

## JULES AND JIM: A film review

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## JULES AND JIM

Sound was discussed in a manner contrary to Film Art because sound effects are a given, whereas music is often taken for granted as is the case in Film Art. People in general expect sounds to occur when someone opens a door or drops something on the floor. However music is often overlooked, other than in the context of a musical, because it's not music's natural context to be playing in the background of any given scene without being justified by an orchestra. Music, which is not justified tends to be unrealistic and unthought of, consciously or subconsciously, and therefore, tends to be overlooked in favor of realistic elements, which are given sounds in everyday life. Therefore, this is the reasoning behind using music as the center of the discussion of sound whose aim was to focus on an area that was under represented in Film Art. All of the elements of sound are mentioned such as pitch, tone, etc., which compose the summary of its parts, the whole being music, of which was completely overlooked. Imagine, *Once Upon A Time In The West*, *Star Wars*, *ET*, *The Godfather*, *2001*, etc. without music! My argument contends that Film Art deserves a rethinking of the powers of music and possibly an entire chapter should be devoted to music and the differences, music in itself made in many films!

This essay will discuss Jules and Jim in terms of its sound, mise en scene, and narrative construction in order to understand why the film was shot the way it was without necessarily judging it in any way, shape, or form. In order to avoid confusion all three topics will be discussed separately.

Jules and Jim presented a story and developed a plot around three central characters, Jules, Jim, and Catherine. Set in the background of World War I, Jules and Jim told the story of a friendship between two men, of whom, one is in search of a relationship and encounters troubles in meeting the right woman. In fact the conflict

in the plot developed when Catherine, the woman Jules chose to love absolutely, was added to the story thus transforming the plot into a three-way friendship/relationship story. Conflict, stemming from Catherine's indecisiveness and instability, transformed the plot into one major head game. A triangular pattern developed with Catherine at the top, at odds, with Jules and Jim at the bottom who remained friendly towards each other until the end of the story. Catherine's character was looking for the happiness which Jules and Jim, had developed and found, in a their friendship, making them inseparable to Catherine's discontent.

The narrative structure was composed of images illustrating different moods through the use of mise en scene, and the narrator's narration, which provided the audience with information important to the development of the story, not inherently found in the images or mise en scene on their own. In addition the narration took on a dual role revealing information pertaining to the story as well as information which spoke from individual vantage, points of views.

The narrator's voice provided the first important information, which served the purpose of updating the story, to the point where the film began. This was particularly important because the next scene illustrated Jules unsuccessful attempt at meeting and seducing Therese, when she dumped him at the coffee shop the following day. Jules lack of success, despite himself, was a recurring theme throughout the story, whose history was revealed by the narrator's narration in the opening scene of the film. Throughout the film Jules and Jim constantly philosophize, while they completely ignored the woman. Therese was no exception because she was the first to be completely ignored as Jules and Jim went into one of their philosophic conversations. Jules decided, upon bringing Therese to his room, that they would sleep separately as opposed to being more flirtatious. This prompted Therese to play, illustrating her steam engine imitation, as opposed to making love. Jules was simultaneously juxtaposed to Jim who refused to stay in bed with Gilbert after having spent intimate moments, which illustrated that Jim could afford to refuse opportunities whereas Jules alone, did not have many opportunities, and did not create them. The juxtaposition suggested an early indication that Jules would rely heavily on Jim to assist him in finding a woman. In fact, in the following scene, Jules asked Jim for his assistance in greeting three women that were to visit him. These incidents involving Jules' hardships with woman were a recurring theme throughout the film as the narrator's opening statements successfully prepared the audience from the outset the film.

