

**STRUGGLE FOR POWER IN JOSEPH L.
MANKIEWICZ'S FILM ADAPTATION OF ANTHONY
SHAFFER'S PLAY SLEUTH**

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***Abstract:** The analysis of the filmic adaptation of Anthony Shaffer's play Sleuth in relation to the playtext shows that its binary structure metaphorizes power relations and the amalgamation of drama and film.*

***Key words:** drama film adaptation power class*

1. Introduction

After about two-thirds of Joseph L. Mankiewicz's film *Sleuth*, when the two main characters of the film have played practical jokes of humiliation on each other and then pause for a drink, the following scene takes place: Andrew Wyke (Laurence Olivier), in medium shot, stands at the bottom of the staircase of his stately country house. The camera follows him as he heads for the sofa where Milo Tindle (Michael Caine) is already sitting. After Andrew sits down, the film alternates close-up shots of him and Milo, while he talks uninterruptedly, as if in a monologue:

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Compare your experience this weekend, my dear Milo, with any other moments in your life. If you're honest with yourself, you have to admit you lived more intensely in my company than in anybody else's, not even with Marguerite's. Now we know what it is to play a game, you and I. That's so rare, two people brought together, equally unmatched, having the courage and the talents to make of life a continuous charade of bright fancy, happy invention, to face out its emptiness and its terrors by playing... by just playing.

This whole scene is accompanied by slow and low music, in which strings are predominant. Olivier says his lines in a trance-like way, slightly leaning forward over Caine, who sits upright and does not seem to be receptive to his words. This scene, part of a longer sequence, differs in tone from the rest of the film and for that reason calls attention to itself. All through the film the action is fast-paced, lines of the witty dialogue dart continuously, and the music is often light and speedy. But here in this scene, there is a feeling of serenity throughout. Everything in the *mise en scène* seems to suggest it is Andrew's filter we have: the camera follows him before he sits down, it is he who does all the talking, the music seems to underline his delight, there is an intimate feeling to the scene, shot mainly in close-ups.

But as soon as Andrew finishes his speech, the music stops, and Milo says bitterly: "Haven't you forgotten the jumped-up pantry boy who doesn't know his place? We are from different worlds, you and me, Andrew." He stands up and there is a cut to a long shot in which Milo advances towards the camera, while Andrew remains on the sofa, on the left side of the frame. Milo is now the center of attention, as he continues speaking: "In mine (my world), there was no time for bright fancies and happy invention, no stopping for tea; the only game we played was to survive or go to the wall. (...) You probably don't understand that." All this time, Milo is in front of us, his back turned to Andrew, framed from his waist up. A little bit later, he continues his speech. This time, Andrew is in the foreground, but in profile or with his back turned to us, near the edge of the frame. Milo, farther away, is facing the camera. He is very angry and points his finger at Andrew as he shouts: "I don't want an even score. And don't you give me any of that one-set-all, the-game's-the-thing, enough-to-take-part crap." The camera follows him as he moves towards an armchair, and we see Andrew's back on the left side of the frame, Milo in the middle, and the Laughing Sailor, a full-size mechanical toy, one of the many toys in the house, on the right side of the frame. Milo, the center of attention, goes on shouting angrily: "My father just took part, and his father, and his father, losers, as far back as you can go." Milo walks on, we see his back for a moment, then he turns to Andrew and to us, shouting: "Well,

it stops with me. With me the Tindles start winning.” He continues walking and speaking: “And others start losing.” Cut to close-up of the Sailor. Middle shot of Milo sitting down in an armchair, the pieces of a game on the table by his side. He now speaks with a normal tone of voice, pointing at Andrew: “You, for example.”

I have selected these two scenes from the same sequence of *Sleuth*, because I think they tell us a lot about the characters they refer to and can be a starting point to the analysis of this film. As they are not present in the play the film was based on, Anthony Shaffer’s *Sleuth*, they could also serve as a starting point to see what changes the implied author of the film made in adapting the play and how these changes affected the film’s meaning as a whole. The screenplay was written by Anthony Shaffer himself, but Mankiewicz can be credited with having had a participation in its creation. As Kenneth L. Geist puts it in *Pictures Will Talk*, “Mankiewicz’s perfectionism impelled him to make Tony Shaffer, also a compulsive polisher, do three revisions of the screenplay based on his international stage success.”¹

In the first scene described, we can see the role that games play in Andrew Wyke’s life. In fact, they are his life, his *raison d’être*. In order to make it very clear, Mankiewicz crammed Wyke’s house with games of all sorts, scattered puzzles everywhere – even on the wall by the toilet bowl in the bathroom – and, what I consider his brightest idea, devised a set of mechanical toys, not present in the play, that are not merely decorative, but appear at crucial moments of the narrative. Although Andrew really enjoyed the jokes he played on Milo, in fact they were exercises in humiliation and a form of assertion of power, as we are going to see in detailed descriptions of certain scenes.

