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**PROFESSOR:**

Good evening people. I place so much emphasis on Renoir's camera because I think it's so fundamentally expresses his sense of experience. And if you become attentive to the really quiet and subtle ways in which Renoir's camera is almost always in action, is a part of the story in some sense, you can begin to capture something of his importance in the history of cinema. Because no director or apprentice director, whoever studied, looked at Renoir's films came away from it the same, and his influence is almost impossible to fully measure. there are no cinematic traditions, after Renoir, that haven't, at least in some degree, even if not directly, then indirectly through other people who've been influenced by him have been shaped by Renoir's example.

And I wanted to give you one more instance of Renoir's camera. This is from a film I've mentioned, but not shown you. It's from the last of his great French films. Some people, many people would say it's his greatest film, one of the great masterpieces in the history of movies, the rules of the game. The only reason I don't show it in our course is that it's, in many ways, a more difficult, a more complex film than Grand Illusion. there's a grand clarity, or simplicity of a certain kind. not a simplicity of character, or a vision, or a theme, but a simplicity of intention that becomes clear, at least after the fact in Grand Illusion. It's a more accessible film, especially for Americans, I think.

The Rules of The Game, much more profoundly, is a meditation on the theme that is also present in Grand Illusion, as you'll see this evening, the theme of historical transition. But it's a much more complex and extended meditation on what was happening to French society in this immense transition that took place at the beginning of the 20th century. Essentially, it's a transition, as you'll see dramatized in the film we're showing tonight, Grand Illusion, It's a transition from an aristocratic to a middle class culture. From an aristocratic dispensation, to a quasi democratic, or more democratic dispensation. And this was a topic which preoccupied many directors, Renoir especially, and is a kind of central topic in both Rules of the Game and Grand Illusion.

This scene from Rules of the Game is maybe his least subtle in some ways. Or rather, the subtlety is harder to see if you're just looking at a clip. The subtlety is involved in the characters themselves, who have already, in some degree, been established in a kind of individuality, which then further expresses itself in the scene you're going to see. The basic situation of the Rules of the Game is a classically powerful one. It's essentially a weekend of festivities. A marquis, a grand figure, presumably who owns a remarkable chateau, invites some friends for a weekend of games and shooting, hunting, at his great chateau in the country.

And the film is a kind of series of tableaux, or a series of festivities, all of which are cankered, or damaged in some way. It's as if we have a sense that each of the festivities or festivals that are dramatized in the Rules of the Game are diminished versions of something that, in the past, had great authority, power, and cultural centrality, but have become now diminished, and even parodically reduced versions of what they had been when they were part of a coherent culture. It's almost as if these festivals and rituals have become-- are recognized by the film, although not necessarily by the characters inside the film, as vestiges of a time that has now passed. And the most dramatic instance of this subject, or the embodiment of this theme, is the scene you're going to see. It's the hunting scene.

And I want you to, sort of, at least get a sense of it, not only because it's an important film and I'd like to fix it in your mind. Maybe give you a taste of it so you'll go out and look at the film yourself. These two films, Grand Illusion and Rules of the Game are certainly the pinnacle of Renoir's art, and people who know these films deeply know something important about film, know something important about what works of art are. So I want to see for that reason.

But I also want you to see to get one more experience, outside of Grand Illusion, of the way Renoir's camera behaves. Especially the way it establishes a relationship between character and ground, between character and environment. And here, of course, the camera's job is not only to tell us something about the relations among the characters, and to show us their interactions in as economically powerful a way as possible, but also to give us a sense of this grand ritual gone bad. OK.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[HORN BLOWS]

-[INAUDIBLE]

[END PLAYBACK]

**PROFESSOR:** Freeze it one second. That little character who's giving instructions, you will recognize him. The actor's name is Dalio, and he's the one who plays Rosenthal in Grand Illusion. In this film, he plays the marquis.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

-[SPEAKING FRENCH]

**PROFESSOR:** You see how powerful it is not to have fake music? What, just the effect of that is on the film? I shouldn't say fake music, non-diegetic music, music that's not part of the scene itself. There's Dalio.

-[SPEAKING FRENCH]

-[SPEAKING FRENCH]

[HORN BLOWING]

[CLATTERING]

[END PLAYBACK]

**PROFESSOR:** Freeze it for a second, please. I wish we had time to dwell on this, and I won't do this too much because I'll run out of time for what I need to tell you, but tell me what you see here quickly. Make some conclusions about-- what about this great ritual? Immediately, what would we think if we're watching this? What's one conclusion you draw from this? Is this hunting the activity of brave pioneering souls who are confronting the dangers of the wilderness? [LAUGHS]

Right? It's an unbelievably controlled, and in many ways, murderous environment isn't it?