The narrator again introduced us to an important development in the plot/story, when Catherine made her entrance, and described the beauty that the men saw relating her to the statue that they had visited in the Adriatic. The narrator

described the affinity, which Jules immediately felt and mentioned Catherine as being the first dividing factor, which came between Jules and Jim. Although it was Jules every intention to develop a relationship, we witness the lack of any relationship or seriousness when the three characters found themselves together. Jules appeared to be friendly as opposed to romantic, just by noticing his greeting with a kiss on the cheek as opposed to the lips. When the three characters are together the whole notion of play, in a child like manner, takes precedence over the romance and manner that a man would act around a woman as sophisticated as Catherine.

The narrator's information ended this scene on a serious and informative note by stating that Jim understood that Catherine was Jules' girl and did not attempt in any way, shape or form, to interfere in Jules apparent new found happiness. In fact, through the narrator's information Jim seemed to understand that Catherine was Jules' woman more than Jules understood it himself. Interestingly enough Catherine asked Jim to greet her to the train station, met Jim in a nightgown the next morning, and finally asked Jim to help her dress, while music created a romantic mood in the background. We see the misunderstandings, which were developing between the characters in relation to their friendships/relationships, as the mise en scene illustrated a romantic moment between Jim and Catherine more revealing than any other scene between Jim and Jules. We see through their friendship that a territorial line was drawn between both men, as their friendship was intact, but no firm understandings existed between Catherine and the men. Thus far the narrative plot revealed information and indications to the viewers suggesting that the plot was developing into a bizarre love triangle involving characters which make no differentiation between friendships and relationships.

Another issue was made apparent when they went to the beach as the images presented Catherine like a mother figure rather than a potential wife. One illustration of her mother like impression occurred when she picked up the clothes off the clothesline, which provided a portrait of a stereotypical mother. Another example was provided at their trip to the beach where she sat down to discuss a serious subject occurred when they were then sent off to play in the water, just like a mother directing her children.

The story/plot development thus far had established the main theme as being related to the difficulties, which Jules experienced in establishing a stable relationship. This conflict occurred within the context of a solid bonding friendship between two males and the intrusion of a woman, in Jules' favor, which acted more like a friend and or mother rather than a woman looking to develop a relationship. The narrator expressed happiness, stating that Jules and Catherine's relationship

had been inaugurated as both their pillows were now situated in the same bed. However the narrator's discussion of happiness always included the three characters in a threesome as images were depicted them running onto an outside terrasse and cuddling up together. Jim's inclusion in their happiness created a triangular friendship/relationship. Their found happiness, thus far, included all three characters in a triangular friendship/relationship arrangement and did not take into consideration what would happen if this threesome would ever be separated. What would happen to the triangle if one of the three points went missing, how would the other two link up?

The plot took a radical turn when Catherine jumped into the river to attract the men's attention, while they were engaging in one of their many intellectual conversations. Catherine's bid for attention began at this moment in an attempt to interfere with Jules and Jim's friendship thus transforming her into the antagonist. Her drastic jump into the water succeeded in drawing Jim's attention closer to her, as the narrator mentioned. The narrator mentioned that Jules remained unsure of himself while Catherine smiled with her look of cynicism, as she had succeeded in her bold attempt to draw them further apart, by drawing Jim closer to her.

The café scene revealed to us, through narration, that Jim did not know what kind of a woman she was as he reflected and waited. The plot construction revealed the importance of this scene only much later in the film when we found out that their purpose of meeting would have been to express their true feelings for each other. However the viewer being aware of Jim's feeling for Catherine was left in an ambiguous state as they failed to meet. The ambiguity then rose to a new level when Jules called Jim to tell him that they were going to be married thus resolving Jules' inability to find a woman, while creating another, hints of Jim's and Catherine's true feelings for one another.

However the plot's next development saw the addition of context which contributed in splitting the three characters away from each other for a period of four years. This new element revealed the time period as being the dawn of World War I. The revelation of this element occurred, during Jules' phone call when he stated that he was going to be married. Then Jules, in denial of any accent, began reciting a French patriotic speech while images of the war were being simultaneously shown. The mention of World War I had important consequences because society as a whole, especially German and French society, changed encompassing important shifts in the thought processes of everybody's minds. World War I changed society, which was in part reflected in the mood changes in Jules and Jim, illustrated in the narration, mentioning how trench life became routine and part of everyday life.

