

***Breathless* - comments**

The movie *Breathless* contains three lines that are especially noteworthy. Regarding the first line, the principal male character, Michel Poiccard, says: “You Americans are dumb. You admire Lafayette and Maurice Chevalier. They're the dumbest of all Frenchmen.” Regarding the second and third lines, Van Doude, a Journalist, asks: “What's more ethical: The women who cheats, or the man who walks out?” Parvulesco answers: “The woman who cheats.”

Regarding Poiccard's line, this statement, which consists of three sentences, is delivered in the form of an assertion. Now, the movie company has a right to make movies through which to express their opinions, but when those opinions are presented in the form of assertions, they warrant scrutiny. Is Poiccard's statement about Americans, Lafayette and Maurice Chevalier true? If it is true, then fine, the movie has now educated the public, thus performing a valuable public service. But maybe it is not true.

Let us examine certain facts. The United States sent an entire army of soldiers to France twice, in World War One and World War Two. There are no historical sources that this writer is aware of that characterizes the Americans who twice were sent to France as dumb. Lafayette fought with the Americans during the Revolutionary War; today he is honored as a hero. There is no historical source that this writer is aware of that characterizes Lafayette as being the dumbest of all Frenchmen. The same disclaimer applies to Maurice Chevalier who fought for France during World War One and for two years was held captive by the Germans as a prisoner of war. It seems that Poiccard's statement is not based on fact. So, why is it presented as such?

Regarding the second and third lines, which are delivered as part of a colloquy, what is said here? What is said is that it is more ethical for a woman to cheat than for a man to leave. This too is delivered in the form of an assertion, thus also warranting scrutiny as to its truthfulness. As the movie was made in the West, do Western values support the validity of that statement? The seventh commandment states: You shall not commit adultery. In the West, marriage is

considered a legally binding contract and adultery grounds for divorce. It seems that this statement, that it is ethical for a woman to cheat, is inconsistent with Western values. So, why is it presented as a fact?

It seems that the movie maker was attempting to use the movie to make certain political points. The problem is that these points were raised but not developed, thus leaving them hanging and thereby undermining the value of the movie as a work of art. To state that Americans are dumb without further developing the point is gratuitous. To state that it is ethical for women to cheat without further developing that idea renders it a cliché.

The artist as political activist has a long history. Paul Robeson said, "I saw the connection between the problems of all oppressed people and the necessity of the artist to participate fully."¹ Robeson's statement is correct, but in order to participate fully, the artist must clearly state his political position. In this respect the movie maker hedges. This weakens the movie, both dramatically and as a venue for political expression.

PWW 4/2014

¹ Clarke, John Henrik, "Paul Robeson: The Artist as Activist and Social Thinker," www.nbufront.org - online