What have we begun to feel about these creatures that are being flushed out? Tremendous sympathy for them, right? We're hostile to the adults, right? We're hostile to the human beings in the scene.

We think there's something the matter with this. And of course in the olden days, presumably

in the days when such hunts occurred in a more coherent, and less forced way, you need beaters to go around in other words, making noise to scare the few vestiges of rabbits and other game out into the open so people with giant guns could kill them. right? in the 16th or the 15th century, or the 18th century, these fields were teeming with game. Now, in the 20th century, you have to beat the sticks to get them to come out. What a parody of what an actual hunt would be. Go ahead.

[VIDEO PLAYBACK]

[CLATTERING]

**PROFESSOR:** When this film was made-- I forgot the number, I have it in my notes, but I couldn't find them there, I left them in my office. A certain number of these animals were actually killed in the making of the film. I forgot the number, but it's a significant number.

[GUNSHOTS]

**PROFESSOR:** If today, they made such a film, there are rules that don't allow them to kill animals.

[GUNSHOTS]

[BIRD CHIRP]

[GUNSHOTS]

[GUNSHOTS]

[HORN BLOWS]

[END PLAYBACK]

**PROFESSOR:** OK, you get some sense of how powerful a satirist, but also how quiet a satirist, he can be. It's not as if the film-- it's not as if there's someone there saying, isn't this horrible. He's leaving it to the audience to figure out, although, it doesn't take too much to figure it out, does it? What you can pick up from this, it makes, maybe, the scene that I've shown you may make the scene seem cruder than it is. Virtually all the characters, faces that you've seen. most of them, anyway, are major characters in the film.

And even by this time in the film, you've gotten to know some of them quite well. So they've been humanized and individuated, and that makes the brutality, to which they are mostly oblivious, of what's happening even more powerful. You don't hate the characters who are doing the shooting. you know them for the comic, and damaged, and ambitious, and idealistic, and foolish characters they've already shown themselves to be by the time they get into this scene. It's almost as if they, themselves, are also victims of this ritual they're part of. So there's a kind of subtlety that you can't pick up on just watching the clip, that is present for any audience member.

But I wanted you to see that this scene, also in part, again, to show you how powerfully Renoir's camera is able to create emotional and intellectual responses in the audience, in a way that is, in some sense, diametrically opposed to what we might call expressionist directors like Hitchcock or Eisenstein might do. By manipulating our attitudes, by constant, by very rapid editing, and by giving us high or low angle shots that control our emotional response because of the way we're seeing things.

Renoir's strategies can be just as powerful in terms of emotional and moral reaction, but Renoir's strategy is quite different. Present the evidence, in some sense, to the audience. Keep the camera at a level that allows the full action to be taken in. I hope you realize that there were relatively few cuts in that scene, and in most of Renoir's work the number of edits is relatively small compared to the number of scenes that are extended, the amount of long takes that we have. And there are certain moments in the film where he will vary this strategy. For example, and you might want to watch for this in tonight's film, there's one moment in tonight's film, an interview between two of the central characters, the German prison warden played by Erik Von Stroheim, and the French aristocrat named du Boeldieu, played by an actor named de Fresnay.

And in this scene between the German and the Frenchman, one of the things we recognize is, because they belong to the aristocratic class, they have a lot in common. They speak English, for example, because they both know English, even though one's a German and one's a Frenchman. And there is a sense in the film, a very powerful one that's established, that they have, in some sense, a greater connection to each other than they have with other soldiers in their own armies. And the film meditates on these distinctions, and especially on this conundrum of social class, in rather a complex way as I'll suggest.

Well, in the very first scene between Boeldieu and Rauffenstein, the German and the Frenchman, Renoir uses a fairly standard procedure, much more common to other directors, it's sometimes called a shot, counter shot style. It's especially common on American television, but it's common in the movies too, in which, when you see characters in conversation, you'll get relatively rapid cutting. And you look at one face, then the camera will shift, and you look back at the other face. They'll be a cut, and you'll look-- right? And you'll constantly shift back and forth, this shot, counter shot style.