The second scene selected presents an aspect that is important to my reading of the meaning of the film, but is only superficially dealt with in the play, namely, Milo’s awareness of classism in English society and his revolt against it. This tension between the upper class, represented by Andrew Wyke, his style of living, his tastes and his language, and the working class of the descendant of Italian immigrants, who has to struggle for life, and reveals his upbringing in the way he speaks – Milo speaks Cockney – permeates the whole film. All the games Andrew and Milo play are a sort of arm wrestling to see who has more power and who will succumb.

In part 2 of this paper I will comment on two scenes that I expect will show something of the approach used by Mankiewicz in his adaptation. Part 3 will be an

¹ Kenneth L. Geist. *Pictures Will Talk: The Life and Films of Joseph L. Mankiewicz*, p. 387.

attempt at analyzing the structure of the film in order to see how this structure can be related to a possible reading of the film.

2. Mankiewicz's adaptation²

Before studying the film in more detail, I think it might be helpful to summarize its story. Milo Tindle, a hairdresser, wants to marry Marguerite, the wife of Andrew Wyke, a wealthy man who also happens to be a detective story writer and who, in turn, wants to be free to live with Tea. As he does not wish to spend a fortune in alimony, Andrew invites Milo over for the weekend and suggests he break into the house, steal his insured jewelry and leave with Marguerite. Andrew will then claim the insurance. Milo agrees and after he gets hold of the jewels, Andrew points a gun at him, saying he made all that up in order to have a good reason to get rid of him. In spite of Milo's begging for his life, Andrew shoots him. Two days later he is called on by Inspector Doppler who, little by little, finds evidences of the murder. Andrew begins to panic and admits having shot Milo, but with a blank cartridge, as a joke. As the inspector does not believe him, Andrew tries to escape. Inspector Doppler submits him after a struggle and then removes the make-up: it is Milo, who wants to revenge his humiliation. He tells Andrew he has murdered Tea, has hidden incriminating objects in Andrew's house, and has warned the police, who will arrive in fifteen minutes. After Andrew finds all the items, Milo tells him it has all been a game. Tea has collaborated with him and even told him Andrew is practically impotent. Deeply hurt, Andrew shoots Milo, this time with real bullets, not believing Milo has really called the police. They arrive to find Andrew moaning madly among his mechanical toys.

There is only one set in Shaffer's play: the living room of Andrew Wyke's Norman Manor House in Wiltshire. In Mankiewicz's film, although there are sequences shot in Andrew's wife's bedroom, his bathroom, the kitchen and even some outdoor scenes, the action occurs mostly indoors.³ There are long stretches of dialogue that were transferred intact to the screen, but there were some changes, not only in the dialogue, but also in the plot and characterization. For example: in the play, Milo Tindle is a travel agency owner, while in the film he is a hairdresser. This is, I think, an improvement in terms of plot motivation and characterization, for we can more easily accept the fact that Milo created a very convincing make-up to fool Andrew. It

² When I refer to Mankiewicz's adaptation I do not exclude the work of Anthony Shaffer, the screenwriter.

³ Location shooting took place at Athelhampton House, near Tolpuddle, Dorset, England, UK.

also favored the development of Milo, the character, in relation to the stereotyped belief that hairdressers have an uncanny power of seduction. Here we have to add that, besides being a hairdresser, Milo is also of Italian descent, whereas in the play he is Jewish. The status of Latin lover is a trait of Milo's character that is emphasized in the film, as the comparison of these two fragments of dialogue can show. The first one is taken from the play; the second one – wittier, as we can see – from the film.

Andrew: And you? What do you do?

Milo: I'm in the Travel business. I have my own agency in Dulwich.

Andrew: Tindle's Travels, eh? I see, and where do you live?

Andrew: And you? What do you do?

Milo: Don't you know? I have a hairdressing salon in South Kensington - Casa Tindolini.

