Daisy Kenyon: Otto Preminger (1947)

Published in September 1962, *Movie* 2 was a special Otto Preminger issue, with articles on his films by Ian Cameron, Paul Mayersberg, V.F. Perkins, Mark Shivas and Robin Wood from within the *Movie* group, and with additional contributions from Eugene Archer and Eric Rohmer. The articles stress key features of Preminger's work which are now taken for granted, such as his ambiguity and objectivity, his commitment to 'exact and lucid presentation' (11), the fluidity of his long takes, and his fondness for father / daughter and father figure / daughter figure relationships. In referring to such notions here, I would like to acknowledge these early *Movie* pieces: in a sense, they provide a critical background against which this essay is written. Although in the 1962 issue, *Daisy Kenyon* is not considered separately, it is referred to by Mayersberg in his article 'From *Laura* to *Angel Face*', and I shall indeed quote him.

Movie returned to Preminger in *Movie* 4 (November 1962), which also includes an interview with the director. Then, over the years, there has been a smattering of Preminger articles inspired by these early *Movie* pieces: I am thinking of Walker (1970), Lippe (1988), Gallafent (1992), Gibbs and Pye (2005 & 2010) and Keathley (2012). Nevertheless, although these are by no means the only articles of interest on the director, in the 55 years since the two *Movie* issues, there has in fact been relatively little critical consideration of Preminger's films. There is no substantial critical account of his work overall; two fairly recent biographies – by Foster Hirsch (2007) and Chris Fujiwara (2008) – do not say much about the details of the films. In particular, I am unaware of any significant criticism of *Daisy Kenyon*.

By 1947, Preminger – who also produced *Daisy Kenyon* – was a highly-respected director at Twentieth Century-Fox, and Joan Crawford was a major star of the era. This was the only time in his career that Preminger worked with such a major female star, and one would therefore expect a degree of tension between Preminger as *auteur* and Crawford's star persona. In fact, Crawford got on well with Preminger – see Spoto (2011: 191) – and tensions emerge, rather, in the interaction of star and genre. And although Preminger would have been responsible for articulating the material in such a way as to bring out these tensions, part of my argument is that they were common to many if not most of Crawford's films.

I would like to look at the film from four perspectives. In the background throughout, there is the matter of genre: *Daisy Kenyon* is both a woman's film and a melodrama, and there is a play between these genres – which do of course overlap – which the film from time to time highlights. (The Region 1 DVD of the film markets it as 'Fox Film Noir'. This misidentification arises, I assume, because of the current popularity of 1940s film noir. *Daisy Kenyon* has nothing to do with film noir.) Within that overall frame, there are three main lines of analysis: the adaptation of the novel, which raises in particular the issue of ideology; the contribution of the director, which raises in particular the issue of style and tone; and the significance of the film as – to an extent – a vehicle for Joan Crawford, which raises in particular the issue of identification.

The novel and its adaptation

The first edition of Elizabeth Janeway's 1945 novel has 'An historical novel of 1940-42' across the front cover, emphasising that the narrative covers the lead up to and entry of the US into World War 2. In the film, the time period is shifted to the immediate post-war years. It would thus be useful to look first at the novel, and the way it inflects the story. In it, Daisy, a New York magazine illustrator, is 32, and she has been having an affair with Dan O'Mara, a high-powered lawyer, for eight years. In his early forties, Dan is unhappily married, but devoted to his two daughters, Rosamund (15) and Marie (13). His wife, Lucile, knows about the affair. A somewhat confused Pete Lapham then enters Daisy's life, and she responds to his evident need for her by having an affair with him. Their relationship is facilitated by Dan's absence in Washington, trying to get approval for a new type of plane engine – to help the British war effort. Pete tells Daisy about the death of his wife Susy, killed in a road accident (he masochistically blames himself: for marrying her; for letting her drive), but then proposes and, even though she still loves Dan, Daisy accepts. On the evening when Dan learns from Daisy about her impending marriage, he returns home to find – in a melodramatic twist – that Frank Millar, a friend of Lucile's to whom she had turned purely for comfort, has had a (non-fatal) heart attack in their apartment.

Married, Daisy and Pete move in the summer of 1941 to a cottage in Martha's Vineyard; Pete – who foresees the US entry into the war – joins the army and goes to boot camp. But on one of Daisy's trips to New York, Dan turns up, embittered at the failure of his plane engine deal. He takes it out on Daisy, and rapes her. Then, feeling guilty, he phones her from home to apologise. Lucile listens in, and bursts into the conversation, provoking Dan to threaten to kill her. To protect Daisy, he then threatens Lucile with divorce, saying he will name Frank Millar as co-respondent.

Dan rapes Daisy on 8th December 1941, the day after Pearl Harbor. It's as though the national trauma combined with the personal humiliation turn Dan, albeit briefly, into a monster. In the aftermath of the rape, the symbolism becomes even clearer. Daisy thinks she may be pregnant, but it turns out to be an ovarian cyst which has flared up – as though in response to the rape – and must now be removed. Symbolically, (1) the cyst signals a change in Daisy's body: Dan's seed is now actively harmful, (2) the operation hints at the taboo subject of abortion, and (3) the operation will get Dan out of her system. Moreover, it will enable her, in future,

to conceive. Meanwhile, Pete has been away at camp; all he learns is that Daisy needed an operation. Daisy and Dan have a final day together; imagining for themselves an alternative world in which they are married; Daisy then happily catches the train to visit Pete at camp.

Bought by Fox before publication, the novel was a best seller. The long process of turning it into a script is summarised in Fujiwara's biography (2008: 90-92). Satisfying the Production Code Administration was a major issue, but the film neatly solves the problem of Daisy's two sexual liaisons by (1) beginning at the point when Pete enters her life, which stops her sleeping with Dan, and (2) rushing her into marriage with Pete in order to legitimise the sex in that relationship. Joan Crawford seemingly sought the role of Daisy, and Fox studio head Darryl F. Zanuck obtained her on loan-out from Warner Bros. She in turn requested Dana Andrews and Henry Fonda, both under contract at Fox, as her co-stars. It seems likely that the final version of the script by David Hertz was written with these stars in mind.