But he, Renoir uses this kind of style rarely, because first of all, it involves the idea of cutting. It involves the idea of separation. Why use shot/ counter shot, Renoir would say, when I can move my camera like this and show the two characters together? And move it around in another way, and show the back of one character's head, and the way the other is reacting. In other words, if the camera's part of the action, a fluid part of the action, I can show you more about character, Renoir would say. But in that particular scene, he doesn't do it in this first extended interview. It lasts about two minutes and 45 seconds, and it uses 21 shots. 21 separate shots in two minutes and 45 seconds. For Renoir that's a tremendous number of edits. And it's why would he do it there? Because it's very unusual for him to use this shot, counter shot style in the film. Why would he do it? He wants to emphasize their separation, their isolation from each other, their distance from each other.

And there is a later scene in the film, near the very end of the film, again between Boeldieu and another character. But this one between the Boeldieu and Marechal, the French working class figure who's on the French side, just before there's an attempted escape. And that scene is almost as long, two minutes and 20 seconds long, but that scene only has three separate edits in it. And you might compare it. The farewell scene is a very obvious one, and you'll recognize it when you see it. And, of course, the reason is that he wants to emphasize, insofar as it's possible, that they are together. He wants to minimize the sense of isolation in that sequence.

Again, I mention this because I want you to become as attentive as possible, without destroying your enjoyment of the film, to the camera's way of behaving. To summarize what I'm trying to say about the way the camera works in Renoir, I want to remind you that, even in his darkest films, his camera work carries an undercurrent of excitement, even sometimes a kind of joy at the sheer particularness, the particularity of the world. You can sense his awareness of human ambiguity and his wonder at the texture of the visible world all through his films of his so-called French period. And especially in the film you're going to see tonight, which is in

many ways in environments that are very unpoetic right? The entire film takes place in a series of prison camps. The entire film is about these French prisoners of war.

There is an introduction or prologue before they're captured, and then after they're captured we see them in a series of prison camps. it's quite an amazing experience, in some ways, to watch Renoir's camera discover the complexity of a world that seems, on the surface, to be so unpromising, and so uninteresting, so lacking in texture. we can think of Renoir's camera as shy, timid in a sense. Capable of embarrassment, even.

There's one moment in the Rules of the Game which partly involves a force dimension, so that when all the guests in the great estate or castle go to sleep at night. They sort of come out of their rooms, and start changing bed partners and things like that. they have various liaisons. And there's a moment when the camera is in this long hallway, and one of the lovers comes out to meet another lover, and it looks as if the camera actually backs away in embarrassment, and looks away as if it says, oh, that's inappropriate for me to be looking at.

The camera is humanized in a very subtle, quiet way all the way through Renoir's work. So we think of his camera as shy, as embarrassed, reluctant to overhear, or to intrude. There are even moments when it is distracted, or drawn toward an apparently irrelevant element. Times when the camera hesitates, or even appears to change its mind. An uncertain camera, then, always adjusting to a world that is, itself, always shifting and changing.

And of course, that's the deepest argument for why the camera is so restless. remember, it's not obtrusive. it's not like to feel the camera swinging wildly, not at all. You have to pay attention, sometimes you won't even be aware of the fact of how quietly and simply the camera-- but it's as if the camera is always making adjustments. As if it's always alive to the changing character of what it's looking at, and that very aliveness reminds you of how complex reality is, because reality itself is always shifting and changing.

This describes, I think, something of what is meant by Renoir's realism. But there's a kind of lyric element, as I've mentioned, even a kind of tranquility, or pleasure, or joy. Celebratory impulse in his camera's gaze that qualifies, or sweetens, his realism of space and character, and we need to be aware of that too. One way to crystallize this is to suggest that once we become attuned to the camera's forms of attention-- that's a good phrase, the camera's forms of attention. There's a wonderful book about poetry called forms of attention. Lyric poetry is what constitutes a special kind of attention. We can say that Renoir's camera is engaged

constantly in these forms of attention.

Once we become aware of that, of the camera's interest in that, we become aware of a quiet continuous struggle, a loving contest almost, between the multiple points of interest in the scene, and the camera's reluctant gently hesitant choices. The menu of things to see and hear, Renoir's films keep telling us, is too rich to be fully captured, even by the most eye. And that's what I mean when I say that visual style can be understood as a form of moral style.