Andrew: Oh, you can use that word these days, can you?⁴ People don't take it for an ice-cream salon.

Milo: No, I suppose... the ladies seem to like the continental touch.

Another change that can tell us something about Mankiewicz's method of adaptation takes place in the scene in which, shortly after Milo arrives at Andrews's, the conversation topic turns to Tea. Andrew praises her charms in his pompous way – “Her golden hair smells of pine, and her cobalt eyes are the secret forest pools of Finlandia.” To which Milo retorts: “I hear she's a scrubbed blonde with all the sex appeal of chilled Dettol.”⁵ They go on in the same sarcastic vein discussing Andrew's Olympic sexual achievements, Milo's lack of resources to support Marguerite's expensive way of living, up to the moment Andrew reveals he has devised a plan to solve his and Milo's problem. He says: “This, as they say, is where the plot thickens.” And he goes to fetch another drink.

Although Mankiewicz maintained most of the dialogue from the play, he devised what I consider an ingenious way of presenting it on the screen: as they talk, both characters go to the billiards room of Andrew's mansion and the whole discussion occurs while Andrew banks all the balls, while Milo never has a chance to use his cue stick. It is during the game that Andrew calmly convinces Milo that this is his chance to get rich and be able to support Marguerite. He wins and seems to be confident of

⁴ Milo had already told Andrew that his father changed his name from Tindolini to Tindle because in “those days” you would not be successful with a name like that.

⁵ Dettol (trademark): a liquid for killing germs, used especially in the treatment of cuts, stings, spots, etc. *Longman Dictionary of English Language and Culture*, 1992.

his superiority over Milo. Let us see the details of his scoring during the game.

They go to the billiards room. Andrew is talking about Tea: "Her golden hair smells of pine, and her cobalt eyes are the secret forest pools of Finlandia." Milo replies: "I hear that she's a well scrubbed blonde with all the sex appeal of a second-hand jeep." Andrew smiles: "Not so, dear boy, you can take it from me. Tea's an engaging little trollop, and suits me mightily. Mind you, she takes a bit of keeping up with, it's a good thing I'm pretty much of an Olympic sexual athlete." Long shot, Andrew in the foreground, Milo in the background. As Milo goes round the table, the camera follows him: "Yes, I suppose these days you are concentrating more on the sprints than on the long distance stuff." Medium shot of Andrew preparing to play: "Not so, my boy. I'm in the pink of condition. I could copulate for England at any distance." He knocks the ball. Cut to the camera following it to one of the pockets. Some time later, when Milo asks him what is stopping him from marrying Tea, Andrew answers: "The firm of Prurient and Pry Ltd., whom you and Marguerite have seen fit to employ." Medium shot of Andrew: "Those nicotine stained private detectives who've been camping outside Tea's flat for the last week." Andrew knocks the ball, which is shown in a very short shot as it falls into the pocket. Later, in medium close-up, Andrew says he wants to get rid of Marguerite for life, "not just a two-week Tindolini perm set and touch up." He sinks another ball. Medium shot of Milo: "Good shot." Medium close-up of Andrew: "Yes, of course, it's yellow!". He then sinks the green ball and we see Milo in medium shot, low angle camera position, getting away from the table and sitting down as he says: "Money... And what if she is used to luxury? Whose fault is that?" Shots of Andrew as he walks in an agitated manner around the billiards table, intercut with shots of Milo sitting, defeated. After the camera pans to follow Andrew who sinks two more balls, Milo is shown in medium close-up, sipping his drink and looking at Andrew, who is now still and is also shown in medium close-up, with the light of one of the big round lamps of the billiards room right on his face: "Now I'm not joking, how much has this brief liaison cost you so far?" Medium close-up of Milo, who does not answer but finishes his drink. After some more dialogue using the same shot distance, we have Andrew saying: "But it is to solve this little problem that I have invited you around here tonight. And this, as they say, is where the plot thickens." He bends down and prepares to sink one more ball. "What plot?", Milo asks in medium close-up. The camera frames the table, approaches the black ball, a playful harpsichord tune begins – there was no music up to this moment – the ball zigzags on the green cloth, goes into one of the pockets, the music ends in a two-note flourish, as the camera shows Milo and Andrew in medium shot. Andrew asks: "Whatever are you doing with that cue in your hand?" Medium

shot of Milo, smiling, with Andrew's back on the left side of the frame: "I was waiting for you to miss it." Medium shot of Andrew approaching: "Foolish boy."