After the interruption caused by the war, the narrator resumed the story by stating what the men had been doing during the war. The story resumed when Jim met Catherine at the train station and felt he was waiting for her to arrive at the coffee shop before the war. When all three characters were reunited in Jules living room they were speechless as they began recollecting about their past war experiences and compared what the future reserved for both Jules and Jim's careers. Therefore their first meetings and topics of conversation demonstrated the mood of somberness that engulfed their once happy three-way friendship. This mood of somberness was a sign of the new conflict, mainly Jim and Catherine's feelings about each other.

Happiness did find its way back into the plot as Sabine redirected adult problems by attracting the bulk of the attention when she was involved in any scene. Sabine's role in adding happiness was made evident in two scenes, one of which began with Jules playing a horse and a game which required everybody to make faces around a table. The happiness after the war reflected life in that era which focussed more on the family, an institution that had been broken down. This occurred because the war cost the lives of an entire generation thus dramatically increasing the number of orphans and single parents.

However as soon as happiness made its entrance, pessimism found its way back into the plot, when Jules told Jim that Catherine wanted to leave him, mentioning her love affairs, which Jim had sensed when they first met. Therefore the major theme had shifted from Jules inability to find a woman to Catherine's search for attention and Jim's indecision as to who to choose, Gilbert or Catherine. However when Jules mentioned he'd rather see Catherine being unfaithful rather than leaving, or that he'd be willing to let Jim marry her to keep Catherine by his side, Jim opted for Catherine. Jim was then forced to decide whether he would marry Catherine for himself or for Jules.

Therefore the triangular relationship changed with Jules finding himself at the top of the triangle with Jim and Catherine finding them selves at the bottom. Jules, being the only character who retains his innocence throughout the film, whereas Jim crosses the line from being decisive to indecisive about what woman to chose, without hurting Jules in the process. Catherine, for her part, retained the role of antagonist as she originally came between Jules and Jim, giving Jules a false sense of happiness, which made him feel as though he had found the right woman. However, retaining her antagonistic role, Catherine's role got worst as she developed a character trait which did anything to get attention by manipulating men into having

short term affairs, and by attempting to drive a deeper wedge between Jules and Jim.

However a lot of the unanswered questions which dated back to the coffee shop where Jim and Catherine missed each other was finally resolved in a scene where the narrator tells us that Jim indeed loved Catherine. The revelation began in the scene where Jules and Jim returned to their normal routine of playing dominoes. Jules began talking about the superiority of German beers and came into direct confrontation with Catherine when she mentioned the greatness of French wines. Confrontation, between Frenchmen and Germans, has been a constant stream of unresolved arguments led Catherine to run out of the house while Jim ran out after her. When they stopped at a tree Jim and Catherine remembered the past, as the narrator dictated the story up to this point, where they stated how they felt about each other.

Jim's character then began to reflect Catherine's character as he became evoked into uncertainty in not knowing who to cheat on or who to love, Catherine or Gilbert. As Jim's affinities were now ambiguous and favored Catherine, the narrator mentioned that Catherine's idea of love was short lived and needed renewal, as was the case with Catherine's seduction of Jules in his bedroom as Jim sat quietly and jealous in his room below. Jealously, on Jim's part, was another example of the rift which Catherine's antagonistic role, attempted to cause between Jules and Jim, throughout this film. Despite the false sense of harmony that was created temporally, by their agreement to get married when Jim got back from Paris, Catherine was doubtful and insecure whether Jim really loved her or not. Meanwhile Jim was having an affair Gilbert when he realized, as mentioned by the narrator, that he could not leave Gilbert as much as Jules could not leave Catherine.