Although the adaptation shifts the time of action to post-war, otherwise it keeps much of the novel's plot up to Dan's assault on Daisy and its immediate aftermath. The film's final act (of four) is quite different: one suspects that a resolution which was dependent on a suspicious-sounding operation and a rather whimsical final scene between Daisy and Dan was rejected at an early stage. Some of the differences in the first three acts derive from the date shift: thus Pete (Henry Fonda) comes out of the army rather than goes in, and his war-time experiences have compounded his emotional instability. But he is also given a more masculine job: in the novel he was art editor of *The Ladies Gazette*; here he designs boats. Others are auteurist: Frank Millar is dropped, but Lucile (Ruth Warrick) is given a father, Coverly (Nicholas Joy) – a typical Preminger detail – and he serves as her confidant. Dan (Dana Andrews) is now a partner in the law firm of Coverly, Coverly and O'Mara, but he is also the driving force within the firm. But Dan is also undermined: he is given the extremely irritating habit of calling almost everyone but Daisy and the members of his family 'Honeybunch', which makes him seem patronising and 'cocky'.

A major effect of the casting is a shift in the character of Pete. Perhaps the most striking feature of the novel is its emotional violence: Daisy rows constantly with both Dan and Pete. It's as though Janeway can only drive the narrative forward by conflict. The film is markedly less aggressive: Daisy and Dan do still argue, but Fonda's Pete is far calmer than his prototype. When Dan patronises Pete on Daisy's doorstep early in the novel, Pete is enraged and wishes afterwards he'd smashed Dan's face in. Fonda's Pete just takes it in his stride. However, this was Fonda's last film in his contract with Fox, and it seems likely, as Tony Thomas suggests (1983: 135) that the actor, third-billed, saw the role as little more than his ticket to 'freedom'. This would help account for Pete's placidity – which becomes something of a problem in the later scenes – and for the generally low-key level of Fonda's performance.

Otherwise, the four main characters are much the same as in the novel. But two narrative changes are more radical. The legal matter that takes Dan out of town is here the case of Suyo Naguchi, a Nisei who fought in the war and then came home to find that a smart operator had, seemingly legally, taken his farm from him during his absence. This is a very rare Hollywood reference to the appalling treatment, during WW2, of those of Japanese descent in the USA – even the Nisei, who were US citizens. Moreover, since the usurper acted legally, the law itself is implicitly indicted; in the perhaps better-known example of *Bad Day at Black Rock* (John Sturges, 1956), the villainy is confined to the locals.

The second change is foregrounded, and so has greater force. In the scene with Daisy after Dan has lost the Naguchi case, it *seems* as though he intends to rape her – he kisses her very aggressively – and although she fights him off, he still feels guilty, and later phones to apologise. Again Lucile interrupts, provoking Dan's violent outburst – and, in the film's most shocking moment, his threat to kill her is overheard by Marie (Connie Marshall), his eleven year-old daughter. But the film now takes a different direction from the novel. Here it is Lucile who wants a divorce. Moreover, if Dan won't grant her exclusive custody of the girls, she'll take him to court, naming Daisy as co-respondent. After consulting with Daisy and Pete, Dan refuses her terms, and the first part of the last act takes place in a divorce court.

TOP Marie overhears Dan threaten to kill Lucile.

BOTTOM Outside the courtroom, Marie and Rosamund come to see Dan.

Preminger studied the law, and there are court scenes throughout his films; this is the earliest. Nevertheless, to depict a *divorce* court in 1947 was unusual. The PCA was neurotic about divorce, which could only happen under highly specific circumstances, and a serious look at what happens in a divorce hearing was virtually a taboo subject. *Cass Timberlane* (George Sidney, 1947) summarises the ideologically approved stance to such matters. The film begins in a courtroom at the end of a divorce case; Cass Timberlane (Spencer Tracy) is the presiding judge. Summoning the two plaintiffs to the stand, he extols the institution of marriage and refuses the divorce. Otherwise, prior to *Daisy Kenyon*, I can only recall the divorce courts appearing in screwball comedies – e.g. *The Awful Truth* (Leo McCarey, 1937) and *Midnight* (Mitchell Leisen, 1939) – where they are used as the basis for comedy. *Daisy Kenyon* shows the painful side of a divorce hearing.

Lucile's attorney (Art Baker) considers that it is his responsibility not simply to establish Daisy's affair with Dan, but also to insinuate that this has damaged her marriage – she and Pete no longer live together. Eventually, his questions become so personal that Daisy protests, which annoys the judge (Charles Meredith). He now permits the attorney's line of questioning, and Daisy's obvious distress at talking about her marriage prompts Dan to give up the case.

The emotional distress in the courtroom is mirrored in physical pain outside. During the lunch recess, Dan's daughters come to see him. Marie is holding her ear and, although both she and Rosamund (Peggy Ann Garner) claim the pain is caused by the cold weather, Dan realises with a shock it is likely that Lucile has hit her, which happened earlier and which Dan attributes to Lucile's rage at his affair. Although the ambiguity of Preminger's presentation means that we cannot be sure of this reading, the film nevertheless shows the unpleasantness of divorce for all those affected: the co-respondent, the married couple, the children.

Superficially, this supports the PCA's position: divorce is supposed to be bad, and so anything that stresses its messiness is ideologically acceptable. But it is not just a divorce that is at stake here, but also the custody of the children, and Lucile is using the divorce court to separate father and daughters – something which makes both girls very unhappy. As so often in melodrama and the woman's film, the law, working in the interests of the 'righteous', is repressive.