Instead of staging the scene following the directions of the play, with the actors sitting and having a drink, Mankiewicz preferred to use the billiards table as an arena where the contenders would have the chance of exchanging their witty remarks, while movement, framing and lighting could be put to use to enhance the scene's force. Whenever Andrew succeeds in his reasoning with Milo, he sinks a ball. In order to show Milo's weakening resistance, the implied author has him sit down without scoring any point. As Andrew begins to have total control of the situation, he starts playing faster and, consequently, moving faster, in a striking contrast with Milo's stillness and with his own stillness when he stays under the glaring lights which are over the billiards table. The light ending of the sequence, with the harpsichord music, the witty dialogue, the image of the black ball going into the pocket, is a true cinematic adaptation of the ending of this sequence in the play:

Andrew: (...) This, as they say, is where the plot thickens.
 Milo: Ah!
 Andrew: I'll get you another drink. (He crosses to drinks table).

At this point it might be useful to remember Bazin's words in his article *Theatre and Cinema*:⁶

The story of the failures and recent successes of theatre on film will be found to be that of the ability of directors to retain the dramatic force of the play in a medium that reflects it or, at least, the ability to give this dramatic force enough resonance to permit a film audience to perceive it. In other words, it is a matter of an aesthetic that is not concerned with the actor but with decor and editing.

I think that is what Mankiewicz tried to do in the sequence mentioned above. He did not deny its theatrical origin. On the contrary, he seemed to stress it. He kept most of the dialogue and used shot/reverse shots abundantly, to capture all the nuances of the words and the performance of the actors, so that we would concentrate on what the characters were saying. The words seem to direct the *mise en scène*: Andrew's convincing arguments precede the scoring of points and they determine when Milo has to sit down and when the game is to finish. This would then be an example of a

⁶ André Bazin, from *What is Cinema?*, 1951, *Theatre and Cinema*.

cinematic adaptation that gives resonance to the dramatic force of the theatrical play.

Another scene that might help us see how Mankiewicz went about adapting *Sleuth* is the one that is part of the sequence in which Andrew announces he is going to kill Milo. In the play it goes like this:

Milo: I believe you are serious.
Andrew: I'm not afraid of killing you, if that's what you mean.
Milo: You've got to be. Mortally afraid for your soul.
Andrew: I didn't think the Jews believed in hell.
Milo: We believe in not playing games with life.
Andrew: Ha! Wit in the face of adversity. You've learned something from the English. Well here's something else to learn. A sporting chance. Why don't you run for it?
Milo: And give you the chance to shoot me down in cold blood?
Andrew: In hot blood you mean. I'm going to shoot you down in cold blood anyway.
(Milo tries to run but falls over his boots)

I will now describe the scene in the film: medium close-up of Andrew with Milo in profile on the right side of the frame: "Property has always been more highly regarded in England than people. Even Marguerite will assume you were after all just an adventurer after her jewels, a petty sneak thief who, in the end, found larceny less burdensome than matrimony." Reverse medium close-up shot of Milo, with Andrew in profile on the left side of the frame: "Yes, the way you're finding murder less burdensome than alimony." He draws back and the camera follows him. Cut to medium shot of Andrew pointing a gun at Milo: "Ha! Wit in the face of adversity. Good!" As he speaks he goes round Milo so that he appears on the right side of the frame, from his ankles up: "You've learned something from the English. Well here's something else, a sporting chance. Why don't you take a run for it?" Cut to Milo, high angle camera position (Andrew is on the second or third step of the staircase): "And give you the chance to shoot me down in cold blood?" Cut to Andrew: "Hot blood, you mean. But I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll close my eyes and count up to twenty slowly. That'll give you a reasonable chance. Milo, off you go. One..." Zoom in on Milo, who approaches Andrew as if trying to get his gun. High-pitched violin music. "One..." Cut to close-up of Milo's face. "Two..." Milo turns to run. Long shot showing the room Milo is crossing. "Three..." Cut to the toy ballerina. "Four..." Hand-held camera frames Milo's face as he struggles to open the door. "Five... Six... Seven... Eight... Nine..." Close-up of Milo as he runs outside. "Ten..." Zoom out as he reaches the car. "Eleven..." He sits, removes his boots. "Twelve...Thirteen... Fourteen... Fifteen..." Cut to car ignition. "Sixteen..." Milo's hand reaches out for the key, which is not

there. Close-up of Milo's face. "Seventeen... Eighteen..." Close-up of feet approaching. "Nineteen..." Medium close-up of Milo, as Andrew's hand holding a gun enters the field. "Twenty." The tense music has continued up to this moment.