The final scenes witnessed Jim's decision making to marry Gilbert as he finally realized that Catherine's love was short lived. The final turn in the plot began when Jim returned from Paris, and greeted Jules only to return home to find Catherine out on an escapade again. Jim then decided to leave asking Jules to make up a story stating that he did not see him at the train station. However as he was saying that Catherine appeared in the window. She confessed that she had seen her ex-lovers for the last time where, at which point they decided to abstain from sex to assure that Catherine's next baby would be Jim's and not some other man's child. After seeing a doctor about Catherine's inability to fall pregnant, Catherine got frustrated and stated that her pregnancy was taking too much time. Catherine, at this point, decided to return to Jules in her moment of frustration. The narrator then stated, as Jules and Catherine hugged and made up, in the most fitting line to describe exactly how Jules love was the most honest for both Jim as a friend and Catherine as a lover,

that Jim's love was relative whereas Jules' was absolute. However, Catherine began corresponding by letter stating how much she desired Jim to return to Germany. Jim's conviction to marry Gilbert remained intact, which essentially led Catherine decision to take both her life and Jim's.

In sum the narrative construction developed a bizarre love triangle involving Jules and Jim's friendship pitted against Catherine's shifting antagonistic role involving one nightstands and search for attention.

As stated in Film Art "Mise En Scene is composed of all the elements paced in front of the camera to be photographed: the settings, and props, lighting, costumes and make-up, and figure behavior". In relation to Jules and Jim, perhaps the most important element was figure behavior. Figure behavior with the placement and movement of the three characters within a given frame contributed greatly to illustrating the discussions, of narrative structure presented above.

The opening scene and credits, followed by the scenes leading up to Catherine's first appearance, was perhaps the most honest look at Jules and Jim, pursuing everyday activities. The figures were framed as equals in relation to one another as no one was subservient to the other. The opening credits presented Jules and Jim in a balanced manner including intellect and playfulness. We were shown how both men were able to behave like boys as they fought with broom sticks and imitated a horse ride, and were extremely appreciative of their common love of literature as they exchanged ideas in their relative discourse. They were presented as being the two lower points of a triangle as no one was dominant over the other.

However after Catherine's first scene their relationship changed instantly, with Catherine being represented as the third edge of the triangle, thus changing the relationship of the figures' framing. The framing after Catherine's first appearance changed when she appeared with both men at the same time. Long shots were usually framed with all the characters, which usually excluded any personal association with any single character. However when the characters were framed in medium close-ups or closer, they were usually framed in pairs, either, Jules and Catherine or Jim and Catherine. Catherine was the manipulative one in the triangle and thus her position was at the top edge with both lower edges of the triangle answering to her.

However another format exists in the framing of the three characters which often paired Jules and Jim together and Catherine alone or in a separate corner. A clear example of this was demonstrated in the scenes where Jules and Jim were playing dominoes while Catherine sat in the background where we saw her, slightly out of focus.

Catherine also dominated the men by representing the focal point, which directed the camera's attention. This was clearly the case in the scene where she jumped into the river and the first scene after the war when all three characters meet for the first time. The first scene placed Catherine in front of the men, as they had a philosophical argument on the placement of woman within the arts, as they were walking by the river. In this scene shot counter shot was used, flipping back and fourth from Catherine to the men, as Catherine was "grinningly" in firm control. The men argued regardless of the fact that Jules, in particular, was degrading women in his conversation while Jim listened defenseless and said nothing, other then I contest. This scene essentially demonstrated how shot counter shot gave Catherine her position as being the single jagged edge in the triangle.

The second scene illustrated the three characters as they were sitting around a table, speechless, as their were framed through shot counter shot, while Catherine body skimmed the edge of the frame reminding us that she was present. Her slight presence off of the edge of the camera helped attract more attention because she was just skimming the image. They were framed in pairs, Jules was framed with Catherine, Jim was framed with Catherine, or Jim and Jules were framed together. They were emphasized in pairs suggesting that the room was filled with tension in part caused by their first meeting since the war, as well as the general mood of somberness which seemed to trouble Jules. Therefore the lack of harmony in the framing of the shot represents this mood of friction through the disunity of not including everybody in the framing.