I want to say a few more words about *Grand Illusion*, itself, to help frame your experience of it. It's not a complex film, but it's a deep and beautiful one, and I think you'll all find it very memorable. First a word about the actors. or maybe I should say one other word about Renoir himself, because it bears on his actors. As I implied, or I think, suggested this afternoon, one of the most distinctive features of Renoir's practice-- if you think about the way his camera behaves, you can see how logically connected these elements are-- was that he was an improvisational director.

He collaborated with his actors, with these performers. He didn't come in with an absolutely fixed script. he's like the anti-Hitchcock. Hitchcock has solved all his problems before he's come in to do his shooting, Renoir has just begun the process of making his movie. he has an idea of the subject matter, He knows what he's doing. I don't mean that he's working completely blind, but he allows discovery to take place in the course of the making of his movies, and he's very deeply involved in collaborating with these performers. So that, for example, when he had already begun working on the movie-- I don't think they'd begun shooting it yet-- but they were very far along in creating the movie, and in casting the movie, when they discovered that Erich Von Stroheim, who was that already by the time this film was made, a very well known actor and director. Much, in fact, incredibly admired director --both an actor and a director, agreed to join the film.

And when he agreed to join the film, he and Renoir began to collaborate on expanding the role that Von Stroheim plays. And you'll understand what an immensely helpful contribution to, what could we call it, to the ecology of the movie, to the sense of the movie Von Stroheim made, because he's one of the dominant characters. if we try to imagine *Grand Illusion* with a much reduced role for the Von Stroheim character, it's a much lesser film. So you can recognize what an extraordinary contribution Von Stroheim made.

Now, he not only made contributions to questions about the dialogue, what the character



would say, expanded the role, but even made suggestions about how the character would look. How the character would be costumed. I think it was Von Stroheim who emphasized, even more fully than Renoir had originally intended, that the Von Stroheim character is a war casualty. That he has ram rod up is back, he has to wear gloves because his hands are horribly burned. He's a cripple, and that's why he's now running prison camps. Because he's not useful for anything else, right? And there's the sense that he's a damaged, wounded figure even from the very beginning of the film, when we first meet him.

So that's important in itself, but there's a second thing about Von Stroheim that I want to emphasize to you. It shows you how subtly Renoir was aware of how he could utilize all the elements available to him as a filmmaker. Von Stroheim was especially well known as an actor, for roles in which he would play-- this was a special true in roles he played in the United States-- in which he would play a dangerous, scary martinet. There were even hints of sadomasochism about the role sometimes. So he would play brutal prison camp wardens, right? brutal police types, militarist types, violent husbands. And, in fact, he was understood, also, as a villain. He often played roles that were recognizably evil roles. He came to be known as the man you love to hate. That was like a sort of motto that was attached to his name.

And, when you want your Grand Illusion, one of the things I hope you'll think about is the complex way in which that inherited idea of the Von Stroheim character is complicated, undermined, and humanized. Because, in many ways, he still is the villain in the piece, but he's a humanized villain. He becomes a complex character, as much a victim of history as any of the other characters in the film. So there's a sense in which, what Renoir and Von Stroheim, together, are doing is taking the persona that Von Stroheim had established, and undercutting it, undermining it in some slight way, creating a much greater resonance for the character, exactly because of the ways in which he first that appears to fulfill the expectations that he's an evil villain, and then as the film goes on, this sense is undermined, complicated, and you realize he's a human being with powers of generosity, although also certain limitations. He's a German, he's prejudiced, he doesn't really like the French, especially doesn't like working class people, most especially doesn't like Jews. He's an imperfect character, but you see this he's deeply humanized.

And something of the same kind of thing happens in the film's treatment of the Jean Gabin character. He's the character who plays Marechal, the actor who plays Marechal, the working class Frenchman who, along with de Boeldieu and the Jew played by Dalio, a character called

Rosenthal. These three are the central French characters, and we see them moving from prison camp to prison camp through the film. that group is the central group of the film. We follow them as the film goes on. The Gabin character too, was, in many ways, the most famous actor, if not in Europe, certainly and France of the late '20s and '30s. major, major figure. and he was especially associated with working class roles. ,

And, most especially associated with roles-- he was like an early Jack Nicholson. An even more powerful version of it, because he became famous for these moments in the films when he would go nuts, when he would have a fit, when he would start screaming, or he would lose it. He would rant or rave. In some films he was in he would have a climactic scene-- this may be, in fact, where the stereotype began-- he would have a climactic scene. Often he would be a suicidal proletarian, a suicidal worker up against the forces of capitalism, or the forces of the police. The Gabin character had frequent roles like this, in which he would essentially lose all rational control, and rant, and rave, and scream, sometimes die. he was so famous for this, and this was such a fundamental part of his persona, that he had written into most of his contracts that he had to have a scene which he did this. He had to have at least one scene in the film in which he sort of went Cucamonga, in which he lost it.