It is interesting to note how Mankiewicz used the tools at his disposal to make this scene more effective. He took advantage of the décor by placing Andrew on the steps of the staircase, thus emphasizing Milo's inferior position, heightened by the fact that he is still wearing the clown costume he wore as a disguise to commit the fake robbery. He uses the zoom and hand-held camera in moments of extreme tension. He inserts the shot of the ballerina which, with her stillness and wide open eyes, seems to be terrified with what is going on. Milo's attempt to flee takes more time in the film - in the play he falls down before reaching the door. This could at first sight seem a cheap exercise in suspense. But if we consider the fact that Andrew is obsessed with games, the choice of a "hide-and-seek" approach to this scene seems adequate.

In the cellar sequence, when Andrew and Milo are choosing Milo's disguise costume, we have many elements that are absent from the play: all those iron bars and heavy iron door as if foretelling us Andrew's imprisonment at the end, the models of theater stages recreating scenes from Andrew's stories, the skeleton in the trunk – in the play Andrew simply brings a large basket full of costumes to the center of the stage. In Marguerite's bedroom sequence, there is the bizarre touch of one having to pay to go through the turnstile at the bedroom door.

As Bazin says, "henceforth it is clear that filmed theater is basically destined to fail whenever it tends in any manner to become simply the photographing of scenic representation even and perhaps most of all when the camera is used to try and make us forget the footlights and the backstage area."⁷ This does not seem to be the case with Mankiewicz's staging of the scenes above.

Although the scenes described, like the film itself, take place in a very restricted space, I believe it is the way Mankiewicz uses this space, together with his technique, that makes these scenes cinematic. Susan Sontag, in her article *Film and Theatre*, points out that "if an irreducible distinction between theatre and cinema does exist, it may be this. Theatre is confined to a logical or *continuous* use of space. Cinema (through editing, that is, through the change of shot – which is the basic unit

⁷ André Bazin, from *What is Cinema?*, p. 383.

of film construction) has access to an alogical or *discontinuous* use of space.”⁸ So, in accordance with Sontag’s point of view, the fact that a film favors spacial continuities does not necessarily make it theatrical. There would then be no need to “open up” a play to make it more cinematic. She goes on to say that, “thus, cinematic virtue does not reside in the fluidity of the positioning of the camera nor in the mere frequency of the change of shot. It consists in the arrangement of screen images and (now) of sounds.”⁹

3. A binary structure

There are only two actors in *Sleuth*, who play the two main characters of the film. Other characters would be Marguerite, the policemen, the automata, and Milo’s impersonation of Inspector Doppler. The production of the film, unwilling to give away the solution of the mystery to the audience, decided to bill a fictitious actor named Alec Cawthorne as Inspector Doppler, and Eve Channing¹⁰ – a joke on the audience, in a film teeming with jokes – as Marguerite, although all we see of this character is a painting above the mantelpiece, which shows a woman who bears a striking resemblance to Joanne Woodward – perhaps another in-joke. When Andrew blows up the safe, the screen is filled with smoke; as it dissipates, it is Marguerite’s smile in the painting that begins to appear, and for a moment she seems to be alive. Two police officers are also credited. On the mantelpiece there is a small bust of Poe, which appears in close-up in many scenes, mainly during Inspector Doppler’s investigation. Sometimes the film seems to make an ironical comment on Andrew’s inflated ego as it shows, in the same shot, the contrast between the very small bust and the imposing figure of Andrew, framed from below. All these examples tell us a lot about the playful nature of this film, in which mechanical dolls “play” in certain scenes.

Anyway, although we have all these characters, only Andrew and Milo are played by living actors, Laurence Olivier and Michael Caine, and the film takes advantage of their screen personae, mainly of Olivier’s: it is easy to see Andrew Wyke, because he is embodied by Olivier, as a representative of refinement and good taste. Caine’s case is perhaps more difficult, for his Cockney origin is not so well

⁸ Susan Sontag, *Film and Theatre*, p. 367.

⁹ Susan Sontag, *Film and Theatre*, p. 367.