Unfortunately, after the intensity of these scenes, the film becomes more contrived – and 'melodramatic' in a negative sense. Dan now wants to marry Daisy; he and Pete travel to the coastal cottage (here in Cape Cod) to get her to decide between them. But Daisy becomes so panicked that she takes the car out, drives too fast on the icy roads, and crashes. Although a crude device, the crash nevertheless calms Daisy down. Returning to the cottage, she says she wants both men to return to New York. But Pete waits outside whilst she convinces Dan that it's over; he then despatches Dan, and re-enters the cottage. Daisy seems to be expecting him; they kiss.

Janeway's novel is essentially the story of a woman who, over a period of eighteen months or so, painfully extracts herself emotionally from her affair with a dynamic married man in order to commit herself in marriage to a more reliable, sensitive man. It is explicit that both relationships are sexual, which means that this particular 'change of partner' story is not really the same as the more familiar choice in the woman's film (and women's literature) between the husband figure and the lover figure, as in e.g. *Mildred Pierce* (Michael Curtiz, 1945).

The film tells much the same story, but by shifting the events to post-war becomes more incisive. Daisy is a working woman who has maintained her financial independence in the post-war years, which is progressive when set against the more common resolution, as in *Mildred Pierce*, in which the heroine is ultimately recuperated into the home. Dan did not fight in the war, and since we do not learn why (in the novel he's old enough to have fought in World War I), this subtly tells against him. His decision to take on a legal case which has arisen out of the war is presented as hubris: he does it to make Daisy love him. His failure may be seen in moral terms: he hasn't the skill to combat deep-seated racial prejudice because he hasn't the moral commitment. In the novel, the only excuse for Pete being what Daisy calls 'a little unstable' is his wife's death. In the film, he is also a veteran who has been emotionally damaged by the war (in one scene, we see him having nightmares), which strengthens his characterisation and, indeed, poses him against Dan in a rather different way from in the novel.

A change from the novel that is more difficult to read is the relationship between the two men. In the novel, they only meet once, when their paths cross on Daisy's doorstep. But, in the film, Dan goes out of his way to be pleasant to Pete, beginning with a scene – after Dan has learnt that Daisy is married – when the men meet outside the house and discuss boats. In fact, this is a wonderful little scene at Daisy's expense: she watches them from the window, trying to hear what they're saying, baffled by their apparent friendliness towards each other. Later, Dan summons Pete from Cape Cod to consult with him and Daisy over the publicity that would arise if Lucile took matters to court. They meet Daisy in a cocktail bar, and their arrival together again perturbs her: she utters a suspicious, 'Do you two get together often?'. Her confused response to their relationship climaxes when she is so disturbed by the thought of both of them coming to see her that she takes the car out and crashes it.

In *Movies: a Psychological Study*, Martha Wolfenstein and Nathan Leites use the friendship between the two men in *Daisy Kenyon* to illustrate their argument that 'Male friendship in American films is impervious to disruption by a woman' ([1950] 1971: 214), one of their many wild generalisations. But the point here is, rather, that the men become friends through dating the same woman, which is most certainly not the way things usually work in the woman's film. Ultimately, it would seem that the male friendship works to confuse and disorientate Daisy, but the purpose of this is difficult to fathom.

Establishing the characters – Preminger's style

The film's first three scenes will serve to illustrate Preminger's skill. The movie begins with Dan visiting Daisy in her 12th Street apartment. She's at work, sketching her friend and model Mary Angelus (Martha Stewart). Dan sweeps into the apartment, the camera tracking behind him, changes the mood by immediately switching off David Raksin's romantic theme tune on the record player (an act he repeats on later entrances) and tries to communicate with a Daisy who –

FIRST COLUMN

TOP Daisy tries to hear the men's conversation.

BOTTOM The cocktail bar: Daisy is made uneasy by the men's friendliness to each other.

SECOND COLUMN

TOP Dan enters Daisy's apartment and switches off the record player.

BOTTOM Daisy 'tidies up' the room.

irritated by his coming round when she had told him she had a date – virtually ignores his presence by continuing to work. After Mary has left, Daisy expresses her resentment at being no more than Dan's mistress. As she goes around the room thumping the cushions and rearranging the ornaments, she pauses to tell him she's through, then makes a speech:

> 'I have to fight to stay happy; fight for everything. My life's all mixed up … and what fun is it? … You've got her and you've got the kids. You've got your work and being a big shot in Washington. I've just got my work. You've messed that up, too. When I'm mad I can't work, and I'm mad all the time. You're never going to marry me because you're never going to be divorced, for all you say…because you don't want to be.'

Of course, Dan denies this last accusation, and wins Daisy round by softening her: by turning serious, speaking quietly, and telling her how much she means to him. He also says he'll get out whenever she tells him to, which relieves him of the responsibility and gives her the semblance of control. He charms her, and of course he wins; the relationship will continue. At the moment Dan leaves, it starts to rain. In a shot which eloquently expresses Daisy's sudden sense of loneliness, Preminger tracks out on her, sitting alone in the darkened apartment, the rain falling outside the window.

It's a brilliant scene, establishing all the essentials of their relationship. Although quite close to the original scene in the novel, it's more condensed, emphatic, effective. First, Andrews' Dan is much more dynamic than the original figure, and what we see here establishes the pattern: Dan tends to enter a space and take over, so that everyone else is forced to react to what he does. Second, Dan in the film is more convincing romantically: he turns on the charm more smoothly and winningly. The mise-en-scène is also crucial. Just as Preminger's strategy with Dan is to emphasise his dynamism and decisiveness, the camera sweeping around with him, so with Daisy he conveys her sense of being on the one hand trapped – her routine of going round 'tidying up' is through a very circumscribed space – and on the other 'enwombed' in the safety of the home: when Dan moves in to soften her, the connotations are of romantic togetherness. When Daisy's session with Mary finishes, the women alter the diegetic lighting in the apartment: the work lights are removed; Daisy puts on a table lamp. But the lighting is still relatively low key, even though it's daylight outside. The lighting thus collaborates in establishing the atmosphere, in suggesting Daisy's enclosure within the apartment. Daisy does, in fact, spend most of the film in one of her two homes: the apartment and the coastal cottage. That she works at home is part of this and, until the climactic car drive, she is rarely shown out of doors. The association of Daisy with enclosed spaces thus becomes a structural motif in the movie, and Preminger uses this to qualify her independence.

