

LETTERS

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(MIS)INTERPRETING THE FUTURE: (MIS)INTERPRETING THE PAST

DEAR EDITOR,

This concerns the review [by Monica Zetlin] in *Cinema Papers*, no. 120, October 1997, of *Doing Time for Patsy Cline*.

I just saw the film for the second time (it finally came to Lismore, where I live). After thoroughly enjoying the details of the film again, I re-read [Zetlin's] review. I felt, again, that [Zetlin] did not do it justice.

The thing most enjoyable about the film is the flashbacks to and from Nashville, Tennessee. These show Ralph's thoughts and dreams as he imagines what might happen in the future. [Zetlin] seem[s] to have missed the point of these sections. In the review, [Zetlin] say[s], "the film attempts an interesting – although not entirely successful – refiguring of this linear structure by starting and interspersing the flow of the story with scenes from the future, when all three find themselves in Nashville." The three, in fact, never find themselves in Nashville – the scenes are what Ralph is dreaming could happen.

There are subtle but consistent messages throughout the screenplay that show these scenes are being dreamed by Ralph. When the real story kicks back in we usually see Ralph staring out of his cell window, or with his eyes closed, and he is jolted back to reality.

In another section of the review, [Zetlin] comment[s] that "instead of getting a feel for the characters developing, and story ideas unfold-

ing, the structural interweaving of the two strands instead plays like the same story being told at the same time, but in different locations". Of course it's the same story – Ralph is transposing what he feels about the characters throughout their ordeal onto the characters in his imaginary trip to Nashville. When Ralph is going through a stage of hating Boyd – surprise – the Nashville Ralph hates the Nashville Boyd.

The Nashville Boyd makes a silly comment about Patsy singing like Nefertiti, which he would never really make, but at that stage Ralph doesn't know that Boyd is a musical virtuoso, so he thinks Boyd entirely capable of making such a comment. Do you see how this is an extremely effective way of revealing all of Ralph's feelings and fantasies throughout the "real" story? We can tell that Ralph fancies Patsy a bit, and he plays out his fantasy in his dreams of Nashville, kissing Patsy in the hotel room. Ralph sacrifices three months of his life to let Boyd go free and look after Patsy, and in a similar way Ralph sacrifices his career in Nashville so that Patsy can continue to be successful.

Without going into any more of the delicious details, Ralph's delightful parallel story, dreamed up as the events in his real life occur, seems to have been lost on [Zetlin].

If the film did have a fault, it would be that perhaps it did not make the dreams of Ralph obvious as just that – dreams.

As a reviewer in a respected publi-

cation, [Zetlin] obviously wield[s] a lot of power over the choices of the people who read it. I subscribe to *Cinema Papers*, and often make choices about which films to see on the basis of a review I find in there. I only hope that people weren't turned off the film because [Zetlin] failed to appreciate the purpose of the major plot technique in the scriptwriting. A lot of time, money and effort obviously goes into getting films off the ground in Australia (I don't suppose [Zetlin]'d need to be reminded of this) – remember that [Zetlin is] jeopardizing the large wager that a film is every time [she] put[s] pen to paper (finger to keyboard?). Be wary not to miss the subtleties of films – as this situation demonstrates they can be very important.

[Zetlin] must review many films in a year, many of them bad, and it would be a formidable task trying to pay sufficient attention to detail. I just thought I should point out this mistake of [Zetlin's], even if it just means [Zetlin] might rent out the video and enjoy the film even more the second time around, now that [Zetlin] know[s] the Nashville scenes are all a dream!

Thanks for reading,
Tim Roxburgh.

[NB:] Yes, there is obvious bias present here! I am Richard Roxburgh's nephew.