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1805 AND ALL THAT - DEFINING THE NAVAL WAR FILM

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This paper seeks to address a series of questions, ideas, and interpretations which arise from the examination of representations of navies and naval history on film. The basis of this examination has been a detailed review of feature films which portray naval stories, events, characters and battles. The questions which set this work in motion were a) whether naval war films were distinguishable from other types of war film, and b) as a result, whether they were different enough to represent a distinctive genre of their own. The conclusions to be drawn from the review would at the very least acknowledge a broader and more complex appreciation of the formal properties and meanings of the war genre, and at the most propose a definition of a distinct, recognisable generic or sub-generic group, which would be worthy of further investigation. In the majority of cases, the film texts chosen for study came from either Britain or America: this limitation is justified on the grounds of feasibility (since the resultant group numbers nearly a hundred films), critical and theoretical applicability (as the majority of extant analysis of the war genre addresses these countries and their film industries), and cultural suitability (given that these are countries with highly visible and long-standing naval traditions which have found elucidation within popular media).

In order to address those questions, a broad-based consideration of the war film genre has been necessary, which has involved opening the textual, critical and cultural issues out, and narrowing them down again. This reflects the way the war film or any other genre is conceptualised when a textual, or historical, or institutional examination

of its production is attempted. The focus shifts from the wider war film genre down to more succinct definitions of World War II movies, down further to depictions of naval subjects, then pulls back out to a more inclusive definition of the 'naval film', which may embrace depictions of naval subjects other than of the World Wars (for example, the Cold War, or the Nelsonian era), and in other genres or genre combinations (comedies, musicals, and disaster movies). Definitive war-time movies from both America and Britain which concentrate on naval subjects (such as We Dive at Dawn; Anthony Asquith, 1943, and They Were Expendable; John Ford, 1945) may not at first glance appear to be distinguishable from contemporary films about the same war or a different armed service (such as The Way Ahead; Carol Reed, 1944 about the British Army, or Air Force; Howard Hawks, 1943, about the US Air Force). However, if differences emerge, they may be discerned within and shared with naval-oriented films from other popular genres (musicals like Follow the Fleet; Mark Sandrich, 1936, and Anchors Aweigh; George Sidney, 1945, and disaster movies such as Tora! Tora! Tora!; Richard Fleischer, 1970), depicting other wars (World War I in Forever England; Walter Forde, 1935) or produced in later decades (U-571; Jonathan Mostow, 2000). However, even these initial questions pose their own problems, the foremost being how the war film itself is defined. If we look at some examinations and rationalisations of the war film as a studio product, we can gain a sense of how the genre has been changed or manipulated, and how naval subjects might fit into or diverge from patterns or cycles of production.

In his comprehensive consideration of the convergences between Hollywood cinema and American history, John Belton offers a very wide-ranging reading of the war film as a genre, allowing the incorporation of filmic treatments from the silent period to the present (Belton 1994, 164-183). Within the context of Hollywood

production, Belton reads the war film as a genre no different from any other, with its own conventions and appeals, and with the spectacle of combat functioning as an equivalent to the staging of song and dance routines in musicals.(164)   While it may appear to be a highly conservative genre, in re-asserting societal values and roles in the defence of national principles, Belton sees the war film as an extreme and peripheral Hollywood product, which highlights the structural and ideological precepts of Hollywood narrative through its repeated transgression of them (171).

Belton identifies four consistent areas of concern within the war film, which reflect its divergence from the formal and moral staples of narrative cinema: the suspension of civilian morality within the diegetic environment of war; the primacy of group activity and goals over personal motivations, with individualism (an accepted and inspiring quality in characterisation within mainstream Hollywood narrative) being characterised as an indulgence; rivalry and oedipal conflicts between men in predominantly male groups, which lead to the peripheralisation of women, the potential for homo-eroticism in the representation of military hierarchies, and (in the cliché of two comrades-in-arms in love with the same girl) the valuation of women as tokens of homo-social exchange; and the representation of problems on the home front, in the separation of family members and the difficulties of re-integration experienced by returning veterans (165-171). These common narrative clusters unite disparate war films, from The Big Parade (King Vidor, 1925) and South Pacific (Joshua Logan, 1958) to The Deer Hunter (Michael Cimino, 1978), across pro- and anti-war stances and the boundaries of other genres, such as comedy and the musical. This approach offers the valuable recognition of filmic features which embody and convey responses to war in American society. Above all, American war films seek to provide an unambiguous justification for the involvement and loss of citizens in violent conflicts.