Catherine's dominance was portrayed as being an attempt to attract attention and manipulate as many different men as she could. However women, as a more general rule, have often come between both Jules and Jim in terms of a diversion from their friendship and simply in terms of their framing within a shot. We began to see this trend develop in the first scenes; the narrator was discussing there past history, where Jim finds himself surrounded by women while Jules lagged in the background. Jules framing in the background represented his dominant theme, his inability to meet and maintain a lasting relationship. Another example was provided when Jules and Jim jumped into the car with Therese, where again, she was framed in the middle with counter shots framing only two people at a time, male and female. Jules' inability to keep women interested was demonstrated by showing



how he decided that they would both sleep in different beds, as opposed to making a “move” and, as a result, Therese walks off with another man the following morning.

Apart from organizing figures in the frame, Truffault also makes use of close ups and extreme close ups to exentenate the moods through the use of mise en scene. Numerous examples exist in terms of faces and objects. The head shots were perhaps the most important of the close ups as they were used to exentenate the moods at different points in the film. The head shots which were freeze framed were a perfect example where she exentented her moods before and after meeting Jules and Jim. Another fitting example was Catherine’s headshot, when they were on the beach, as the men ran off into the water like boys. The look in Catherine’s face was a true sign that Catherine was in a state of confusion and uncertainty. Her mood was internal as the men were obviously happy and having a good time. Jim and Catherine’s first kiss was another telling moment where the use of a headshot created a mood by simple use of framing. Jim ran his finger along Catherine’s face where she then moved into his space to kiss him. The fact that she moved into his space was important when coupled with the narrator’s statement; Jules’ love was absolute where as Jim’s love is relative. Catherine’s advance on Jim supported this statement as it proved that Catherine was more interested in Jim and had to put effort into demonstrating her love whereas she had Jules hypnotized.

However, as headshots had telling stories, so did props in there own form. The objects were seldom used but left their lasting impression in terms of the mise en scene by use of close ups. Two examples, was the close up of the slide which resembled Catherine and the close up of the hat. First the close up of the slide could have foreshadowed Catherine’s ambiguity by never revealing to the audience exactly what she wanted. The same could be said of the slide whose beauty we could appreciate but not necessarily understands. We could only look at the statue and admire its beauty but we could never know the story behind the statue unless we researched it. The same could be said of Catherine, because we could only admire her beauty but could never know throughout the film exactly what it was that she looking for. The other close up such as Catherine’s hat simply suggested that she was drifting away into her own direction. In fact, the narrator, added to the hat’s importance as the close up was accompanied by narration, which stated that the hat was drifting out into the sea alone. This was clearly the case as Catherine’s character got darker and darker from that point on.

Music composes the third section of this essay by adding mood to the scenes with its texture and style. Perhaps the best example was the opening scene in which music created a circus like atmosphere correctly supported by Jules and Jim’s clowning around (fighting with brooms and horse riding imitation). The music, in

this scene correctly interpreted the mise en scene and made the audience feel as though they were in the midst of a circus. Through the melody, the music accentuated a mood of fun, easiness, and open-mindedness, similar to that which we find in the context of a circus. However the same mood of fun, easiness, and open-mindedness, set up the liberal and easy going manner in which all of the characters would behave among themselves later on in the film. The repetitious manner in which Jules and Jim would stand idol as women walked in and out of their lives, without showing any emotions in their process of breaking up or losing them.