The film's second scene is between Daisy and Pete in the same apartment, and we see at once the contrast between the two men. Waiting for Daisy to dress, Pete moves in a restrained, contained manner, the opposite of Dan's sweeping around. Since he is in the apartment for the first time, we would expect a certain restraint, but Pete seems unsure of himself. But he's also gentle: he makes friends with Daisy's dog, which Dan had ignored. (In the novel, it's a cat, and – in keeping with the novel's generally more aggressive tone – it attacks Dan in his first scene and Pete later.) It is established that Pete and Daisy met at a party last night, and that he gave her his service ribbons. He jokes, 'I always give them away when I find someone who'll listen to me', but symbolically it is as though he had given himself into her safekeeping. For Pete, Daisy is a lifeline back to civilian life; the unseemly haste with which he declares his love and proposes (after a couple of dates) is a measure of his insecurity.

At the same time, Daisy is not as sensitive as she might be. Learning that Pete used to design boats, Daisy remembers his wife's photographs of them. Immediately, she type-casts him: 'What is it with you guys? Don't any of you go back to the wives you left when you went to war?'. The doorbell interrupts before Pete can respond: Dan has sent back the taxi he appropriated from Pete. From Daisy re-entering the apartment and

TOP Dan softens Daisy's hostility.

MIDDLE Track out on Daisy alone in the apartment as it starts to rain outside.

BOTTOM Pete makes friends with Daisy's dog.

reporting this to the two of them exiting is filmed in one of Preminger's characteristic long takes, which emphasises the fluidity of the shifting positions.

Walking back to pick up her fur and handbag, Daisy comments on Dan's high-jacking of Pete's taxi, suggesting he was probably rude. Helping her, Pete smiles: 'I didn't notice'. As they then walk towards the door, Daisy returns to the topic that interests her. Pausing with her hand on the light switch, she says, delivering the line with the suggestion of a challenge, 'We were talking about your wife'. Walking past her to open the door, Pete now responds: 'You were, yes. She's dead'. The camera has been tracking behind them; now quite close to Daisy, it captures her sudden confusion, and when she switches off the light, it's as though she is seeking to hide her embarrassment. It's a beautifully choreographed moment. Daisy is aware that she has made herself seem unfeeling, and she avoids looking at Pete as she walks past him through the door. But she does not apologise, a reflection of the 'hardness' of her character. There is a sense that her relationship with Dan has made her cynical about men, and it's difficult for her to adjust to someone like Pete. Equally, however, Pete's 'I didn't notice' could now perhaps also refer to Daisy's own faux pas, which might suggest delicacy but could equally imply a rather odd emotional detachment.

The third scene is Dan in his Park Avenue apartment with his wife and daughters. Again, the scene expertly summarises the essentials, here Dan's home life. Dan continues to sweep around, taking phone calls as well as dressing for dinner, and Lucile is so outpaced by all this activity that she admits, rather feebly, that nobody expects her to understand his business affairs. We note that they have separate bedrooms, and it's hinted that she probably knows about Daisy, but this is something they do not discuss. But the main point of contention between them is how to treat the girls. Thirteen year-old Rosamund is the first to appear: she enters the room in the background, symbolically between her parents in the foreground, and does a pirouette for her father to admire her in her new dress. Dan is most responsive, whistling and commenting, 'Fifty million dollars, honey'. Irritated, Lucile immediately censures her for wearing lipstick, and so Rosamund appeals to her father, calling him Dan: 'Do you

FIRST COLUMN

TOP A confused Daisy switches off the light as Pete opens the door.

MIDDLE Daisy does not look at Pete as she leaves the apartment.

BOTTOM Dan takes a phone call whilst dressing; Lucile in the foreground.

SECOND COLUMN

TOP Rosamund shows off her new dress – particularly to her father.

BOTTOM Dan comforts an upset Marie; Rosamund on the left; Lucile on the right.

think it's too much?' Dan's response – 'Of course it is, but it's very attractive' – technically supports Lucile, but at the same time flatters Rosamund, which further irritates Lucile and she leaves the room. As Dan gently chides Rosamund for the way she's just treated her mother, they hear the sound of a violent slap, followed by tears: Lucile has hit Marie, allegedly for insolence. Marie runs to her father for comfort, so that Dan is now called upon to mediate between mother and daughter over a much trickier issue. Eventually, he succeeds in comforting Marie and in getting her to apologise to Lucile, before telling Lucile, when the two of them are alone, never to hit the child again. Lucile, in turn, is angry at the way he is at home so infrequently that he can spoil the girls. Here the scene is much more developed than in the novel, not just in the (typically Premingerian) closeness of the father / daughter relationships (Marie, too, will call him Dan), but in the sense that Lucile takes her frustration out on the girls, which sets up the later moment during the divorce proceedings. It is clear that the relationship between husband and wife has broken down, but Dan stays married, we deduce, for the sake of the girls.

These first three scenes illustrate Preminger at his best: his lucidity, his objectivity, the fluidity of his camera movements, his staging, the choreography of his characters. His objectivity, in particular, obliges us to *read* the events; to deduce motivation from frequently ambiguous actions. The extent to which Dan is genuine in saying that Daisy is the most important person in his life, or how much he encourages his daughters in their preference for their father; the way Pete shifts from apparent neediness to apparent detachment – these are just some of the early ambiguities. Later scenes could likewise be discussed along similar lines, but the key role is Daisy's.