This is particularly evident in films made during and about World War II, and distinguishes them from British films of the same period (where the need to fight is often not interrogated), and later American films portraying more problematic conflicts, such as the Vietnam War (175). Like any other popular genre, the war film is available for the affirmation or the contradiction of cultural, political and moral precepts underpinning American society. As a reflection of generic consistency, and of Hollywood's responses to contemporary events, audience tastes and public perceptions of conflict, Belton's categorisation of the American war film is revealing and persuasive, but inevitably does not distinguish specific eras or types of war film for detailed, sub-categorical analysis.

To digress for a moment on Belton's observation of the war film's representation of Oedipal conflict, it is worth considering Steve Neale's detailed examination of this feature in detail, which identifies the potential for both the conservative and oppositional functioning of Hollywood narrative form (Neale 1981, 35-57). Neale's analysis of the war film's frequent elucidation of Oedipal conflicts reveals its tendency to invalidate rather than reaffirm structures of institutional (and narrative) authority. This isolation of problems in narrative agency, and the often arbitrary nature of plot development in popular film, identifies a convergence of film form and diegetic development in matters of authority. The attribution of arbitrary, disruptive power to the enemy, to set narrative events in train and precipitate an individual and national response, is an important facet of the war film's personalization of war's causes, and its propagandist function in audience mobilisation (38-39). However, Neale also proposes that the unequal apportionment of knowledge upon which hierarchic, military authority is based can lead in the war film to unsympathetic representations of institutional power. Using Raoul Walsh's Objective Burma! (1944), Lewis Milestone's A Walk in

the Sun (1945), and Stanley Kubrick's Paths of Glory (1957) as examples of arbitrariness in military command and narrative development, Neale exposes a drift towards anti-war and anti-establishment arguments, even in wartime propagandist productions. Establishment authorities, the 'headquarters' and 'high commands' cited as the source of obscure orders, can appear as faceless and impersonal as the enemy, in the effect of their unpredictable and unaccountable actions or decisions on their own soldiers. This can prove the case either with or without the effects of dramatic irony, where omniscient narration may reveal more information to the viewer than is available to the protagonists themselves, as in Objective Burma. Neale's observations of the war genre prove that 'issues of knowledge and power' are central to the representation of masculine action in the war film, and are explored through 'alignments, re-alignments, discrepancies and dislocations in the scales of narrative knowledge possessed by command, the [enemy], the men, and…the spectator' (50, 45). Through this emphasis upon authority and causality, the nature of war and its representation in film provide a focus for definitions of masculinity, including the probing of Oedipal conflicts and considerations of autonomy and power, in tandem with a testing of the conventions of Hollywood narrative.

By narrowing the focus of textual analysis to a smaller field of films, a more detailed mapping of the conventions of the war genre becomes possible. In attempting this enquiry into a clearly demarked group, Jeanine Basinger's critical commentary on the characteristics and development of the American war film remains the definitive categorisation of the genre (Basinger 1986). Basinger's focus does not rest upon the representation of World War II, or the wider war genre within American cinema, but on the emergence of a specific sub-genre, which she labels 'the World War II combat film', which epitomises the filmic treatment of armed conflict. In her evaluation, the 'hard

core' combat film, composed mostly if not entirely of representations of military action, appears in 1943, once the experience and newsreel images of the early part of the Pacific War have been digested by filmgoers and filmmakers (24). Basinger assembles a robust working model of the combat film through the tracing of consistent characteristics in films of the late war period, and noting contrasting deployments of the same conventions in post-war films about World War II and later, more problematic conflicts.