Two other scenes in the film present vaudeville like music, the scene where Therese demonstrates her train imitation to Jules, and the scene where Catherine dresses up as a man. Both these scenes include music, which has a vaudeville-like theme and therefore represent the situations of comedy that the characters find themselves in. These scenes reinforce the lack of seriousness, which seems to surround the characters every time they are together. The lack of seriousness can be observed when Jules and Jim are together, Catherine is often ignored, and despite knowing that Jules and Catherine's relationship is not healthy. The three best examples where the men behave like children in front of Catherine are; their first trip to the beach, their chess game when Catherine tries to attract their attention, and their walk late at night when Catherine jumps into the river to attract their attention.

A waltz like music was also played in repetition conveying a musical interpretation of a relationship and plot, which constantly moved from side to side, or in a circular motion. The waltz melody repeats itself throughout the film especially when all three main characters are together. It ultimately suggests that their relationship progressed in circles without ever going anywhere. In fact the scene's plots justifies the music's melodic message.

One such example, where waltz music was used, was during the narrator's narration in the second scene, which tells the story of Jules and Jim's relationship, prior to where the film begins their story. The waltz like merry go round music foreshadows Jules and Jim's circular relationship, which will dominate the theme in the film. In fact the waltz is used every time a relationship takes a turn for the worst in this film, i.e. when Therese leaves the restaurant with another man. Yet another example occurred when Jim awaited Catherine in the restaurant at which time she never met him. This can qualify as a turn for the worst as Jim was about to confess his love for her as we found out later in the film.

Another instance, where the waltz was used were the scenes where all three main characters find themselves involved and are interacting together in the same scene.

The first scene occurred, shortly after their first meeting, when they journeyed down to the beach. The music demonstrated a relationship that was moving in circles as we were shown a close up of Catherine, who looked distressed, while Jules and Jim played like children, in the water. The waltz-like music, in essence, appeared throughout the film everytime a low or high was attained in their three-way relationship, supporting the images that suggest that the relationship is moving in a circular motion.

In the ending scenes, from the scene where Jim moves into the chalet until the final scenes where Catherine drives the mysterious black car, the waltz theme is played in a mysterious melodic variation. The plot construction also began to illustrate the characters in moments of indecision where Catherine cannot decide who she loved. We witnessed a seesaw of emotions, which, right before the car crash, ended up where the relationship began with Jules and Catherine in wed lock and Jim on his own with an un-decisive Gilbert in France.

Other than waltzes or circus style music, music has had its fair share of mysterious melodies in this film with most of them occurring after the war. This suggested that, not only had the three characters changed but also much of society. Music traces the changes in mood after the war, especially in Catherine's character. Her happiness seemed to have disappeared not to mention the general mood of somberness and uneasiness between Jules and Jim. A change in mood was illustrated during the exchange of letters between Catherine and Jim when they were living in separate countries. The music was played in a mysterious variation, in an obvious manner so as to alarm the general audience regardless of their music experience. It was this mysterious theme which carried on until the ending scenes involving the black car which eventually drives Jim and Catherine to their deaths.

In sum, music often portrayed the moods in relation to the narrative construction of the film. More specifically music also tended to reflect the mood between the leading characters. In essence, sound, more specifically music, created a mood, which coupled with images, told stories on their own.

In conclusion Jules and Jim's sound, mise en scene, and narrative construction were used as a means to understand why the film was shot the way it was. The love triangle, which ensued between Jules, Jim and Catherine was ridden with conflict which experienced ups and downs throughout the film. Conflict arose with Catherine's indecision towards choosing men and was resolved when Catherine took both her life and Jim's life by driving themselves off a bridge. For its part the narrative construction developed a bizarre love triangle involving Jules and Jim's

friendship pitted against Catherine's shifting antagonistic role involving one-nightstands and a search for attention. Mise en scene contributed greatly to illustrating figure behavior and displacement in relation to the narrative and plot construction. More over music, for its part often portrayed the moods in relation to the narrative construction of the film. Therefore the contribution of all three filmic elements combined to illustrate the triangular plot development both visually and narratively.

by Pierre Hobson