¹⁰ Eve Channing would be a combination of the names Eve Harrington and Margot Channing, the two main characters of Mankiewicz’s successful film *All About Eve*.

known. Both actors and characters are opposed in the film: on one side we have the ornate speech of Andrew Wyke and the intense theatrical performance of Olivier; on the other, Milo's accent, which ingeniously comes up in moments of tension – as when he is threatened of death – and the more naturalistic performance of Caine.

The film, like the play, is divided in two parts. The first one is dominated by Andrew and his display of contempt for Milo and what he represents; in the second, we see Milo asserting himself by taking advantage of Andrew's weaknesses. Both parts are preceded by a long introduction, almost without dialogue. The introduction to the first part comes right after the credits sequence; in fact it is part of it. Even in this credits sequence, we can see Mankiewicz's debt to the theater. We are presented a series of miniature tableaux recreating stage scenes – we will learn later they are in Andrew Wyke's cellar and represent meaningful scenes taken from his detective stories. Although the action represented is often somber – a man with an ax entering an Egyptian tomb, for example – the sprightly music score that sometimes reminds us of circus music (a reference to Milo as a clown) and the way the titles are sometimes introduced – to the rhythm of the music – prepare us for a light thriller. The lightness will be mainly supplied, we will learn as the film proceeds, by the witty dialogue provided by the authors of the film. As the name of the director appears on the screen, we have the last set, in which a huge mansion can be seen. The camera zooms in and Milo's car enters the scene. There is no denying, it seems, the film we are going to see is closely related to a theatrical experience. As Milo's red sports car stops near the mansion, it is dwarfed by its hugeness, and for the first time we have the contrast between Andrew's power and tradition and Milo's modern ways and vanity: he takes off his sunglasses and combs his hair with his fingers. He then hears a faint voice and follows it. And next we have a striking shot that shows a stone serpent in the foreground and Milo entering the garden in the background: a possible metaphor for the evil that awaits him. He is then seen in a high angle shot as he tries to find his way in a hedge maze. The voice he hears is now clearly perceptible as it tells a detective story. Milo finds a mirror as he walks in the maze and stops to check his appearance – Andrew will later call him a seducer of silly women. Always from above, the camera shows him as he makes many turns trying to find his way out of the maze. Then the camera draws back and Milo seems insignificantly small. The camera then goes over the hedge and zooms in to find Andrew sitting in the center of the maze. We find out at this moment that he is not telling the story, but it is his recorded voice in a tape recorder that we hear. Close-up of the tape recorder as the voice says: "We, in the police force, are just plain baffled." Milo is still lost. Andrew starts recording his narration again. Cut to Milo still looking for an exit. Back to Andrew telling his story

as he walks and mimes some of the actions. Milo is seen in one of the parts of the maze he has already been to. Andrew goes on recounting his story. Milo looks at himself in the mirror again. Andrew finishes his story. Milo shouts: "Hallo. Are you there?" Andrew looks at his watch: "Who's there?" Milo identifies himself. Both men are shown from above, a hedge separating them, as Andrew asks "Won't you join me?" and opens part of the hedge as if it were a revolving door. Milo enters his "outdoor inner sanctum". After some time, Andrew asks him if he agrees the detective novel is the normal recreation of noble minds and Milo answers he does not know very much about noble minds.

In this opening scene, which in the play is simply the reading by the detective writer of the text he has just finished typing, we can see many elements that will be later developed: the different social status of both characters; Andrew's interest in playing games – he has Milo try hard to get to the center of the maze; the frustration of our expectations – we expect to see a person in flesh and blood telling the story, not a disembodied voice in a tape recorder; the antagonism between the two characters – Milo says he does not know anything about noble minds; Milo's feeling of oppression – in many high angle shots he seems crushed; the labyrinthine development of the plot – the maze would then be a metaphor, together with the story the writer is dictating.