Basinger contends that twelve films released in 1943 are crucial to the emergence of the combat film, as they concretise the conventions, themes and narrative concerns of the war-time war film. Notably, five of the twelve are based on naval subjects, but of these only three receive brief analysis, and are used to illustrate the pervasiveness of patterns of narrative and characterisation established in films portraying war on land and in the air.[1] Basinger advocates a hierarchy within combat films, with those depicting infantry combat representing the 'truest and purest' form, followed in order by films about submarines, ships and aircraft (21). This ranking is based not only on the quantity and graphicness of combat which the films encompass, but on additional factors related to its depiction: the potential for distance from the enemy; the availability of space and time for reflection by the protagonists on the experience of combat; and the opportunity to remember peace time, or to be reunited with loved ones. The purest infantry combat films, portraying isolated, platoon-sized groups in near-constant action, display the fewest of these factors, while films about air force operations, showing flights to and from action, life on bases and fraternisation with civilians, exhibit the most.

The combat film's essential group is composed of representatives of the full range of American communities and ethnicities, with the cross-sectional symbolism of

the military society-in-miniature being heightened by additional modifiers of age, experience and action. Basinger notes the character types and their suggested narrative functions: the senior officer father-figure, who is killed unexpectedly at an early stage in order to open the way for a true, resourceful, pragmatic hero (certainly of lower rank, sometimes of lower class) to emerge; a rival or adversary for the hero within the group, who questions his decisions before recognizing and accepting his authority; representatives of youth and age (new recruits and old hands), immigrant communities and minorities, who serve as more or less willing subordinates, comic relief and early casualties in the platoon's operational odyssey (51-53). The sequence, manner and significance of deaths within the group is as predetermined as rank and personality as by stereotypical characteristics of ethnicity, class and religious belief, just as the group's composition and characteristics also represent a deliberate and compelling contrast to the racist, dehumanising treatment of the enemy (56-60). The narratives which contain this emblematic group prove equally predictable within Basinger's formulation of the typical combat film: the narrative events are located more or less precisely and factually within the geography and history of a specific campaign; the group is assembled, either purposefully or haphazardly, for a specific mission; this objective may be modified by new developments, and its achievement threatened by internal dissension; the journey to the objective gives opportunities for expanded characterisation, including reminiscences of home and peace; and the accomplishment of the mission provides the active conclusion to preceding, contemplative debates within the group as to the validity of their task, and, either implicitly or explicitly, the conduct of the war itself (61-62).

Ironically, within Basinger's hierarchy, the submarine film (in which the crew serves as the group, far from home and often permanently in close proximity to the

enemy), comes second, as the closest equivalent to the infantry combat film. However, this similarity is undermined (and, by implication, the combat less intense) because the boat itself functions as a both a weapon of war, and a communal and private space away from conflict, in which peacetime life can be replicated as well as recalled. In distinction from the infantry film's concentration on combat, Basinger characterises the navy film as 'about domestic strife', detectable in both in the biological family left behind on land and the figurative family assembled on board (21-22). This atmosphere of domesticity is even more marked in the case of films set aboard surface ships, which avoid the submarine's associations of claustrophobia. In Basinger's estimation, this tendency separates films based on naval operations from those representing land war, not simply in offering an alternative interpretation of war's spatial boundaries, but also in re-conceptualising relationships between characters. Although she suggests that a ship's crew is characterised as a 'family' prone to soap-operatic disputes (67), Basinger does not follow the logic of this analogy, to consider its ramifications for the distribution of power and authority: if the infantry platoon is depicted positively as a largely democratic 'band of brothers', the ship's company is often seen as a troubled, patriarchal dictatorship. Challenges to naval authority, directed against the father-figure of the captain by subordinate officers, assume a more marked Oedipal dimension than is suggested by Basinger's description of conflict between the hero and his adversary in the infantry film. This is a good moment to factor in Steve Neale's discussion of Oedipal conflict, as the naval variant of the war film offers a more pointed portrayal of the symbolic order via the characterization of the ship's captain. The ubiquitous threat of insubordination, and the questioning of authority (though common to the war genre in general) lead in the naval film to the threat and taboo of outright mutiny: the displacement and replacement of patriarchal authority not simply in terms

of command, but in status and ownership of a mythologized female entity, the ship herself. It is possible, then, that this area, where disputes over the disposition and dependability of authority are handled differently in land and naval war films, represents a relevant distinction between their forms, which belies further, significant divergences.