Joan Crawford

As has on occasions been noted (e.g. by Andrew Britton [1984] 1995: 162), the dominant structure of Bette Davis' films is focused on her character's rivalry with another woman, frequently over a man, and almost always in a struggle for power. Joan Crawford's films have a completely different dominant structure: she rarely has a female rival; instead her heroine typically has to choose the right partner from two or more men. However, in a surprising number of the films, she initially makes the wrong choice. Again and again, she thinks she is in love with, and may even marry, one man, only for her to realise that another is really a better choice. The difficulty for her heroine then lies in extracting herself from the first relationship. In *Sadie McKee* (Clarence Brown, 1934), there are in fact three prospective partners, and so Sadie moves through two unsatisfactory relationships before ending with the 'right' man. *Chained* (Clarence Brown, 1934), *Forsaking All Others* (W.S. Van Dyke, 1934), *Mannequin* (Frank Borzage, 1938), *A Woman's Face* (George Cukor, 1941) and *When Ladies Meet* (Robert Z. Leonard, 1941) all then have versions of this change of partner structure involving two men.

These films thus construct a whole range of different sorts of partner for the Crawford heroine, a range that ensures a constant play of male / female relationships in the films – something which I suspect helped the popularity of the films with contemporary female audiences. *Daisy Kenyon* fits readily into this series of films; indeed, as Stephen Harvey points out, in the nature of its change of partner structure, the film is similar to *Chained* (1974: 105).

Yet another factor with Crawford is her heroines' sexuality. Before the imposition of the Production Code in 1934, her films included quite a few extra-marital affairs; afterwards, this became difficult. But Crawford's sexuality is such an insistent force in the films that one is sometimes unsure just how far she has gone. Equally, from a certain point, Crawford's films were tailored to *allow* her to have sexual relationships. The pivotal film may well be *A Woman's Face*. In the original Swedish version, *En kvinnas ansikte / A Woman's Face* (Gustaf Molander, 1938), with Ingrid Bergman as Anna, Torsten Barring is simply a posturing villain. But, in the MGM remake, with the story restructured as a Crawford vehicle, Barring (Conrad Veidt) becomes a cultured and charismatic figure, who has no difficulty in seducing Crawford's Anna. And from 1941 on, it is rare for Crawford's heroines *not* to have a sexual relationship with one or more of the film's men.

Moreover, this continued for some time. Like Dietrich, Crawford took on roles in which she is sexually active well into middle age. In Crawford's case, this sets up tensions in some of her 1950s films: since men can so readily seduce her, they may be out to exploit her, as in *Sudden Fear* (David Miller, 1952) and *Female on the Beach* (Joseph Pevney, 1955). Made when Crawford was 43, *Daisy Kenyon* is on the cusp of this transition, but its premise is nevertheless that Crawford is not simply sexual, but also romantic and desirable. To claim, as Foster Hirsch has done, that Crawford was 'too old' for the role of Daisy (2007: 146) seems to me churlish. Crawford is fine as Daisy, and it is clearly progressive that her age is not a handicap.

Daisy also fits the typical Crawford heroine in that she is a career woman who has succeeded in keeping her financial independence. The opening scene between Daisy and Dan establishes that it is her *work* that is suffering because she hasn't secured from him the commitment of marriage. The emotional difficulties of the change of partner structure dominate the film, but Daisy's need to work is never forgotten.

To accommodate the Crawford persona, Daisy in the film is made markedly less abrasive and aggressive than in the novel, but there are, nevertheless, criticisms of her as a woman's film heroine. An early example is her assumption that Pete must have left his wife. It is almost a given in the woman's film that, in personal matters, the heroine is more sensitive and understanding than the men. But Daisy seems to lack the emotional insights that her sister heroines almost invariably possess. There is a sense that she's too wrapped up in her own view of things to really understand. Moreover, this is, I believe, a significant feature of a number, perhaps most, of Crawford's films. As a consequence, unlike other woman's film heroines, Crawford is only occasionally called upon to sacrifice her own happiness for that of those she loves. The heroine needs to be able to understand and sympathise with the weakness or inadequacy of men – as Greta Garbo and Bette Davis of course do – in order to be in a position to make such a sacrifice. Compared to them, Crawford fails the test. One could argue that this is progressive: why should the heroine sacrifice her own needs? But it is, nevertheless, a difficult path for a heroine: she risks seeming selfish, and so losing audience sympathy. I suspect that, in negotiating this territory, most Crawford films reveal ideological tensions.

Despite careful scripting to satisfy the PCA, it is quite clear that Daisy's relationships with both men are sexual. Moreover, the film also skilfully implies sex. There are two key scenes. After he and Dan have discussed boats, Pete comes up the stairs (Daisy's is a second floor apartment), but then sits at the bottom of the next flight of stairs; Daisy joins him. Michel Cieutat mentions that couples sit on stairs in Hollywood films to discuss their problems (1991: 205); my reinflection of this is that the discussion is usually a prelude to the couple making up by going up to the bedroom and sleeping together (2005: 369). The latter is certainly implicit here. Pete declares his intention to kiss Daisy, 'like nobody was ever kissed – even before you wash your face'. He then lifts her in his arms: 'Were you ever carried over your own threshold before?' Daisy: 'Not sober, darling'. Pete carries her in and closes the door.

The implied sex here is also structurally significant, since Pete is celebrating the usurping of the previous lover. He will even have sex with Daisy in the bed she used to share with Dan. Although the PCA could not really object because the couple are now married, there is a sense that Preminger is pushing things a little far. Writing about a scene in *Fallen Angel* (Preminger, 1946) in which Dana Andrews and Alice Faye are shown in bed together, Bob Baker comments on 'Preminger's censor-baiting' (1992: 189). In this scene in *Daisy Kenyon*, Preminger has converted the familiar 'groom carries bride across threshold' moment into what seems like an anticipation of imminent sexual abandon. Such a notion would, I suspect, have been even clearer to readers of the novel, where there is indeed a scene in which an aroused Pete and Daisy rush into her apartment for extremely urgent sex: see Janeway (1973: 75).