Now, one of the most subtle things about this film is, there is such a moment in this film. Watch for it, because it's so quiet compared to what you might expect, that you might miss it. But it's really there. And in fact, the way in which it both fulfills, but also undermines, our expectations about this character, again, tells us something about the way in which Renoir and his collaborating actors were able to create immensely nuanced meanings, possibilities, out on the raw material, not only of the story of the film, and of the setting of the film, but even the past history of the performers.

I want to say just a couple of things about some of the dominant themes in the film to help organize your experience of it. And I'm borrowing here, or deeply influenced here, by two critics especially, or perhaps I should say parenthetically. You should probably assume that almost anything I say has been said by someone else at some time in the past. the job of a teacher, as I conceive it, is not to come up with totally original arguments every time, because no one can be so original as to say everything that's wonderful about particular texts, or about a whole phenomenon like the movies.

So a good teacher draws on that. When I really am drawing on a prior scholar, who I know has shaped the arguments I'm making, or has given me the categories I'm using, I mention them

by name. But, of course, I've been teaching for so long that much of this must not be unconsciously absorbed into my psyche, and I don't always know this, so I'm not saying that those moments where I haven't made this acknowledgement are free of such influence. Quite the opposite. But I do want to mention two scholars who have especially influenced me on Renoir, because virtually all the things I've told you about Renoir, though I've made the ideas my own, come from these.

One is a Frenchman named Alexander Sesonske. And he wrote a wonderful book, I think a several volume book, on Renoir that taught me a tremendous amount, especially about his French period. And the other is the, now California scholar, Leo Braudy, one of whose essays I've asked you to read in this course. He's written a wonderful book on Renoir. And, although I have read the book, I learned more about Renoir from Braudy in conversation, because he was my colleague many years ago when we were teaching together in the English department at Yale, and he's one of the people who turned me into a person interested and movies, interested in film. So, Leo Braudy, B-R-A-U-D-Y, Alexander Sesonske, S-E-S-O-N-S-K-E, the two principal scholars and critics behind what I've been saying, both this afternoon and this evening.

Dominant themes. One. The prison camp as a microcosm. There's a wonderful passage, at one point in the movie, where one of the character's said "everyone would die of the disease of his class, if the war did not reconcile all microbes". think about the implications of that. the idea is that one of the things that makes this prison camp such a fascinating place is that it is, in some sense, a microcosm of the larger world. and especially if you think of the prison camp beyond just the grouping of the French soldiers, the French prisoners who we follow primarily, what you can recognize if you back away, because we are told about, or we meet, and we see briefly some of the other prisoners. There are Russian prisoners and there's other kinds of prisoners as well.

There's a sense that the prison camp is a kind of microcosm, at least of Europe, if not of the world as a whole. And, more specifically, the way in which the prison camp is a microcosm for the social striations that organize outer society. There's a working class, there seems to be a middle class, you'll notice that there's a scholar who has a copy of Pindar, the great ancient poet, who treasures his work on Pindar-- he's one of my favorite minor characters in the film because of his commitment to literature despite the war, and despite the miseries of prison camp. And what you can see is, in a certain sense, that Renoir is delighted by the idea that a

kind of microcosm is created.

And if you watch the variations amongst the Frenchmen, and again, if you think about that fragment of a scene I showed you this afternoon, of these characters at dinner table in the in the prison camp, you'll begin to see more fully how powerfully and interestingly, complexly, he differentiates his characters from each other. Now That fragment that you saw, I hope you realized one of the characters was an actor. It becomes clearer if you watch the whole scene, but he's a very histrionic and theatrical character, he bursts into song all the time, right? And then there's the aristocrat who's looking down his monocle very, very austere and his lip seems curled in a permanent gesture of condescension. And so forth. Watch how richly, how complexly, the characters are distinguished from each other by social class, by profession, and so forth.