Accepted guidelines and recognizable conventions on narrative, characterisation, propaganda and ideological values which the war film can contain, can be gathered from Basinger and other commentators. A closer analysis of some examples of naval war films for comparison with such traits will help to establish how far they conform to these rules of thumb, and are undifferentiated from this combat film model (as Basinger seems to imply), or whether, as suggested by the naval film's provocative portrayal of mutiny within the war film's incorporation of Oedipal conflict, there are additional distinctive characteristics which set naval war films apart.

For illustrative purposes, this paper will look at three possible candidates for election to a naval film genre, and probe their differences from their peers and comparable texts which have at least in the past been placed unproblematically in the war film category. As a British example, In Which We Serve (Noel Coward, 1942) forwards itself for consideration as the director/star's tribute to the Royal Navy and as a production perceived as emblematic of the British wartime cinema. Similarly, They Were Expendable (John Ford, 1945) is one of several works devoted to naval subjects which its director (a reserve officer in the US Navy) completed during the conflict. The most recent example is K19: The Widowmaker (Kathryn Bigelow, 2002). This film enlarges the scope of enquiry not only in terms of its modernity, but because it is set aboard a submarine and the events it depicts take place within the Cold War stand-off of the 1960s, rather than the unambiguous combat of the World Wars.

A short synopsis of each film will help to illustrate key aspects of narrative and characterisation for comparison with the foregoing categorisations. In Which We Serve follows the career of a Royal Navy destroyer, HMS Torrin, from her commissioning at the outbreak of war until her sinking during the battle for Crete. Her story is told in an alinear fashion, through flashbacks after her sinking which are linked to three emblematic crew members: Able Seaman 'Shorty' Blake (John Mills), Petty Officer Hardy (Bernard Miles), and Captain Kinross (Noel Coward). The film is a reconstruction of the career of HMS Kelly under the command of Lord Mountbatten. They Were Expendable depicts the exploits of a squadron of six Patrol Torpedo (PT) boats during their heroic but vain defence of the Philippines after the attack on Pearl Harbour. Fighting against overwhelming odds, the squadron suffers a remorseless attrition. When all the boats are lost , the survivors join the Army fighting on land, and the squadron's commanders are airlifted back home to train new crews for future battles. K19: The Widowmaker tells the story of the fateful voyage of the Soviet Navy's first nuclear ballistic missile submarine. Whilst on a top secret mission during the Cold War period, the boat suffers a catastrophic failure of its reactor cooling system. Several sailors expose themselves willingly to fatal doses of radioactivity to repair the fault, but a mutiny is only barely suppressed amongst the frantic crew. The stricken submarine is abandoned in mid-ocean, and the contaminated crew are taken home for treatment and interrogation by state security.

From this selection of naval-oriented films, a range of consistencies emerge which, taken together, constitute a grouping of conventions which dictate naval representation. These characteristics can be considered under the following headings:

The Naval Family

A naval ship's crew may appear to offer the clearest and least problematic analogy to Basinger's representative platoon. In both American and British examples, the full variety of regional, accentual and ethnic diversity is embraced in the crews of warships and submarines (British examples may also add representatives combatants from Commonwealth countries). Basinger's contention that the living areas of both ships and submarines can become domestic spaces is supported by the naval examples included in the 1943 combat film cluster. In Stand By For Action (Robert Z. Leonard, 1943), a destroyer rescues a group of women and children from a convoy sinking, and two pregnant women give birth aboard the ship. In Destination Tokyo (Delmer Daves, 1943), the submarine's captain acts as father to his men, especially towards the youngest crewmember who has to undergo a life-threatening operation while the boat is submerged. While the relocation or recreation of a family on board is achieved in these examples, this treatment omits significant detail. The women and children taken aboard the destroyer are part of the 'Navy family' already, being the dependents of active personnel evacuated from Pearl Harbour at the outbreak of war. When the birth of one child proves difficult onboard ship, the Admiral in attendance advises firing the guns to leeward in honour of the tradition of the days of sail, when women were often aboard ships at sea.