In the next scene, Pete and Daisy have moved to Cape Cod; it's as though the New York apartment has, for the time being, served its purpose in Daisy's emotional journey from Dan to Pete. When Daisy returns to it, we have the attempted rape, which provokes a crisis in this journey. But the intermediate stage is in the Cape Cod cottage, where the focus is just as much on Pete getting over Susy (they also lived in the area) as it is on Daisy getting over Dan.

The second (implicit) sex scene occurs in the cottage, but, in the events leading up to it, there are further details which complicate our view of Daisy. First, as Daisy works in the living room, Pete tosses in bed with a nightmare. But her response is to close the bedroom door on him, as if cutting herself off from that problem. (Contrast the sympathy with which Peggy / Teresa Wright responds to Fred / Dana Andrews' equivalent nightmare in *The Best Years of Our Lives* [William Wyler, 1946].) Waking, Pete tries to describe the nightmare to Daisy, saying it involved both Susy and his war-time experiences. But Daisy interprets things in her own way – 'But mostly Susy' – even though Pete comments: 'If you say so, doctor – only I don't know how you know'. The implication is surely that Daisy doesn't really know, but she wants to take Pete in a certain direction. Not for the first time drawing a parallel between them, she says, 'I've had to work to get Dan out of my system. I've done it, too. Now you've got to work'. She produces a poem which Pete wrote when Susy was killed; it ends with the line, 'What happens to a hurricane, that hasn't any place to go?' Pete responds, 'It was self-pity. The whole nightmare was that', which shows that (a) he doesn't understand about nightmares and (b) he wants to change the subject. But he then raises a delicate matter, one which suggests that Daisy is being optimistic in saying she's got Dan out of her system: he points out that Daisy has never told him she loves him.

One issue being addressed here is Daisy's commitment to the marriage. In *Movie* 2, Paul Mayersberg suggests that Daisy marries Pete in 'a mood of despair' (1962: 15), and although this seems a little extreme, there is no doubt that she has not entered into the marriage with the sort of happiness and optimism one would expect. The sequence lays out some of the difficulties Daisy is having. First, she is awkward when it comes to comforting Pete: Crawford is not an actress who finds it easy to 'mother', and this extends to her relationships with men who are vulnerable in some way. Second, she simplifies

TOP Pete carries Daisy over the threshold.

MIDDLE Post-coital: Pete and Daisy through the bedroom window and the rain.

BOTTOM Pete and Daisy celebrate the success of their sex with a kiss.

TOP Daisy with the fire in the background as Dan leaves.

MIDDLE Daisy reconciles with the now humble Dan, touching his face.

BOTTOM Dan thirstily drinks from the bottle of milk.

Pete's emotional problems so she can offer forthright advice. Taken together with her reluctance to say she loves him, one could argue that these details are a sign, not often registered in films, of the difficulties of (early) married life. But there is also a sense in which they subtly undermine Daisy. For a wife to see her husband through a difficult period of readjustment after the war requires certain emotional resources: Daisy, it is implied, lacks these.

However, the sex scene follows this, and this does bring the two of them closer together. The post-nightmare scene is terminated with a fade to black, followed by Pete, in pyjamas, lifting the blind on the rain outside. Daisy joins him (in the sort of nightdress that could pass, under the Production Code, as day wear), and in a reverse angle shot, we see them from outside the window, the rain pouring down. The film cuts back inside, and Daisy tells Pete that she loves him. He goes to pour out drinks for a toast, after which she tells him, 'Now you know what happened to that hurricane that hadn't any place to go'. 'Now I know' responds Pete, and they kiss passionately.

Evidently, Daisy is talking about sex. The window is in the bedroom, so we deduce that they've just got out of bed, and that Daisy is complimenting Pete on his performance. Here the rain has different connotations from that in the opening scene; it suggests, rather, sexual togetherness. Rain is another motif discussed by Cieutat: he suggests that it frequently possesses sexual associations (1991: 304-308); this is an excellent example. Moreover, the cottage has now acquired the associations of togetherness and warmth identified by Jean-Loup Bourget in an article on Crawford in *Film Reader 3* (1978). However, although Bourget notes what he calls 'the cottage-motif' (26) in Crawford's movies, he does not sort out the range of ways in which it functions. In melodrama generally, the cottage (cabin; beach house) is an escape from the world, and the associations are usually romantic, but they may shift, as in film noir, towards adultery and murder. Crawford's films cover the full range: in *Mannequin*, the associations of the country cottage are romantic; in *Mildred Pierce*, those of the beach house are typically noir, and the cottage in *Daisy Kenyon* and the beach house in Humoresque (Jean Negulesco, 1946) fall somewhere in between. The associations of the *Daisy Kenyon* cottage are, ultimately, positive, but the moments of harmony there are relatively brief. In addition, there is the deeper problem of Daisy's unease outside the home: the car crash is almost a parody of her inability to function competently when outdoors. However, as Bourget notes, the fire in the hearth is a potent symbol in the final scene: when Daisy finally says goodbye to Dan, Preminger frames her so that she is against the fire, which emphasises the familiar association of the woman and the hearth in such a way as to stress his loss.

There is another 'sex scene': Dan's sexual assault. This is more problematic, since although it triggers the chain of events of the last act, it is weakly motivated. The scene begins with Dan pushing his way into the New York apartment uninvited. He and Daisy argue quite violently; in particular, she refuses to show sympathy for his having lost the Naguchi case: 'The one time in your life you thought about somebody else, you lost. Well, that's too bad. But if you're really trying to do something that will change things for people, you've got to be humble'. The problem with Dan's reaction – his aggressive sexual attack – is that it is out of character: unlike his prototype in the novel, Andrews' Dan lacks the viciousness that would motivate such an assault. Daisy fights him off, and sobs that she'll never forgive him; Mary returns to the apartment to prevent matters getting worse.