I don't want to romanticize or idealize this argument, because I'm not suggesting that when he says it's a microcosm of the world, he wants to celebrate that microcosm, although he's interested in it. Renoir is also aware of the limitations. it's not as if he's suggesting that this is a perfect community at all. One reason is, they're forced together, but they're being forced together makes them share, forces them to come out of their limitations in certain ways, to overcome certain of their prejudices, although night never fully. But what it also does is reveal them. And we can and we can see how both processes-- the process of adjusting to people different from yourself, and maybe overcoming some of your class or racial prejudices-- is a part of the experience that the characters in the film have, but another part of the experience is that they come up against the differences between them, some of which can never be breached.

Let me mention one scene which dramatizes this ambiguity very deeply. There's one moment in the film, very powerful moment I think, in which the character played by Gabin, the Marechal character is wounded in a early part of the film. in fact, in the dinner scene that I showed you this afternoon, you'll see that, at a certain point, his comrade sitting at the table cuts his meat for him because his hand is injured. And, I don't know if it's in this scene or subsequent scene, there's a moment when another character in the film washes Marechal's feet. Why is foot washing instantly a symbolic thing? Who knows the answer?

**AUDIENCE:** Cause, like, Mary washed Jesus' feet.

**PROFESSOR:** All right. There's a scene in the Bible, in the 12th chapter of John, in which Mary or Martha, I

can't remember which, washes Christ's feet. And then, in the very next chapter, at The Last Supper Christ, himself, washes the feet of his disciples. And in fact, the washing of feet is, in Catholic and in certain other Christian rituals, an actual official ritual. It used to be much more common than it is today, but it's still done in certain Catholic countries at the advent of Holy Week. so it's a deeply symbolic act in which Christ, himself, is washing the feet of his disciples, and the message he gives is everyone, you should now do this to your Fellows. The implication being no one is better than anyone else. a radically democratic invasion, in some sense, of God's love.

And where has this practice been recently, very dramatically, and publicly revived? Who's been doing it? The Pope, the new pope. Haven't you read about this? The new pope has been doing this, washing the feet of parishioners, a symbolic gesture in which God's emissary on earth is behaving with the humility that Jesus Christ, himself would.

So the foot washing scene in our film has this sort of resonance to it, even though there's no openly religious reference. but it has a similar kind of significance. And they are carrying on a kind of conversation as the feet are being washed. And what you feel is, boy, what a moving scene. the man who's doing the washing doesn't feel that he's being condescended to, or that he's being diminished in any way by doing it. The man whose feet are being washed is not embarrassed to have it happen. What a scene of solidarity and community.

And you could wax very poetic about what a scene of community, and yet, watch how the scene ends. There's a moment at which, as he's drying his feet, Marechal asks the foot washer, what do you do for a living? at some point during their conversation he says I am a cadastre. What that means is something like city planning. He's a city planner.

And so the Marechal character hears this and they go on, at the very end of the scene, Marechal turns to his foot washer and he says, what does that mean, cadastre? The implication being that they're vocabularies aren't even the same. what it dramatizes is the distance between them. He's been sitting there having this conversation with him, but he didn't even say, gee I have no idea what that word means, I certainly have no idea what you do for a living. It's a way of reminding us, yes they've come together, yes they're sharing space, yes they're doing something that dramatizes human solidarity, and yet also how separated they are.

Again and again in the film we have this sort of double experience, in which we see characters

make contact with each other, or even sacrifice for each other, and at the same time we're aware of their differences. Watch for this. It's very powerful and moving. It's a form of moral realism, in which the film refuses to simplify what it wants to say about human experience. Very powerful example of this in the relationship between the Jew, Rosenthal, who's proud of his wealth, he's the heir of a department store fortune. but because he's a Jew, and because he's nouveau rich, he can never be part of the aristocracy, his relation to the Marechal character's very complex.

Marechal, as I mentioned this afternoon, retains a kind of French working class characteristic antisemitism. And there are moments when you can feel the hostility between them. When the two of them finally try to make an escape from the prison, and they actually are away from one of the prisons for a while, and you see the Rosenthal character hurts his foot. And there's a moment in which it looks like, gee, if the Marechal character stays with him, he's putting himself in danger as well. And they get into a fight. And Rosenthal says, go away, leave me alone! And Marechal says, all right I will! it's a very wonderful scene, because they start singing at each other. it's a form of singing hostility. So there's a comic dimension to it. it's really rich. But what is also being dramatized there are the limitations of the characters. Marechal's antisemitism rises, comes to the surface. Their hostility toward each other comes to the surface at that moment, although of course, they also overcome it.