In Destination Tokyo, the submarine captain's fatherhood at sea may be seen as an extension of his married life ashore, where we might expect shore and sea life to be mutually exclusive. Rather, the land-based biological family must be absorbed into and become subservient to the navy family, and the life of the sea service. This is articulated most poignantly by the admission by the captain's wife (Celia Johnson) of her rivalry with the ship for her husband's affection in In Which We Serve. Further to this, we can see the ship and shore families intermingling, as the ship's existence comes

to dominate the lives of all the characters: Blake weds Hardy's niece, and Kinross's flag lieutenant is engaged to one of the captain's relatives. Similarly, in Task Force (Delmer Daves, 1949), the widow of one US Navy carrier pilot marries another, and supports his rise through the ranks over a twenty-year period of service. At a ball at Annapolis, a young officer tells her, "There's not a midshipman at the Academy who wouldn't want to serve with your husband," and she replies, "I'm sure if I were a midshipman I'd feel the same way. I'm lucky enough to be his wife." Far from insisting upon the gap between shore and naval families, and on problems of integration in line with Belton's survey, such instances do not differentiate at all, since the shipboard crew's numbers are increased by those of navalised loved ones ashore.

Historical Basis

All war films adopt a pseudo-historical setting, placing their fictional narratives within the context of larger campaigns or commonly-known events. Expository voice-overs or titles (in Up Periscope [Gordon Douglas, 1959] locating us 'Somewhere in the South Pacific, 1942') generally serve to confirm this orientation. The naval films examined here go further in transcribing into the popular feature actual, and recognisable, events. HMS Kelly's name may be changed in In Which We Serve, and some episodes in the film (for example, her involvement in the Dunkirk evacuation) may be more illustrative than historically accurate, but most of the events of her career and sinking are included verbatim (and no doubt are expected to be recognized by the audience, as is Coward's impersonation of Mountbatten) in the story of the fictional Torrin. Similarly, Ford's They Were Expendable draws its narrative and its title from the publication of firsthand testimony of PT boat personnel evacuated after the fall of the Philippines, with the film's Lt. Brickley (Robert Montgomery) standing in for the real national hero Lt.

Bulkeley (White: 1998). The representation of submarine disaster in Kathryn

Bigelow's film is also based on the recollections of survivors, specifically the memoirs

of the captain of the real K19, Nikolai Zateyev (Huchthausen: 2002). In each of these

cases, and contemporary examples (such as San Demetrio London; Charles Frend,

1943; The Battle of the River Plate; Michael Powell and Emeric Pressburger, 1956; The

Yangtse Incident; Michael Anderson, 1957; Hostile Waters; David Drury, 1996)

historical events are re-rendered in recognisable forms.

Docudrama Approach

Although a documentary aesthetic may be implied by a reliance on or dedication to the

reconstruction of historical events, the narrative structure of the feature film will still

tend towards clear causality, character-driven action, and unequivocal resolution.

Docudrama, though more often encountered in television than film, is a mode of

journalistic investigation or exposé which seeks a different relationship to its subject

matter, and therefore to its audience:

> Docudrama… has almost always set out to do one or more of the
>
> following:
>
> (a) to re-tell events from national or international histories, either in
>
> reviewing or celebrating these events;
>
> (b) to re-present the careers of significant national or international
>
> figures, for similar purposes as (a);
>
> (c) to portray issues of concern to national or international communities
>
> in order to provoke discussion about them. (Paget 1998, 61)

The recognition of significant events (key naval battles, and the voyages of famous ships) and relevant persons (Mountbatten and Bulkeley) within the naval examples of the war film outstrips the undeveloped geo-historical location of fictional narrative in the generic war film, and corresponds closely to (a) and (b) . Similarly, the investigative and revelatory stance towards Cold War submarine operations and disasters (particularly in films depicting the Soviet Navy such as K19 and Hostile Waters), can be seen to conform to (c). This docudrama stance is also indicative of a more significant distinction of the naval war film in narrative form or visual style, even in the light of the widespread adoption of a documentary film aesthetic in both British and American feature production during World War II. The recollection and reconstruction of recent events in naval wartime productions anticipates the documentary approach to history in nostalgic and reverential productions (The Dam Busters; Michael Anderson, 1954; The Longest Day; Ken Annakin, Andrew Marton, Bernhard Wicki, 1962) in the post-war period. However, rather than simply setting an agenda or a tone which is developed in post-war cinema, naval war films enjoy a consistency of treatment in historical reconstruction which assumes the audience's acquaintance with the films' factual bases, promotes a consensual, national history, and treasures an agreed cultural, traditional underpinning.