After a very tense and merciless sequence in which Milo is "murdered" by Andrew, we have the opening scene of the second part of the film. It is a relief to listen to Cole Porter's melodious song, *Just One of Those Things*, accompanying a slow traveling to the left, as the camera frames toys and games, shows newspapers on the sofa and glasses on the table, a toy bear pouring liquid into a cup, a Chinese toy, a mechanical acrobat, a clown. The song now is *You Do Something to Me*, and we see a little ballerina, more acrobats, a harpsichord player, a billiards table, a kind of scaffold with the inscription "English Execution" and, finally, Andrew waltzing up the stairs into the kitchen, as if he were part of the mechanical toys. In the kitchen, he is shown toasting bread. The camera now shows feet walking toward the house in the dark. Andrew brings food and a bottle of champagne to the table. Cut to a hand pulling the cord of the bell outside. Andrew making a toast with the champagne and preparing to eat. Bell ringing. The song now is *Anything goes*, a song that will later help Andrew solve a riddle to "save" his life, in one of his and Milo's games. Hand ringing the bell. Camera from the outside shows Andrew opening the door, looking around and going back inside. Camera movement to the left, approaching the window and showing Andrew inside, putting on his glasses. Camera gets closer to another window to see him go into the kitchen. Feet approaching. Andrew about to put piece of toast with caviar into his mouth. Bell ringing. Andrew gets up from the table and opens the door

to see Inspector Doppler.

Like in the opening sequence of the film, Milo is shown approaching Andrew's mansion, this time disguised as Inspector Doppler. The display of the mechanical toys in action and the playing of Cole Porter's romantic music are motivated by the plot – Andrew is at ease, preparing to have a refined snack, and there is a reference in the film to his being fond of Cole Porter's music. Besides, this sequence can be seen as an interlude between the two parts, which gives the audience an opportunity to relax from the taut ending of the first part and make hypotheses as to what has really happened and what Milo's apparent death may lead to. The close-up shots of the approaching feet in the dark, a menace to Andrew at a moment he is in high spirits – he waltzes, listens to Cole Porter and has caviar and champagne – may be related to the close-up shots of Andrew's feet that also represent a menace as he gets closer to Milo, who is trying to start his car and run away. In the opening scene it is Milo who wants to find his way to the center of the maze; here it is Andrew who goes to the front door, looks about the garden, sees no one, returns, then goes to the back door to find Milo impersonating Inspector Doppler. Likewise, the camera's gliding movement in the beginning of this sequence resembles the travelings in the opening sequence, as the camera follows Milo through the maze.

Besides these two introductory sequences and the presence of only two actors, there are other elements in the film that show this binary pattern. In Andrew's cellar, we see a skeleton jump out of a box twice: first, when Milo is stripped to his underwear and dressed as a clown and is frightened by the sudden apparition; second, when Andrew tries to make fun of Inspector Doppler by pressing a button that makes the skeleton jump. This time, it stays between them in medium shot, as Doppler asks: "Is there nothing you would not consider a game, sir? Duty? Work? Even marriage?" And Andrew answers: "Oh please Inspector, don't include marriage. Sex, sex is the game. Marriage is the penalty." Tea and Marguerite, the two main female characters of the film, would then take on the respective roles of sex partner and wife, Tea providing him with the fun and Marguerite representing the burden of a stable relationship. Andrew then goes up the ramp of the cellar and the music we hear is the same of the scene in which he talks about playing as the only way of facing the emptiness of life. He adds: "Round and round we jog towards each futile anniversary. Pass go. Collect 200 rows, 200 silences, 200 scars in the deep places." More to the end of the film, there is another scene in which a suggestive use of the skeleton is made. Milo is now controlling the situation, playing the game of humiliation on Andrew, who has just frantically searched the cellar looking for an incriminating object that might send him to prison. Before leaving, Milo takes the mask of the

clown – the same he wore to commit the fake burglary – and puts it on the skeleton. The camera then zooms in on the mask, as Milo hums a song and says the word “pagliaccio”, in the language of his family.

There are recurring elements in the two crucial scenes of the film, Milo’s humiliation scene dressed as a clown, and Andrew’s race to save his life as he searches for the hidden objects. In the first scene, when Milo thinks Andrew is really going to kill him, he tries to get outside help and dials a number. As we anxiously wait for the call to get through, there is a close-up shot of a golf club interrupting it. As Andrew coldly says there is no hope for him, Milo keeps the phone in his hand, completely discouraged, and it is Andrew who puts the receiver back. As Milo goes up the staircase, begging for his life, he is always framed from above, while Andrew is shot from a low angle, his towering presence completely dominating the clown-clad Milo. Andrew, hurt in his English pride, says he would never give up his wife to him, a seducer of silly women.