Despite what Daisy says, subsequently she does forgive – which is important for a woman's film heroine. After the violent row with Lucile, Dan returns to Daisy's. He waits outside her door; she, too, had been unable to sleep, and had gone, we assume, for a walk. He tells her, 'I'm humble now', and although he doesn't actually apologise, he makes it clear that he's here to make up: 'I couldn't go on thinking of you with that expression in your eyes'. She gently touches his face. After she's gone inside, Dan suddenly picks up a milk bottle

from the doorstep and gulps from it thirstily. It's a startlingly effective moment: Daisy's gesture shows she has forgiven him, and his drinking the milk suggests the resolution of a crisis.

Milk is yet another of Cieutat's motifs: 'In the cinema, [drinking] milk is a symbol of faith in the future, and therefore of optimism' (1991: 182). (I discuss Cieutat's thoughts on the motif in *Hitchcock's Motifs* [2005: 29-30].) Dan and Daisy's relationship had been poisoned by his violence; now they can move on. Mayersberg goes further, and takes the scene and its resolution in Dan's drinking the milk as characteristic of Preminger: 'The grotesque realism of the fight scene dissolves here into a mood of symbolic forgiveness. *Daisy Kenyon* is constructed, like all Preminger movies, on a dialectic of crisis and renewal, and Preminger moves from one to the other with Shakespearean fluidity' (1962: 16).

Temperamentally, Dan and Pete are in crucial respects like polar opposites: one an archetypal dominant male, forceful and successful; the other the sort of man who finds life rather threatening, and who needs a protective framework in order to be able to function properly. It is implied that the army has provided such a framework for Pete: in the novel, he becomes a lieutenant even before going on active duty, but in the film, he is a master sergeant, not an officer, a rank which would have required him to be more decisive and authoritative. In addition, he remains in the army until he marries Daisy, as if he anticipates that she, now, will provide him with a safe haven. Dan, by contrast, only realises that he can be vulnerable and need Daisy when, returning to New York after the failure of the Naguchi case, he gives the taxi driver Daisy's address in mistake for his own (a clear Freudian slip). The scene which crystallises Pete's 'problem' is the nightmare and its aftermath; the equivalent scene for Dan is the attempted rape and its aftermath. Accordingly, Daisy is called upon to act in opposite ways to these two crises: doing her best to comfort Pete; fighting off, but then forgiving, Dan. This is indeed standard Crawford material: that all her men 'need her', but in different ways, and she has to negotiate her way through the competing demands.

Despite certain limitations implicit in the Crawford persona, the film's handling of the emotional shifts in Daisy's relationships with the two men is fairly successful. Less satisfactory is the treatment of the melodrama. Melodrama is actually foregrounded as an issue in the proposal scene: Daisy characterises the way Pete feels about his wife's death and his war-time experiences as melodrama: 'I believe the facts all right, but not the melodrama. If everything had gone dead for you, you wouldn't know it. You wouldn't be sitting here trying to sound like a case history'. This, too, is taken in part from the novel (Janeway 1973: 78), but it's re-scripted to make it less fraught – there Daisy is genuinely getting angry with Pete for his self-pity – and more reflective. But, as the film develops, we see that Daisy herself is prone to melodrama. This is most apparent in the scenes which lead up to her (highly melodramatic) car drive. Unable to cope with the pressure of deciding between the two men, Daisy becomes panic-stricken and reacts like a child – running away.

This is the film's most problematic sequence. When Dan first phones to tell Daisy that they want to see her, she is still in the New York apartment, frenziedly packing. Her response to his call is an incredulous, 'Peter's with you?', then 'Oh, no. No, I'm not up to that kind of civilized nonsense'. She flees to the cottage. But the men pursue her, and Dan phones from the local railroad station, telling her that they're coming to see her and it's no use running away. Daisy hangs up, but the phone immediately rings again. At this point, the sense of melodrama is heightened in a manner most untypical of Preminger, as close-ups of Daisy are intercut with a series of increasingly looming close-ups of the ringing phone. When Daisy then flees in the car, the shots of her driving are accompanied by the ringing, as if she is still being hounded by it. Only when she crashes the car does the ringing stop.

There is a structural reason for Daisy's wild drive: it re-creates Susy's drive of five years ago but gives it a happy ending. Although we know nothing of the circumstances of Susy's fatal car accident, it was on the same roads. Nevertheless, the sequence doesn't work. In *From Reverence to Rape*, Molly Haskell writes of Daisy 'driving eighty miles an hour through the woods, her chin jutting, her eyes glaring ahead not at the road but into the middle distance of her own self-absorption, in a narcissistic trance that can only be broken (since she can't change expression) by the crash when she drives off the road' (1974: 168). The notion of narcissistic self-absorption is telling.

ABOVE Daisy emerges from the crashed car.

This is not the frenzied, hysterical reaction of, say, Georgia (Lana Turner) in her equivalent car drive in *The Bad and the Beautiful* (Vincente Minnelli, 1952). Daisy has been impelled, like a melodramatic heroine, into an emotional, overwrought reaction, but she enacts this more like an 'emotional game' in the sense outlined by Eric Berne in *Games People Play*, a game along the lines of 'See What You made Me Do' ([1964] 1967: 76-79). The reckless car drive satisfies Daisy's image of herself as harassed by outside demands (from, of course, the men) into such a foolish reaction. When Dan first phones, she tells him that she's got to be alone to work, but rather than suggest a sensible solution (such as give me a week to think things over), Daisy rejects the men's 'civilized nonsense' and flees. She casts herself as irrational. Whereas Georgia's frenzied car drive brilliantly captures the sense of a woman driven to hysteria, there's something rather silly about Daisy's drive. Once more, one feels, the film is criticising its heroine.