And there are many other such moments in the film. The relationship between de Boeldieu and his German counterpart, the aristocratic German, is also a version of this kind of thing. as I've already implied, a second central theme of the film has to do with what we might call barriers and boundaries. There's the barrier of social class, which I've mentioned already. There's the barrier of language and culture, right? The Germans and the French are at war.

The Russians don't speak the same language as the Germans, the English don't speak the same language as the French. again and again what separates people is dramatized for us, although there's also a longing the film to transcend these boundaries, they can't always be transcended. Sometimes these boundaries are shown to be foolish and trivial, or at best, unhelpful. there are many examples in the film, both of language and of geography, as well as of social class, but let me mention just two of them,

There's one wonderful moment in the film. The French prisoners have been digging a tunnel, an escape tunnel. And they've almost completed the tunnel when the Germans come and say, all right we're moving you out of your barracks and we're putting these English prisoners in.

and so the French are very unhappy about this, because they've almost completed their tunnel. So, at great danger to himself, the Marechal character breaks ranks, does a kind of trick where he drops a suitcase, I think, and he bends over to try to pick it up to give them an excuse to talk to the English prisoners who are going to change places with him.

He wants to tell me English prisoners, there's a m you could escape. But it turns out he's not able to give them the message, because the English don't understand French and he can't speak English. So the English Prisoners end up going into the-- without ever knowing that there's a tunnel waiting for them that's almost ready to be completed. An example of the barrier, the way language separates people, that in many ways can be said to be frustrating.

One more example. At the very end of the film, there's a moment when the two characters, Marechal and Rosenthal are making their escape across a great field, a great white field of snow. And they're running across the field, and the camera backs up, and we see them being watched by German soldiers. One of the soldiers picks up his rifle, he says they're making an escape, and starts to aim at them. Then, all of a sudden, he stops. watch for that how it happens.

I think his partner says, wait a minute, hold off. Why doesn't he shoot? And then we see Marechal and Rosenthal disappear across an invisible boundary, and the German says, well they've crossed the border. They're no longer in Germany, I can't shoot them, they're now in Belgium. But the fact is there's no boundary there, it's all snow. It's a snowy field. How arbitrary that boundary is. But again and again the film we have this theme of barriers and boundaries. What separates us?

And also, one last thing about the question of social class. Maybe the most disturbing and powerful insight that the film has about social class, one that Americans tend to resist. But I encourage you not to resist it. Those of you not from the United States will, perhaps, understand this more easily, although Americans need to understand it, is the extent to which one's social class shapes one's identity. That is to say, one of the things we feel in this film is that de Boeldieu's nature is a function of his having been raised as an aristocrat. There are wonderful scenes between de Boeldieu and Marechal, where Marechal says to him, there's a wall between us. And you're so undemonstrative. Marechal doesn't trust him because he belongs to a different class, even though, of course, they're Frenchmen after all. And in the end, nationality trumps class in this film, as you'll see.

But in this sort of distinction or difference between Marechal and de Boeldieu, we have another expression of this sense, of this idea, of this recognition that one's personality, itself, what one likes and dislikes, one's fundamental nature is in part shaped by the class into which one is born. We're not born utterly free. We don't have absolute choice in what we become. Our characters are shaped, controlled, by the circumstances in which we live, and the film profoundly understands that. It understands our desire to breach those limitations, to go beyond them, and it celebrates our impulse to do so. But it also recognizes the degree to which we remain confined within personalities that are partly controlled or shaped by forces far beyond our individual control, and that are especially located in the social class to which we belong.

Finally, as I mentioned this afternoon, the theme of historical transition is at the heart of this remarkable film. And you'll understand very clearly what is going on there. Again, dramatized even more complexly and fully in *Rules of the Game*, it's a central topic here. aristocratic traditions are giving way to modernity in this film. And we're aware of them in all kinds of ways. Even in the nostalgic way in which de Boeldieu and Rauffenstein carry on their conversations. they have experiences in common because they belong to the aristocracy, a class that transcended, in some sense, at least in part, transcended national origins. That aristocratic dispensation is disappearing. In fact, this first World War completely obliterated it, and Renoir's not the only one who said this. apart from scholarship, there are a number of wonderful novels, for example, that deal with the transformation of European society because of the First World War, and Renoir's film is one such text.

Renoir's maturity. This is another way of talking about the complexity, or the richness of his films. I simply want to remind you, at the end, that one way to think about what Renoir is doing is to recognize that his visual style is, in some sense, an embodiment of the ambition not to simplify. To be as fluid and as attentive to the world as it's possible to be. And one could say that that visual, that commitment to the way the camera acts toward the world, is a version of a larger kind of maturity or complexity that's revealed in the content of his work, as well.

