

Three interpretations of Regle du Jeu

First interpretation.

Since I'd mentioned Regle du jeu, I decided to watch it again to see what more than the hunting scene is actually there. I'd sort of misremembered, as I know J. Renoir also had made a point about the class disconnect between protected aristocratic generals and actual fighting soldiers.

But seeing this again, there is something in it that is more general, not specific to aristocrats having servants and gamekeepers with guns.

It is something reminiscent to me, but opposite, of what happens in one of Shakespeare's comedies, towards the end it is taking a very dark turn; the girl had been defamed, falsely proven to have been unfaithful, her family had pretended she has poisoned herself and is no longer alive, all because of a complicated and evil plan. Each scene sweeps the evidence deeper, and you realize that no-one is ever going to unravel the truth.

But then Constable Dogberry, who has up until then been so stupid that he confused being guilty with failing to respect Dogberry's authority, has an impossible flash of brilliance, figures out all the misdeeds. There could be no proof, but the culprits respect Dogberry's authority, they confess, and everyone celebrates the happy ending.

It is hilariously funny that such a dark hidden misdeed, seeming surely beyond any analysis of any of the simple characters there, could so suddenly be uncovered, and there was nothing to worry about after all.

In Regle du Jeu, there is something almost directly opposite. If you were not paying attention, you could think that having one's wife taken away would be deserving of a confrontation, a challenge.

The loser in love, whose wife will leave his home with his rival, though, is kind. He knows his wife will be happier leaving.... Just a tiny worry, some parting advice

“Vouse etes jeunes...vous pouvoir avez un accident.”

And then later another worry: in other cases like this, when there has been competition in love,

“...de temps en temps, je lis dans les journaux, que...c'est termine' par des coups de couteau. Je me croyais pas la possible!”

And at the end, when the rival actually is dead, shot by the husband's gamekeeper, the natural comment by a bystander:

“Une nouvelle definition do mot accident.”

But, this is a phantom plot, a non-meaningful plot. The characters actually were infinitely changeable, flexible. The dialogue leading up to where the shots are fired goes:

“Quest-ce qu'ils disent?
Je ne suis pas sur. Je n' e'coute rien.
T'as ton revolver? Fous y en coup!
Y a plus de balles. J'ai tout tire' sur tois!”

“I don't have any more bullets, because I shot them all at you!”

This is the gamekeeper, who had been hired to organize the shooting of the animals. He and his rival had been fired from their jobs in the house because things were getting too confusing and violent.

The phantom plot is there. Somebody like Constable Dogberry, no matter how clever, is going to say the wrong thing, just what the bystander concluded at the end.

The issue is nothing to do with understanding logic or intentions, nothing to do with good or evil. It is just that there is a disconnect between what happens when a person pulls the trigger, and what happens afterwards, that can not be comprehended emotionally or logically.

A person can abstractly understand and predict that human intentionality can fail to be coherent when such possibilities are suddenly (in a few tens of millenia) introduced into existence.

Renoir illustrates the same idea when he juxtaposes a logical problem for the audience (if you hadn't been privy to an omniscient eye, but had been there and seen everything that an observer can see, what would you deduce, what would you feel, who would you blame?) with a false answer which is easy to deduce: the husband secretly asked his gamekeeper to shoot his rival after he left the house.

But in a million ways, with the benefit of the omniscient eye, the audience knows that this is nothing like the truth. That it was very clearly many many kind little events, like Lisette giving Christine her cape so she will not be cold, even like Octave foregoing his love for Christine and letting his friend go outdoors instead, when he realizes that he would not be afford for her to keep Lysette in employment – an act touching enough to bring Lysette to tears to witness it – , that were in fact the actual logical necessary, and sufficient, conditions for the shooting to take place.

It is, then, rather, simply that human beings were never made to have guns.

Second interpretation.

The difficulty with that interpretation of the film is that it represents things I would tend to believe, but maybe is not faithful to the ideas of the filmmaker.

I was sort of thinking that the film ends when Octave, who is played by a very friendly and unassuming J Renoir himself, and the poacher, who had been hired as a domestic servant, say a nice genuine and friendly good-bye.

As far as the killing, the poacher's role was mainly as a witness; his perspective is not much different than the audience.

It was strange that the husband of the house would hire a poacher, and accede to the poacher's wishes to be hired as a domestic servant.