Although when Daisy returns to the cottage, she says that she wants both men to leave, Pete stays. This raises the question of whether this is a false happy ending, and the film is implying that Daisy would be better off alone.

There is a nexus of competing factors here. First, the PCA would require a suitably moral ending, which means that Dan would have to be sent away – implicitly back to his family – and Pete would be expected to stay. Hence, in Daisy's final scene with Dan, she parrots the ideology: when Dan says that his marriage is over, she responds: 'It can't be over as long as the children are a part of it'. But the scripting is more subtle when a reference to Dan's family as his 'responsibility' is included. At the end of their scene, Daisy says to Dan: 'It would never have worked … because what you called wanting me wasn't any more than wanting to run away from responsibility: the way you're doing now'. The phraseology enables the 'real' thoughts to be inferred: 'what you called wanting me wasn't any more than wanting sex'. This doesn't change the direction of the scene – she is still getting rid of him – but it does shift the focus towards what we feel were Dan's real motives in having the affair. Second, and in support of this ending, is the change of partner structure from the book: it seems important that this sort of story can be told without impugning the heroine's character. In other words, it should be possible for a woman to extract herself from an unsatisfactory relationship, even if it is sexual, and move on to a better one without the PCA insisting that she be punished – the sort of punishment that is inflicted, for example, on Terry (Irene Dunne) in *Love Affair* (Leo McCarey, 1939) for her past affair with Ken (Lee Bowman).

But, third, and working against this, is the problem of Fonda's Pete. Beginning with the scene between the three of them in the cocktail bar, Pete plays it very cool, almost as if he doesn't really care about the outcome. He says it doesn't matter to him what happened between Daisy and Dan; he married Daisy because he needed her, but he is all right now, and if she wants to divorce him to marry Dan, he won't object. We might conclude that his behaviour here is masking his feelings: that his speech is an expression of his irritation at (or even his masochistic submission to) Daisy wanting to fight the divorce case on Dan's side, and that Dan's suggestion that he's 'hostile' is close to the mark. But the way Pete plays the scene leaves these questions unresolved. Daisy is shocked at his attitude, but he walks off before she can properly protest.

Equally, we do not know why Daisy and Pete stop living together. This is an odd omission, since it suggests that Pete really doesn't care any more. In the final scene in the cottage, Pete says very little to Daisy, and what he does say is ambiguous. He explains that Dan has asked him to give her a divorce, but when Daisy asks why he's come here, he replies, 'To have you ask me for it yourself'. He does not add, 'if you want to', so that he could mean 'I'm here because I want you to ask me for a divorce'. He then goes to wait outside, leaving the floor to Dan. But, after he has sent Dan off alone in the taxi, he re-enters the cottage and declares: 'When it comes to modern combat tactics, you're both babies compared to me'. In other words, this is really the outcome I was working towards, and the two of you didn't have a chance. Daisy pours each of them a drink, and they wordlessly repeat the toast and the kiss which followed the post-coital declaration of love.

Jean-Loup Bourget is upbeat about this ending: '[T]he cottage also becomes the symbol of Fonda's quiet confidence. He is sure of his love and of Crawford's reciprocatory feelings; knowing the decision she has already taken, he refuses to influence her. The accident and the cottage in the snow are the tangible signs of the recognition of happiness' (1978: 26). The scene seems to me more problematic. At the very least, Pete must be testing Daisy; seeing whether she really has got Dan out of her system. But his own detachment, and especially his cryptic line about her asking him for a divorce, make things much more difficult for her. To withhold any intimation of his own feelings on the matter may be read as both sadistic and masochistic; as though, he, too, is indulging in emotional game playing. His final line reinforces the sense that, to him, it's all been rather like a game. For these reasons, despite the repetition of the toast and the kiss, there would seem to be something uneasy about the ending.

Ultimately, and typically of Preminger, *Daisy Kenyon* seems to be an enigmatic film, in which it would be difficult to reach firm conclusions about a number of key issues, including how we are to read the ending. Some of the ambiguities are bound up with the way Preminger articulates the Crawford persona. Although the stylistics of the star vehicle – punctuating close-ups of Crawford; a key light almost invariably on her face – are present, Preminger nevertheless views Daisy with more detachment than is the norm for a woman's film heroine. As a consequence, the rhetoric of Crawford's performance (the way she presents herself to her audience) tends to be more foregrounded than usual. Whereas, in a film like *Mildred Pierce*, we identify with Mildred's suffering, Preminger's inclination is to problematise Daisy's, most strikingly in the climactic sequences. However, this is not to maintain that Daisy is undermined at the expense of the men. All the characters, even the children, are viewed with a similar critical detachment. When the girls come to see Dan during the divorce proceedings, Marie holds her ear in such a way as to signal to him that her mother has hit her, which is her way of appealing to him: please don't leave me with her. But we don't know whether Lucile really has hit her, or whether Marie is simply using daughterly wiles to make such an appeal. In his slightly delayed response to this, Dan puts on an equivalent act – making a point of signalling his distress – for Daisy's benefit: taking out his handkerchief, holding it to his eyes, stopping dramatically on the stairs. Again and again, details in the film could be similarly cited for their insights

and complexities. The result is a rich, challenging movie, one which has been unjustly ignored in film history.

MICHAEL WALKER

Michael Walker has been on the editorial board of *Movie* and its on-line successor since 1969. His most recent publications are 'Steven Spielberg and the Rhetoric of an Ending' in *A Companion to Steven Spielberg*, ed Nigel Morris, Wiley Blackwell (2017) and *Modern Ghost Melodramas: What Lies Beneath* (Amsterdam University Press, 2017).

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