In the second part of the film, when Milo says he has strangled Tea after having had sex with her, Andrew does not believe him and calls her, but it is her flat mate who answers the phone and tells him she has been murdered. Astonished, he holds the phone without hanging it up and then we see Milo’s hand in close-up interrupting the call. Before that, when Inspector Doppler is examining the staircase and says he has found blood stains, Andrew runs to the stairs and as he expresses his bewilderment, the camera shows them in inverted positions in relation to Milo’s murder scene: Milo/Inspector Doppler is some steps above Andrew.

Parallel to Milo’s plight as he begs for his life and is mercilessly shot, Andrew shows an expression of defeat and shame as Milo reveals Tea has told him she has not had sex with Andrew for more than two years and that he is practically impotent, “not at all, in fact, the selected choice for the next Olympics”, as Milo puts it. During this scene, Milo turns on a mechanical acrobat, the same that Inspector Doppler inadvertently turned on some time before. This time, as Andrew sinks in humiliation, there are intercut shots of the acrobat, which gets out of focus as a near collapsing Andrew looks at it absent-mindedly. Some minutes later, we have Milo at the top of the stairs, exactly above Andrew, who is framed in close-up as he says: “I live as I want to live.” Milo’s voice is heard over the image: “You know, I’ve been thinking of that writer you told me about.” Cut to American shot of Milo at the top of the stairs, framed from below: “And it is my opinion that your detective stories are the normal recreation of snobbish, outdated, life-hating, ignoble minds. (...)” “Long shot of stairs, slow traveling to the left, high-pitched music, and we see Andrew sunk in his armchair,

as if in a nest.

4. Conclusion

The fact that *Sleuth* can be seen to possess a binary structure, that its two parts mirror one another, and that there are recurrent elements throughout, is not in itself significant. We would have to look for pairings in the film that could be related to this structure. The most evident polarization we have is the one between Andrew and Milo. On one side we have Andrew, who wants to protect not only his own honor, but the class he belongs to, a class whose noble minds are entertained with well-crafted detective stories, a class that favors Don Pérignon, a class that likes to amuse itself with costume balls, a class that looks down on immigrants, descendants of immigrants like Milo, and on people who work in order to survive. Andrew puts on aristocratic airs and abhors modern media like the television. When Milo says “I imagine they do a great deal of your stuff on television”, Andrew gets shocked: “Oh God forbid. I’ll never permit it. And, incidentally, it’s not ‘stuff’.” He refers to crime stories on television as “those ghastly things where the police race around in cars and call all the suspects chummy.” His world is “passé” and in the play this is explicitly said: “Perhaps you might come to realise that the only place you can inhabit is a dead world – a country house world where peers and colonels die in their studies.” On the opposite side we have the young man Milo, who has to work for a living, who has the duty of having to support his Italian father who could not succeed as an immigrant. Milo, the owner of a fashionable sports car, who cannot completely get rid of his Cockney accent, who is not very much interested in the “recreation of noble minds”.

In the final sequence of the film, Andrew shoots Milo, who has time, before he dies, to turn on all the automata of the house, which are shown in close-up, probably shot with wide-angle lenses that distort their features, so that they look like crazed figures in a bizarre dance. As the camera tracks back to show Andrew, crying alone among his toys, the image dissolves into another miniature tableau, like the ones in Andrew’s cellar, and the stage curtain descends on this last scene. Fade out.

The set of related motifs that are present in *Sleuth* – fantasy and real life, conservatism and an acceptance of change, a classical style of dramatic performance and a more naturalistic one, life seen as an irresponsible game and life taken seriously – might open room for speculating, considering the dualistic way the film is structured, if there is not another relation implicit – that between theater and cinema. It seems the fatal clash between Andrew and Milo does not correspond to a similar clash between those two forms of expression. The tension existing between these forms, their struggle for power, seem to have been dealt with satisfactorily by the the film’s implied author.

By retaining theatrical elements in his film, Mankiewicz has created a work in which the two forms would attempt at maintaining a sort of dialogue, in which there is transformation rather than annihilation of one or the other. The final curtain on the stage set model would indicate the end of a play. A play that would be like the other ones taken from Andrew's detective stories. Nevertheless, what we have seen is clearly a film. And ultimately it was the implied author of this film who devised this amalgamation, it was this agency that orchestrated this polyphony of conventional detective story, theatrical drama and cinematic experience. The freezing of the last image of the film into the stage set (in the same way that Milo entered the stage set in the opening of the film) would then transform everything that took place into another game, this time a pleasurable one involving the implied author and the audience.

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