mind filled with notions of love, death, and honor, becomes the friend of a woman who has seen so much hated, death, and dishonor. And like the "insane" in *King of Hearts*, she seeks to escape reality through an obliteration of the past, and through the self-indulgence of alcohol and adultery that provide a temporary, but illusionary oblivion.

Nathan, on the other hand, is a crazy romantic who convinces everyone that he is on the brink of finding the cure for polio and who wavers uncertainly between anger and manic exhilaration. Nathan's sporadic outbursts and dramatic mood swings invite his relationship with Sophie to flourish on the brink of bewilderment. Toward the conclusion of the film, the viewer learns that Nathan, too, has a deep, dark secret. He is a schizophrenic, taking on the personalities of a doctor, a scientist, a romantic, and an angry young man. But his madness, along with Sophie's re-creation of her past, causes them both to make a suicide pact. The illusion in this American film is the way in which Sophie and Nathan go about their lives and base their existence on a lie.
Sophie's distraught over her ordeal in a concentration camp impels her to assume another life, one which is not her own, but which makes her existence more bearable.

In combining the perspectives in *La Grande Illusion*, *King of Hearts*, and *Au Revoir, Les Enfants*, *Sophie's Choice* makes a clear and unequivocal statement about war. Like Renoir's *La Grande Illusion*, Pakula's *Sophie's Choice* portrays the paradox of human suffering that is momentarily hidden by delusion but is eternally present by human reality. Immigration from Poland, romantic pleasures, cultural adjustments, and vicarious experiences enable Sophie to obscure the enduring memories of error, guilt, shame, and remorse. But just as Renoir's personages enact an illusion, the realities of war intrude and destroy. Just as a French victory interrupts theatrical frivolity, Sophie's decision results in the converse of Samson's resolution: she sacrifices her daughter for the prolongation, but inevitable destruction, of the life of her son. Linguistic barriers, social prejudices, and cultural divisions are overcome but, in the end, remain impenetrable and constant. The fragility of human aspiration succumbs to, and is destroyed by, the realities of pain and torment.

*King of Hearts*, on the other hand, delves more into the world of insanity and the creation of an imaginary world, which both Sophie and Nathan attempt to create. Mentally scarred with her personal experiences during the war, Sophie, like de Broca's "insane," creates an imaginary world where love and laughter are the only requirements for happiness.
Her new world enables her to escape the devastations of a Nazi concentration camp and to create a new life that is ultimately an illusion covering and obscuring the pain of sin. Fantasy also affects Nathan, as he takes on various personalities to maintain Sophie’s and Stingo’s attention and to support the lie of disappointment and failure. Nathan succeeds in convincing Stingo to such a degree that, when confronted with the truth about Nathan’s mental state, Stingo refuses to act on the unhappy revelation. Illusion continues to mask reality. And, like Plumpick, Stingo accepts delusion in order to avoid acceptance of the realities of human suffering and self-destruction.

Psychologically, Sophie’s Choice parallels and foreshadows the guilt and shame presented in Louis Malle’s Au Revoir, Les Enfants. Like Julien Quentin, Sophie experiences the comfortable and complacent life of the upper middle-class. Economic satisfaction and social prerogatives defend both from the bestialities and brutalities that motivate those unprotected by political realities. War intrudes, and both Sophie and Julien are compelled to fall from their state of blissful innocence and limited perceptions. Venial sin, provoked by ignorance and produced by inevitable errors, results in lasting self-recriminations and, in Sophie’s situation, self-destruction. Anguish becomes their badge of cowardice; and, like the Jews who are identified by the Star of David, Sophie and Julien suffer from a choice which, like the decision of Adam and Eve, inflicts the anguish of guilt and shame.
Sophie's Choice, then, recapitulates and represents the divergent but interrelated perspectives of conflict that denote the suffering of human existence in the respective films of Renoir, de Broca, and Malle. As we have seen, the narrative, and tone demonstrate the individuality of each work. But conflict and its painful consequences persist and thematically, become the substance that unites all four films. For Renoir, in La Grande Illusion, social prejudices and divisions represent the battle lines of distrust and dislike. This illusion that obscures reality of battle surfaces, in turn, as the pain that destroys the dignity and optimism of human existence. Illusion is reality that, in de Broca's King of Hearts, underscores an eternal paradox of the human situation which entraps the sane in a world of madness, and which denies the insane into an asylum of fantasy. Both socially and metaphysically, suffering is constant and pervasive, and its effects penetrate the psychologies of Louis Malle's characters in Au Revoir, Les Enfants. The sin of violence prompted by self-interest disrupts existence and destroys any hope of happiness. War wreaks guilt and shame which, like the mark of Adam, expels humankind from the illusion of innocence into the reality of self-destruction. Julien Quentin must confront and endure this pain. But the destruction that is potential in Renoir's illusionary world and quasi-viable in de Broca's vision of the absurd becomes remorse in Malle's portrayal of Julien and concrete in Styron's narrative of Sophie's choice to sacrifice and to self-annihilate.
In all four films, the war involves frivolous and tragic decisions, and these choices result from illusions and delusions. Such beliefs that present the possibilities of escape ultimately ensnare and entrap. Peace is an illusion that obscures the painful reality of war. In theme and art, these films reflect this prison-house of suffering and despair. Only the story and setting change. Like a magician, each of these directors is a master of illusion, representing in word and picture the painful dilemmas and persistent anguish of human existence.
NOTES


BIBLIOGRAPHY