Episodic Structure
The temporal/spatial gap between the crew and the enemy which the ship or submarine creates serves, in Basinger's categorisation, to reduce the combat quota of the naval film in comparison with the land combat film, and increase the scope for scenes of domesticity. However, the nature of the sea voyage, in comparison with the platoon's composite journey-mission, can lead towards the dissolution of the standard

melodramatic narrative structure. This is most marked in naval films which are epic in scale or intention. In The Cruel Sea (Charles Frend, 1953), the punctuation of convoy battles with moments of introspection is derived from the rhetoric of recollection of its novel base.2 Das Boot (Wolfgang Petersen, 19811997), the equivalent, definitive account of the Battle of the Atlantic from the German side, is exhaustive in the detail and duration of its portrayal of a three-month U-boat sortie. The fore-grounded sense of endurance (of individual voyages and the campaign as a whole) in these examples matches the sequential sacrifice and loss which is emphasised in In Which We Serve and They Were Expendable. No single climactic battle distinguishes these representations of naval combat: rather, a remorseless process of mental and material attrition which marks the naval narrative as both an illustration and an example of a test of character.

Loss of the Ship

The greatest sacrifice and test of captains and crews on screen is the loss of their vessels. Since the inevitability of loss is inscribed in virtually every war film (either as a prerequisite of commitment and an assurance of ultimate victory, or as the embodiment of war's futility and inhumanity), its acknowledgement in the naval variant should be unsurprising. However, the loss of the mythologised and anthropomorphised ship is endowed with greater significance than the death of individual sailors. The status of the warship in the naval film as symbol of the nation and state makes the depiction of its loss appear unwisely defeatist in propaganda terms. Misgivings on this score, despite support from Mountbatten and the Admiralty, led to official opposition to In Which We Serve (Aldgate and Richards 1994, 194-199). Despite the emphasis upon the harmonious hierarchy which binds the representative

crew members, the opening voice over states that In Which We Serve is, above all, 'the story of a ship.' Even when that ship and majority of her crew are lost, the closing oration assures us 'there will always be other ships, and men to sail in them.' The ship finally becomes more representative of the service to which it belongs than of the crew that mans her or the country which produces them. The maintenance of tradition appears fiercer in the face of bereavement, as the memory of ships and shipmates is carried on, as the final voice-over avers, 'above all victories, beyond all loss, in spite of changing values in a changing world.' Paradoxically, the assault on the establishment which loss of the ship seems to personify, actually provides the assurance of its endurance, and the survival of its conservative ideology.

Command Conflict

As with the portrayal of death, and the special case of the loss of a ship, conflict with and disrespect for authority might appear anathema to the conservative ideology and aims of the war film, particularly for productions during wartime. However, it is not just post-war, anti-war and anti-militarist representations which include conflicts in command. Basinger's combat film paradigm recognises the staple of the older, patriarchal leader figure, who is frequently killed in action or otherwise displaced by a pragmatic, unconventional hero. This everyman hero is himself also subjected to the questioning of his authority by an alternative or anti-hero character. Not until proof is available of the hero's wisdom and prowess (often only displayed in the climactic battle) does the anti-hero offer his allegiance, with his conversion operating as an elucidation of the genre's instructional, 'why we fight' ethic.

Conflict in command operates in a similar, but different fashion in the naval film. The patriarchal figure of the ship' s captain enjoys a god-like omnipresence and

omnipotence, wielding the ship and all her complement as his own, single weapon in combat. In so doing he directs and owns their efforts, at once denying their own individualism whilst simultaneously rarefying his own charismatic leadership. (This represents a peculiar negotiation of Belton's recognition of individualism subsumed in unity in the war genre). The devotion due to such captains as those seen in Destination Tokyo and In Which We Serve reinforces the socio-political social status quo, upon which military authority is both modelled and reliant. Questioning such authority would appear counter-productive to governmental, propagandist objectives in wartime, and to the aims of recruitment and public relations, which provide the motivation for military co-operation with filmmakers in peacetime. Yet in naval films, when authority is questioned and undermined, it introduces the greatest naval taboo, mutiny.