He was fired only because, the gamekeeper having been fired for being violent, it wouldn't have been fair to leave in employment who had become a rival for the affections of Lysette, the gamekeeper's wife.

And when they are planning the killing, the gamekeeper had talked about how, although he won't be employed here anymore, he wants to remain in the area so he can still be close to Lysette.

But here is the really strange thing.

After the killing, Octave and the poacher walk down the stairs together, and leave together chatting about their plans. The poacher is going to work in the woods somewhere, and Octave will go to Paris. And then it seems like the film is over.

But, there is another scene. The husband calls everyone to the top of the stairs, and gives a Eulogy for his friend who has been killed. It is a nonsense Eulogy, and he says, it is cold, and he doesn't want anyone to have a chill.

And you notice, the gamekeeper is still there! with his gun slung on his shoulder. He is still in employment, marching around and taking orders.

He had been fired for being violent, and he had been told “I never want to see you again.”

Then after the killing, wouldn't that mean that he's been more violent, right?

Wouldn't his boss had said “Well, I fired you because you were violent, and now that you've been even more violent, and killed my friend, I'm going to have to phone the police and get you arrested.”

Why was the gamekeeper back in employment after the killing?

Why is it, with the killing done, the gamekeeper is suddenly back in good graces with his boss.

Octave, you really sensed that when he was leaving, it is Renoir saying, bye now, this film is done. And the poacher leaving with him is like the audience going. And the film is done, and it is an optimistic and nice film.

But then there is a little other scene afterwards, the Eulogy. You feel like you aren't supposed to be there anymore, aren't supposed to be seeing this. And you see the gamekeeper is still in the fold, and the man of the house says to all the assembled people, I hope you don't catch a chill.

And also, with Octave representing the author's voice, that little interlude where he had pretended that he himself might have gone away with Christine, despite not being able to pay Lysette ... this had made Lysette lie to Christine and say Octave isn't a good person. And when Octave said, no, I am not going to go away with Christine, implying that it is the wealthier man who will, she cries in happiness that she will still have her job. I had thought Octave cries out of kindness, but it is just Renoir, the author, demonstrating himself crying at one or another of the ideas of his own creation.

You can see Octave's character, not only as a really nice person, but as sort of one of Dickens' ghosts, like a fool, saying to the audience, "and if the situation is like *this*, then let me show you *this* and let me show you *this*."

I don't necessarily agree with what he's done, I guess.

It's not something I know anything about, or think about.

It was, after all, I now see, meant to be one of those dark plans like Shakespeare put in *Much Ado about Nothing*, which was a comedy, because there, impossible as it had been, it was all understood by the end of the play.

Third interpretation.

I know it sounds silly to ‘compare and contrast’ two examples of fiction like a high school project, but there could be a reason.

I now realize my interpretation was really wrong, and can correct it.

In the way of contract, here is Dogberry’s attempted proof of the girl’s (Hero’s) innocence

...they have committed false report;
moreover, they have spoken untruths;
secondarily, they are slanders;
sixth and lastly, they have belied a lady;
thirdly, they have verified unjust things;
and, to conclude, they are lying knaves.

It says in Wikipedia that ‘about nothing’ is intentionally a homonym of ‘noting,’ and you notice things like, this terrible proof gets corrected in a way that would be impossible. Hero’s lover hasn’t killed himself while thinking she’s dead, but he did marry someone else...but when Dogberry’s proof is repaired and Hero is exonerated, the story is fixed too by a plot twist that interchanges who he had actually married after the fact (and the audience was in on this, reliably omniscient throughout).

So, something I misunderstood about Octave is, throughout the film, he is a really really nice person, his only motive is to be kind to people. For instance, when the aviator at the beginning is bereft that Christine hasn’t seen his accomplishments, Octave is kind and tries to help. He prevails on Christine’s husband to invite the aviator to his house for an event.

Of course, he is the author, and in every big decision, he is there asking the characters to do these things, he is granting the wishes of characters, by imploring favors of other characters, on their behalf.

But he has a choice what are the things he asks for, and you realize he has contrived every event, finally. Just before the murder, he steps out of character, and stands at the top of the stairway where the Eulogy had later taken place, and says to Christine, what he really wants, is for the audience to be with him in understanding his film, but he thinks it's unlikely.