Take the characters. I've already mentioned the key point here. The way in which the characters are both flawed, full of weaknesses, but also attractive in certain ways. The way in which a Rosenthal is marred by his pride in his family's wealth. The way in which the Gabin character is marred by his antisemitism and his lack of education. The way in which the de Boeldieu character is damaged, or limited, by his aristocratic reserve, and his impulse toward



a kind of condescending superiority, which you could see articulated in the very first moment you see him, at the very beginning of the film, where he's tsk tsking about the incompetence of his own troops.

So there's a complexity of character that reflects the maturity of the film's vision of life, and there's a complexity in the story, because think of it for a minute. This is a war story, but it's a war story without battles. Some people have said it's the happiest war story they ever saw. One way of organizing the film is to see it as a series of meals, in which character sit down at table and share convivial thoughts. It's not a sufficient way of thinking about it, but it's a partial way of thinking about it. so, although it's as film about war, about the consequences of war, it doesn't show shooting. And in fact, although it's a war story, it's about most deeply, human community and human solidarity, and about historical transition.

Well, one way to crystallize all of this, or to summarize it, is to remind you of the complexity of the title-- Grand Illusion. the title seems to me to have at least four separate implications, or four separate ways of understanding. It's a measure of what I've called multiplicity, or complexity. what would the title mean? What is the grand illusion to which the title refers? Well, one is surely this. Remember, the film was made on the eve of World War II even though it is ostensibly set in World War I. And, in fact, it was recognized as an anti-war film. It was banned in Germany and in Italy. President Roosevelt in the United States said anyone who loves freedom should see this film. I think he was right.

The Title. One of the things about that war, that first World War, some of you will know, was it was identified especially by the American President Woodrow Wilson as the war to end wars. So one deep grand, but horrible, illusion is that this is the war to end wars. That there won't be anymore wars after this one. A second possible meaning of the title is this. one of the central events in the film, I haven't mentioned yet, and it's, maybe, the most memorable interlude in the film is, after Marechal and Rosenthal make their escape from one of the prison camps, they're on the run. They're in Germany, and it's the middle of winter.

And they managed to find safety in the home of a German woman whose husband is away at the war, perhaps dead. And she is there trying to manage a farm with her young daughter Elsa, and Marechal and Rosenthal spend the winter with them, and it's an idle in the winter. It's very moving. And, again, the barriers of language are present there. At the very end of their idle in the woods, we have Marechal say to the child, --I called her Elsa, I think it's Lottie. He looks at the girl and, in bad German, he says [GERMAN]. He says blue eyes.

But he's very proud of himself for having been able to articulate two German words. But the fact that he's done that is a mark of his having reached out. And the implication, more than the implication, is he becomes the woman's lover. While they are what while they spend the winter in this way-- and the German woman, at a certain point, when they first take refuge in her place, a German soldier searching for these guys, comes to the door, comes to the window and speaks to the window. And the widow protects them.

So a second grand illusion may very well be, look, this is a very lovely story, but how believable is it? French soldiers on the run from a prison camp find a farmhouse in which a German widow takes them in and protects them from the German soldiers. It's a nice story, but is it a grand illu-- if it is an illusion, maybe it's a grand one, a wonderful one. Not just a large one, but a valuable one. So that's a second way in which the title resonates for me.

The third grand illusion has to do with the community of the prisoners, the solidarity and community that's dramatized in the film in the end. The de Boeldieu character sacrifices himself for the good of the other, something that we might find surprising at first, given his distance from the other characters. and there is a sense all the way through the film, that a kind of community or solidarity has been established amongst the men, especially amongst the Frenchmen. And especially that a kind of friendship between Rosenthal and Marechal has been forged. Well, again, maybe that's a grand illusion. The idea that you can transcend social class, that you can transcend the ethnic prejudices into which you were born, and with which you've been brainwashed. So that's another kind of potential grand illusion.

And then finally, the fourth example I would give. the fourth nuance that one could add to the title, the grand illusion of movies themselves. What are movies but grand illusions, right? They're two dimensional, not three dimensional, but when we watch them we feel we've entered into a real world. The grand illusion of movies themselves is part of what the title alludes to. Well, something of the complexity and maturity of Renoir's vision of experience, sense of human character, and sense of history is embodied, then, in the complexity of the title of his movie.