Some of the best known naval narratives are centred on rebellions against factual and/or fictionalised authority figures tainted by weakness, sadism or cowardice: the many film versions of the mutiny on the Bounty; the proto-revolution aboard the battleship Potemkin; the famous fictional Caine mutiny. What has emerged from the current study is the frequency with which mutiny is portrayed in naval feature films, especially those of the submarine variety. Despite the titles of The Caine Mutiny (Edward Dmytryk, 1954) declaring that no US Navy ship in history has experienced such an event, the relief or replacement of a flawed or failing captain occurs in many American submarine movies, including Run Silent, Run Deep (Robert Wise, 1958), Torpedo Run (Joseph Pevney, 1958), Crimson Tide(Tony Scott, 1995), Down Periscope (David S. Ward, 1996) and Danger Beneath the Sea (Jon Cassar, 2001).

The portrayal of rebellion against authority in these films is complex. The

assumption of a post-war, anti-authoritarian stance in these productions is contradicted by their positive representation of the naval establishment and hierarchy. In nearly all cases (Crimson Tide may be the sole exception), the commander is either reinstated, or the dead, departed or displaced captain is retrospectively revered, with his authority (and that of the service) reaffirmed by those who previously sought to subvert it. To return to Neale's examination of narrative and military authority, it can be seen that naval authority, vested entirely in a captain who is distant from his crew and who, whilst at sea, may be separated physically from his own superiors, can appear as the most arbitrary. This may be truer still of the submarine captain's authority, which must be exerted over claustrophobic and communal spaces. Unexplained orders from submarine captains (which may suggest cowardice or recklessness, endangering the boat and crew) precipitate insubordination and mutiny in Run Silent, Run Deep, Torpedo Run, and Up Periscope. That in each case the suspect captain is subsequently vindicated is indicative of the resilience of establishment authority, and the consistency of its depiction in popular film.

The representation of mutiny in American films about the Soviet Navy (K19 and The Hunt for Red October; John McTiernan, 1990) changes the internal compartment of the submarine from a domestic to political space, facilitating mutiny against a corrupt and negligent state authority. The danger embodied by Soviet submarines (either to the West through their superior weapons in McTiernan's film, or to their own crews because of their inferior technology in Bigelow's) transforms them from domestic to defective or defecting spaces, in which a critique of Communism can be enacted. These narratives prefer the naval captain to the political officer (the Communist Party representative present aboard all Soviet warships), showing him to be devoted to a higher calling (either his patriotic duty, the traditions of the service, or

the professionalism and brotherhood of sailors from all nations) than the iniquitous authority of the state. This rehabilitation of the honourable, defeated Cold War enemy is indistinguishable from the redemptive characterisation of the German Navy (distinct from the Nazi Party) and the Japanese Navy (compared to the Imperial Army, driven unwillingly to war in the Pacific) in post-war cinematic examples, such as The Enemy Below (Dick Powell, 1957) and Tora! Tora! Tora! Ironically perhaps, but in keeping with the foregrounding of defeat in the sinking of ships, command conflict and mutiny actually emerge as amongst the most conservative ideological elements within the naval film.

Citation of Tradition

If loss is inscribed in the naval film as a personal and national trial, the audience is also tested on its historical knowledge and recognition of allusion and reference. The peculiarity of the naval war film's reliance on specific historical incidents is enhanced by the explicit enunciation of more distant and reverenced historical precedents in dialogue or other forms of overt commentary. In films based on the Royal Navy, there are ubiquitous references to Nelson and the Trafalgar spirit. In Ships With Wings (Sergei Nolbandov, 1941), when Fleet Air Arm pilots try to take off from an aircraft carrier's damaged flight deck, a watching Petty Officer notes , 'Nelson struck "impossible" out of our signal book.' Nelson's patriotism also serves as a direct inspiration to Able Seaman Brown (John Mills) in Forever England, to Lieutenant Lockhart in The Cruel Sea, and ironically for Shorty Blake in In Which We Serve. American films make comparable reference to a US Naval hero of similar standing, John Paul Jones. His example is cited half-jokingly to inspire the reluctant Lieutenant Masterman (Robert Taylor) in Stand By For Action, but is presented with unabashed

veneration in Destroyer (William A. Seiter, 1943). The disgruntled crew of the titular

ship, USS John Paul Jones, are finally united in spirit and purpose by hearing an old

hand (Edward G. Robinson) tell the story of the battle between Jones' Bon Homme

Richard and HMS Serapis.