When he is about to leave, after the murder, when he is saying good-bye to Lysette, she says she has been fond of him. He is supposedly kissing her good-bye, but he is detached, and still even now giving her commands, along the lines of 'Now, be sure that you go to Christine and tell her good-bye on my behalf, and be sure you do this, and be sure you do that....' He does not care about her at all. He is just the one who wrote down in the script what she is going to say and do.

My belief is that when you introduce something like guns into a culture, you cause an impossible cognitive disconnect. That it is not even meaningful to think about what happens afterwards, in the same way it is not really meaningful to try to analyze what happens during an LSD trip. And that the same is true for types of large-scale social organization.

What Octave does (speaking as the author of the film), is to say, "here is an assassination machine, composed of people."

He shows that if Christine leaves with the aviator, either Lysette will lose her employment, or she will be separated from her husband, the gamekeeper. He shows you, "here is how she would feel if Christine left with me."

She doesn't want that to happen, so Octave is kind to her, and cancels his plan to fall in love with Christine, accordingly. He cries when she cries because he is precisely the author of those tears, showing those tears, and showing where they come from, from her wishes about her employment.

You never see her crying to the gamekeeper, her husband, about how either she will leave him, or she will lose her salary, if Christine leaves with the aviator. But Octave fills in a little gap for the benefit of the audience.

The poacher, he had been hired because he knows how to set snares. He was the witness. Lysette had made him think she loves him, and he is a rival of the gamekeeper. At the moment of the shooting, there were so many layers of confusion, so many layers of intentionality, that the motives would never be able to be unwound and understood. Did the gamekeeper know that Lysette had given Christine her cape? Was he only pretending to think he was seeing Octave and Lysette kissing when Octave was with Christine in the glass house? How did he have another bullet, if he and the poacher were essentially laughing now, reminiscing about how the gamekeeper had seen him as a rival, and shot all his bullets at him instead?

The actual events of the murder are an infinitely capricious tangle of intentionality, wishes, thoughts, feelings, mistakes.

But, just as you realize that Octave had in fact planned every action of every character, you do realize that this is possible.

You do realize that duplicity is possible.

Duplicity is part of human nature.

When the aviator died, someone commented that it was just like the animals had fallen during the hunt.

In the film, it is not only that the events of the murder could not be *written* or *noted* as we realize is the truth in *Much ado about nothing*. But they do not *exist*.

That human intentions are an infinite balance of influences, and you can show the influences, the motives, by manipulating the characters, by changing, going back, repeating an event. What if it had been Octave with Christine? What if it had been the aviator? What if the gamekeeper thought it was Lysette in the greenhouse? What if he wanted the poacher to think that?

The author of the film can run experiments, make demonstrations of motives. But there is no such thing as getting into the mind of a character, and noting down what he was thinking, or planning.

That, in the presence of a possibility of guns, a collection of humans, and a human organization like a household, can become an assassination machine.

But, that it is not human nature which is to blame for the existence of the assassination machine.

Humans can be manipulated by other humans as easily as a writer can write scripts for them to perform.

We never know, and never can know, who is writing scripts for whom, who is obeying whom, and this is indeterminate knowledge.

The household, in itself, this aristocratic household, had been anyway nothing but an assassination machine; at least insofar as the involvement of the gamekeeper and the poacher.

You could say that human nature is mercurial, ambiguous, and always should be. But that systems of organization sometimes arise, not from people, but in consequence of the introduction into the human world of technological implements like guns, or even tractors one could say too.

So you could think, not as I do, that the consequences of introducing guns into a culture is beyond comprehension, it is known to be beyond comprehension, so that all thought must focus on thinking about things that happened before; but you could think the opposite. You could look at structures of large scale organization, themselves we do know which could not exist without the same technological implements, and you could think of them as having been directly caused by the technological implements.

I mean, this is really nothing but a tautology. You could look at what a person thinks and says while taking LSD and say, yes, this LSD trip is a consequence of taking LSD.

You could test the effects of a drug compound by getting someone high and asking them questions, seeing how they respond.

Octave's investigations, the way he has written them, so it is really his opinions, show that nothing is really different, in a household with guns, except that the structure of the household, the very employment of the servants, in this one example, is related to, and supported by, killing, in a way that would be impossible to understand logically.