The inclusion of more obscure examples requires more detailed knowledge in

the prospective viewer. A portrait of Admiral Dewey, the hero of Manila Bay, which

hangs in the married quarters at Annapolis, prompts an explanatory comment in Task

Force. The traditions of the US Mercantile Marine, going back to the War of

Independence and thus predating the creation of the US Navy, are recalled in Action in

the North Atlantic (Lloyd Bacon, 1943). In Crimson Tide, the hawkish submarine

captain (Gene Hackman) laments the complexity of the New World Order (personified

by his reticent executive officer, Denzel Washington) in comparison with the simplicity

of the Cold War: 'Rickover gave me my command... a target and a button to push. All I

had to know was how to push it. They'd tell me when. They seem to want you to know

why.' Although few viewers may recognise the name of Admiral Rickover, the father

of the US Navy's nuclear submarine programme, the context of the reference is

sufficiently clear to underline the focal points of the film's drama and characterisation:

the conundrum of caution versus aggression, deterrence in place of pre-emptive attack,

political will versus naval authority.

Whether these allusions appear commonplace, recruiting a rudimentary

cultural-historical knowledge and concomitant national pride via the quotation of

Nelson or John Paul Jones, or are more esoteric, demanding an acquaintance with

specific areas of naval history and tradition, the reliance placed on such references in

the naval war film underlines the assumption of a conservative cultural consensus,

shared and transmitted between texts and viewers.

Conclusion

Clearly, the naval variant of the war film shares significant features of narrative construction, characterisation, representational strategy and ideological intent with the generic or standard war film depicting land combat. War film specificities noted by Basinger, such as representative, cross-sectional group and the 'safe' questioning of authority are shared by naval films, as are the tenets of dominant ideology which these features support. Belton's areas of narrative concern are also present in the naval examples used here, albeit in significantly altered forms. However, a 'hard core' of naval narratives is as discernible within the war genre, just as the 'pure' infantry combat film identified by Basinger. Certain recurrent and revealing motifs (the replaying of the loss of the ship, the defused threat of mutiny, the historical docudrama approach and the instinctive citation of tradition) suggest an assumed commonality of address and interpretation between filmmaker and film viewer: in other words, a conventional articulating framework akin to the basis of a genre. These characteristics underline the conservative stance of the naval war film: authority is questioned in order to be reaffirmed, ships are lost so that they can be remembered, tradition and history are cited in order to be recognised as a shared cultural currency, embodying a consensual national heritage. The presumption of a collective interpretation and identity based on such recognition is especially pertinent to this year, and the restatement rather than reappraisal of the myths of Nelson in the 200th anniversary of Trafalgar. In this respect, the narration of naval history appears to suit conservative ideological ends, and the definitive naval film (In Which We Serve on this side of the Atlantic, They Were Expendable on the other) emerges as the war film's most conservative manifestation. The naval war film exists as a recognisable, and highly traditional, popular narrative

form.

NOTES

1) The films chosen are Stand By for Action (Robert Z. Leonard, 1943), Crash Dive (Archie Mayo, 1943), Action in the North Atlantic (Lloyd Bacon, 1943), Destroyer (William A. Seiter, 1943), and Corvette K-225 (Richard Rosson, 1943), with only the first three receiving coverage. Destination Tokyo (Delmer Daves, 1943) is analysed in detail, but only insofar as it replicates Basinger's paradigmatic text, Bataan (Tay Garnett, 1943). However, Basinger also seems to imply that Destination Tokyo establishes the conventions of submarine movies, thereby initiating another recognisable 'sub'-genre. Basinger (1986), 37-42, 63, 67-9.

2) In the novel of The Cruel Sea, the horrors of innumerable convoy actions experienced by the crew of a Royal Navy corvette are recalled only as a series of vignettes: the time of the Dead Helmsman, the time of the Bombed Ship, the time of the Burnt Man, the time of the Skeletons (Monsarrat 1956, 244-262).

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